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Contributors and Constraints to Involvement with Youth Sports Officiating

Lynn Ridinger
Old Dominion University

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Old Dominion University

There is a growing concern about the shortage of sports officials and its impact on organized youth sport. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of psychosocial factors that impact involvement with youth sports officiating by comparing and contrasting the experiences of officials from two distinct sports. In-depth interviews were conducted with baseball umpires and lacrosse officials. Resulting themes were classified as either contributors or constraints to involvement with officiating. The most striking difference between the two groups was the support provided in terms of mentorship, training, and administrative consideration. The baseball umpires received greater support and this was a key factor in overcoming constraints and fostering a sense of community. Implications and strategies for recruiting and retaining officials are discussed.

Referees, umpires, and other sports officials play an important role in organized sports by enforcing rules and keeping competitions as safe as possible. There is a growing concern as the number of qualified and committed sports officials continues to decline. The shortage of officials is a global phenomenon that affects many sports from the grassroots level to high caliber competition (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2004; Thornley, 2010). A shortage of officials can lead to a number of issues

that can negatively impact athletes, coaches, fans, and sport administrators. These issues include having to cancel or reschedule games due to a lack of available officials (Topp, 2001), a decline in the quality of officiating as veteran officials are often overworked (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2004), and novice officials being forced into situations beyond their current knowledge and skill level (Read, 2000).

Much of the early literature on sports officials focused on stress, burnout, and

coping responses (Anshel & Weinberg, 1999; Dorsch & Paskevich, 2006; Goldsmith & Williams, 1992; Kellett & Shilbury, 2007; Rainey, 1995; Rainey & Hardy, 1999; Taylor, Daniel, Leith, & Burke, 1990; Wolfson & Neave, 2007). Overall, the results from these studies suggest that most officials are able to employ effective coping strategies to deal with the stress. More recent research has examined sociological and organizational factors associated with both retention and attrition of officials (Forbes & Livingston, 2013; Kellett & Warner, 2011; Phillips & Fairley, 2014; Tingle, Warner, & Sartore-Baldwin, 2014; Warner, Tingle, & Kellett, 2013). Findings from these studies revealed that there are multiple social and administrative factors associated with the retention and attrition of sports officials. Suggestions for future research resulting from these investigations included comparing and contrasting officials from other sports (Tingle et al., 2014; Warner et al., 2013) and examining differences between motives and constraints of officials from various sport contexts (Phillips & Fairly, 2014).

Building on recent research, this study examined the experiences of officials from two different sports to gain a better understanding of contributing and constraining factors that impact involvement with youth sports officiating. Youth sports were the focus of this study due to the large number of participants in organized youth sports and the subsequent

need for officials (Kelly & Carchia, 2013). Officials from boys' baseball and girls' lacrosse were targeted due to the distinct natures of these two sports. Baseball is a well-established sport that does not require much physical movement for umpires, most of whom are men. Girls' lacrosse is an emerging sport that involves a great deal of physical exertion for officials and many of the officials are women. In-depth interviews were conducted with baseball umpires and lacrosse officials to gain insight on both contributors and constraints to their involvement with officiating. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the salient factors that contribute to involvement with youth sports officiating?

RQ2: What are the salient factors that constrain involvement with youth sports officiating?

RQ3: What, if any, differences exist between baseball umpires and lacrosse officials in terms of their involvement with youth sports officiating?

Review of Literature
Research on Referees

Some of the first studies on sports officials examined patterns of initial entry into officiating and reasons for continuing (Furst, 1989, 1991; Purdy & Snyder, 1985). The studies by Furst (1989, 1991) included samples of volleyball, basketball, and softball officials working at the collegiate level whereas Purdy and Snyder's (1985) study focused on high school basketball

officials. Findings from all three of these studies indicated individuals became involved with officiating primarily through friends and relatives or through personal interest in a sport. The reasons to continue officiating included love of the game, challenge and excitement of the job, and friendships with other officials.

Other early studies focused on the impact of stress and burnout on intentions to discontinue officiating. A series of studies using versions of the Soccer Officials' Stress Survey (Taylor & Daniel, 1987) were conducted to examine sources of officiating stress and relationships among stress, burnout, and termination intentions. These studies included investigations of intramural and interscholastic volleyball and football officials (Goldsmith & Williams, 1992), rugby union referees (Rainey & Hardy, 1999), high school baseball and softball umpires (Rainey, 1995) and soccer officials certified at the youth level and above (Taylor et al., 1990). Overall, results revealed the effects of stress were marginal and reports of burnout were rare at the time when the studies were conducted. This led to investigations on how officials effectively managed the stress associated with officiating.

The next wave of studies on sports officials focused on coping responses to stress, and several of these studies included cross-cultural comparisons (Anshel & Weinberg, 1999; Kaissidis-Rodafinos & Anshel, 2000; Kaissidis-Rodafinos, Anshel, & Porter, 1997). Findings showed coping styles sometimes differed between cultures; but overall, most officials were able to deal with stressful situations primarily through avoidance responses such as ignoring comments. Two studies focused on officials' perceptions of stress and motives for continuing despite the stress. Kellett and Shilbury (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 Australian Rules football umpires and found that the umpires were able to reframe abuse they received such that it served as a point of bonding with fellow officials and helped with retention. In fact, most umpires indicated abuse is expected and accepted as a normal part of their role. Similar findings were reported in Wolfson and Neave's (2007) study on English soccer referees. Their results revealed most of the referees expected to be the targets of criticism from players, coaches, and spectators. Nevertheless, they were able to use effective coping strategies and they did not seem concerned about the disparagement. It should be noted that these studies included samples of veteran officials who had been actively involved with officiating for many years and thus had experience in developing effective coping strategies.

More recent research has shifted attention from psychological to more sociological and organizational factors impacting the retention of sports officials. In their study on the social worlds and communities of Australian Rules football umpires, Kellett and Warner (2011) examined elements that both enhanced and

detracted from creating a sense of community among umpires. Factors contributing to a sense of community included an affinity with the sport, interactions with others involved with the sport, and sharing social spaces such as clubrooms. Factors that detracted from sense of community were lack of administrative consideration and inequity in terms of pay and access to resources. In another study on Australian Rules football umpires, Phillips and Fairley (2014) also noted the importance of community and socialization among umpires. They examined umpiring as a form of serious leisure and found that veteran umpires derived identity and meaning from their role as umpires, which was reinforced by cohesion among their umpire group.

Tingle et al. (2014) used a workplace incivility framework to explore the experiences of former female basketball officials. Results indicated four key factors led to discontinuation as an official. These included lack of mutual respect among fellow officials, perceived inequity of policies, a lack of role modeling and mentoring, and gendered abuse. Forbes and Livingston's (2013) study on attrition of amateur ice hockey officials in Canada found organizational factors to be salient contributors to attrition. Specifically, individuals who discontinued their role as an official expressed dissatisfaction with their local hockey associations in terms of opportunities to move up the ranks, appropriate fee structures, training

assistance, administrative consideration, and appreciation.

Warner et al. (2013) developed the referee attrition model based on Green's (2005) sport development model. They interviewed 15 former basketball referees and identified 10 themes related to officiating experiences and decisions to discontinue participation. Factors associated with recruitment included staying part of the game, meeting needs for competition and challenge, remuneration, and socialization into the community of officials. At the retention level, problematic social interactions with coaches, parents, and spectators hampered retention. Lack of training/mentoring and lack of community were also classified as problems. At the final stage of advancement, issues leading to attrition included lack of administrator consideration, biased administrator decision-making, and difficulty navigating sport policies that differed between leagues and states. Warner et al. concluded that negative experiences triggered by off-court organizational and managerial issues were the primary contributors to attrition of sports officials.

Conceptual Framework
While participation of sports officials has been examined from a variety of angles, scant attention has been given to the underlying psychosocial construct of leisure involvement. Leisure involvement extends beyond individual motives and mere participation; it looks at the relevance or

meaning of an activity within the context of an individual's overall outlook on life (Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). The construct of involvement was first introduced in psychology as part of social-judgment theory (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif & Hovland, 1961). Psychological involvement has generally been defined as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest between an individual and an activity or product (Rothchild, 1984). Research applying this construct to sport and leisure contexts has led to support for a three-facet measure of involvement consisting of hedonic value, symbolic value, and centrality (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011). Hedonic value takes into account feelings of pleasure or enjoyment derived from involvement with a sport product or activity. Symbolic value refers to the importance and meaning individuals ascribe to their association with a product or activity. Finally, centrality refers to the central role a sport activity plays in one's life. Thus, involvement is present when individuals evaluate their participation in a sport or leisure activity as a central component of their life that provides both hedonic and symbolic value (Beaton et al., 2011).

Involvement with a sport or leisure activity can be greatly impacted by constraints, which are factors that can limit people's participation or enjoyment in leisure (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). This is especially relevant for sport officials who work in challenging environments that can

be prone to conflicts and stress. Therefore, when examining leisure involvement, it is also important to investigate constraints that may impact involvement. The topic of leisure constraints has received considerable attention in the literature (see Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). Much of this research has stemmed from the work of Crawford and Godbey (1987), Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991), and Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993) who classified constraints into three categories comprised of intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints.

Intrapersonal constraints involve psychological states and individual attributes which interact with leisure preferences. Examples of intrapersonal barriers include stress, anxiety, attitudes, perceived skill, and level of confidence. Interpersonal constraints pertain to barriers related to social interactions, social support, and relationships among individuals. For sports officials, interpersonal constraints could be related to interactions with coaches, players, parents, other officials, or administrators. Structural constraints are features of the external environment that intervene between leisure preferences and participation. Examples include lack of financial resources, time limitations, family demands, and conflicts with one's job schedule. Leisure constraints were initially viewed as absolute barriers that prevented participation in a desired leisure activity (Jackson, 1988). However, evidence has

shown that many people can and do participate in leisure activities despite the presence of constraints because of negotiation strategies aimed at removing, diminishing, or modifying barriers to participation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jackson, et al., 1993; Kay & Jackson, 1991; White, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of psychosocial factors that impact involvement with youth sports officiating. This study examined factors that contribute to both psychological and behavioral involvement with officiating as well as constraints that detract from involvement. The literature on leisure involvement and leisure constraints guided this investigation as it explored the three facets of leisure involvement (i.e., hedonic value, symbolic value, and centrality) and the three components of leisure constraints (i.e., intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints). Additionally, this study focused on officials from two different sports with contrasting features in an attempt to illuminate factors that may explain why one sport struggled to recruit and retain officials while the other maintained a large pool of committed umpires.

Method

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological qualitative approach that involved in-depth semi-structured interviews. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the internal subjective experience associated with observable reality (Henderson, 1991). As noted by Patton (1990), phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p. 69). Realizing that individuals live unique experiences, phenomenology seeks to discover and describe those lived experiences to more deeply understand the multiple realities of a phenomenon. Researchers must attempt to find "commonalities across participants to see how lived experiences relate to a phenomenon of interest" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). Exploring the thoughts and reflections of baseball umpires and lacrosse officials about their own lived experiences afforded the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of both contributing and constraining factors associated with their involvement with officiating.

Participants

Data were collected from a purposive sample of 14 participants who volunteered to be interviewed for this study. This study was designed to include youth sports officials with varying years of experiences from two dissimilar sports. Half of the participants were boys' baseball umpires and the other half were girls' lacrosse officials. These two sports were chosen due to their distinct differences. In the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, where this study took place, baseball is a well-established sport whereas girls' lacrosse is an emerging

sport. Umpiring baseball does not require much physical exertion while officiating lacrosse involves a great deal of running. Furthermore, all of the baseball umpires in the region were men and most (76%) of the girls' lacrosse officials were women.

Officiating experience ranged from less than one year to 30 years. One baseball umpire and one lacrosse official were in their first year of training and had not yet worked an actual game at the time of the interviews. The seven baseball umpires were all white males who ranged in age from 21-59. The lacrosse officials included five white and two black females ranging in age from 20-58. Information on participants can be found in Table 1.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the human subjects review committee, participants were recruited for the study. To gain multiple perspectives, an effort was made to include participants with varying levels of officiating experience and to match years of experience so both groups would have a similar number of veteran and novice officials. This was done through a combination of convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and stratified purposeful sampling. Drawing upon the researcher's personal contacts, convenience sampling was used to recruit initial participants. Next, snowball sampling was used by asking interviewees to recommend other officials who might be interested in participating in this study. Finally, stratified purposeful

sampling was used by targeting those recommended individuals who had years of officiating experience that fit the needs of the study. Saturation, common in other forms of qualitative research, is irrelevant in phenomenology (Hayes & Singh, 2012). Phenomenology differs from other forms of qualitative data analysis in that its sole focus is to understand the depth and meaning of participants' experiences rather than to generate theory (Hays & Singh, 2012). Data collection was completed when there were at least two baseball umpires and two lacrosse officials representing each purposeful strata based on years of experience – novice (less than 3 years), mid-range (between 3 and 9 years), and veteran (10 years or more).

All identified officials received an email invitation that explained the purpose of the study and specified that participation was entirely voluntary and all information would remain confidential. Prior to the interviews, participants signed a consent form and provided demographic and behavioral information related to officiating, coaching, and playing experience. Interviews were conducted in an office or other quiet location agreed upon by the interviewee and the researcher.

All interviews were digitally recorded and conducted with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide. This type of data collection instrument allows the researcher leeway in its structure and process once the session begins (Hays & Singh, 2012). Impromptu probing questions were added

as needed, an acceptable method with semi-structured interviews due to the iterative process of qualitative research and the desire to collect rich data (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured interview guide was designed to glean information about the essence of involvement with officiating (see Appendix). A panel of three experts in sport management and qualitative methodology reviewed the guide for face and content validity. The time for each interview ranged from 33 to 58 minutes. The interviews were professionally transcribed and member checks were conducted by sending all participants a copy of their transcript so they could review their comments and clarify statements to ensure they were portrayed accurately (Neuman, 2000). Pseudonyms were used to conceal the identity of participants.

Analysis

With qualitative inquiry, the researcher is both a data collection instrument (through interviewing) and analytic interpreter. It is important for phenomenologists to be aware of personal bias and bracket out their own assumptions and values as much as possible (Creswell, 2007). While phenomenologists strive to prevent biases, preconceived notions, or subjectivity from influencing a study, they also acknowledge that it is not possible to contemplate a phenomenon without some degree of personal involvement and intentionality (Willig, 2007). The primary researcher in this study had previous

officiating experience, thus meeting Hays and Singh's (2012) definition of insider researcher — "research where the investigator is not necessarily part of an organization and/or the phenomenon of inquiry, but rather has knowledge of the organization and/or phenomenon prior to the study's commencement" (p. 140). This role can assist in establishing an epistemological connection by minimizing the distance between the researcher and participants and providing the researcher with an opportunity to better understand the population and more effectively elicit information (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, bracketing was used in an attempt to eliminate preconceptions, allowing the data to be viewed more openly without prejudgment (Patton, 1990). The transcripts were reviewed independently by two individuals, the primary researcher and a colleague who assisted with the analysis. An initial coding process known as horizontalization was conducted and then the data were grouped into meaningful clusters (Patton, 1990). After the initial independent reviews, the two researchers compared codes until agreement was reached on the generated themes, thus establishing inter-rater reliability (Neuman, 2000). Next, the codes were entered into NVivo 10 software and themes were confirmed. Finally, textual and structural portrayals of themes were developed and verbatim examples were included to

describe participants' experiences and to explain the meaning of their involvement with officiating (Creswell, 2007).

In qualitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability are replaced by the criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, trustworthiness was established through a variety of means. Credibility was demonstrated through the use of member checking and providing participants the opportunity to review transcripts to confirm authentic representation and ensure data accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data sources was done to ensure the inclusion of multiple participant voices (Hays & Singh, 2012). Dependability was established through the use of two individuals to independently review and code data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, data were further analyzed and themes were supported with NVivo software. Transferability was exhibited by using rich and detailed descriptions that allow readers to make decisions about the degree to which findings are applicable to their settings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Finally, confirmability was demonstrated through bracketing to reduce researcher bias (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Results

The data were organized into two main categories related to involvement with youth sports officiating: 1) contributors to involvement, and 2) constraints to involvement. Three themes emerged as salient contributing factors to involvement with officiating. These included *connection*, *support*, and *community*. The other themes identified as contributors to involvement included *hedonic value*, *symbolic value*, and *centrality*, the factors associated with the literature on leisure involvement. In addition, several subthemes emerged. Constraints to officiating involvement included the three themes from the literature on leisure constraints: *intrapersonal constraints*, *interpersonal constraints*, and *structural constraints*. Several subthemes emerged, but no additional constraint categories were identified. The themes and subthemes are depicted in Table 2. In the following section, themes and subthemes of both the contributing and constraining factors associated with involvement with youth sports officiating are presented and representative quotes from participants are shared.

Connection

Participants were asked about how they first became involved with officiating youth sports. The first theme that emerged was connection, defined as having an association with the sport through past experience or via a significant other. All of the baseball umpires had played baseball in high school while only three of the lacrosse officials had been lacrosse players. For two of the lacrosse officials, initial awareness about officiating resulted from their daughters playing the sport and being concerned about the shortage of officials. Heather

decided to start officiating after some of her daughter's games were cancelled due to lack of officials. Gayle was involved with starting a new youth lacrosse league for girls and recognized the need for officials as she explained:

> We were starting a youth league, and we had no youth officials. And so, that went "hand in hand." If we wanted our daughters to play, we needed officials. I didn't know what I was getting into. But, I knew we needed officials.

Another avenue to connect with officiating was by knowing others affiliated with the sport such as commissioners (Nathan, Thomas) athletic directors (Aaron), coaches (Mike), teachers (Ellen, Mary), or officials (Denise, Sara). Thomas shared how he first became involved with umpiring:

> I go to a ton of baseball games. I'm the oldest of five boys. All my little brothers play, and I was constantly out at the baseball field watching them play. The head of the umpires kept seeing me out there, and he convinced me to get into it and start officiating some games. I'm really glad he did. I've really enjoyed it.

Support

Support, another emerging theme, was defined as reinforcement and encouragement from others to stay involved with officiating. Three subthemes emerged for this factor that included (a) *mentorship*, (b) *training*, and (c) *administrative consideration*. There was no formal mentorship program

in place for the lacrosse officials and their training requirements were minimal. On the other hand, the baseball umpires had a structured mentorship program, a rigorous training schedule, and they all spoke highly of the consideration and support they received from their commissioner. The more experienced umpires (Steve, Rob, Nathan) enjoyed serving as mentors and the novice umpires welcomed their support as expressed by Mike:

> You get assigned a mentor, and he stays your mentor throughout the entire time you're with the association. And not only do you have the one mentor, but everybody is more than willing to help you in some way. It's nice to have that older official kind of take you under his wing, and say, "Hey look, I messed up too. I still mess up. You're not going to be perfect."

Community

Community was another salient theme that emerged. It was defined as nurturing relationships formed with fellow officials. Mike talked about the importance of relationships among the baseball umpires as he expressed, "It's like a family atmosphere kind of. You build these relationships with each other, and they become like your brothers." When Thomas was asked what he would miss most if he had to stop umpiring, he said, "What I'd probably miss most would be the family orientation. Those guys are great. Man, I love them all. They're the best! And they really care about you."

Nathan noted that most of his friend base was comprised of officiating colleagues. He talked about attending various sporting events around town and often running into fellow umpires who were also at the games. The lacrosse officials did not seem to have the same sense of community. When asked if they had many friends who also officiated, Mary said with a smile, "No, my friends all think I'm kind of crazy for being an official." Gayle laughed as she responded, "Only because I got them involved in it!" Ellen, who also officiates field hockey, basketball and volleyball, was the only lacrosse official who indicated most of her friends were officials.

Hedonic Value

When participants were asked about positive aspects of officiating and factors associated with their initial and continued involvement, six subthemes emerged related to hedonic value, which was defined as feelings of pleasure or enjoyment derived from officiating. The hedonic value subthemes included: (a) *enjoyment*, (b) *love of the sport*, (c) *staying involved*, (d) *being physically active*, (e) *challenge,* and (f) *opportunity to earn money*. For both the baseball umpires and lacrosse officials, enjoyment and love of the sport were the most frequently mentioned factors. As Gayle expressed, "I love officiating. And I tell people that every day. It's the best job ever, besides being a parent." Staying involved with the sport was appealing to all of the umpires and officials older than 40. Reminiscing about why he

first started umpiring, Nathan said, "You know, I got to the point where I wasn't as good at being an athlete, so I wanted to still be part of a game." Rob explained how he wanted to coach, but did not have time to commit to the regular practice and game schedules associated with coaching; however, the flexibility of an umpire's schedule afforded him the opportunity to stay involved with a sport he loved.

All of the lacrosse officials talked about how officiating was a good way to work out and stay physically active. None of the baseball umpires mentioned any benefits related to physical fitness. All of the participants younger than age 30 were attracted by the opportunity to earn money. Some of the more experienced officials acknowledged that pay was an initial attractor for them, but it was no longer the primary motive for their continued involvement. Both Sara and Zach, the two participants in training but with no actual game experience, were aware of the amount of money that could be earned and admitted it was the most enticing factor. Several of the participants were attracted to the challenge of officiating (Aaron, Denise, Mary). Most individuals talked about a combination of motives as illustrated by Heather's comments:

> I liked the activity, and the fact that I was able to run, and basically do something with my time, other than just sit there and watch my daughter play or practice…A love of the sport, and just the fact that it's a way to stay in shape.

And it's a way to stay involved with the sport. It's fun. I enjoy being out there.

Symbolic Value

Another theme explored was symbolic value. Symbolic value was defined as importance or meaningfulness derived from involvement as an official. All of the baseball umpires and four of the lacrosse officials stated that officiating was an important part of their lives and many conveyed meaningfulness as a sense of pride in being a good official and calling a fair game (Denise, Ellen, Gayle, Heather, Aaron, Nathan, Rob, Steve, Thomas). As expressed by Thomas, "I want to do the best I can every time I'm out there. And make sure that everything is done legally, safely, and properly."

Centrality

Centrality refers to the central role officiating plays in one's life. Eight of the participants talked about modifying their work and school schedules to allow more time for officiating (Rob, Steve, Mike, Thomas, Mary, Ellen, Heather, Gayle). Mary, who is semi-retired, officiates eight months of the year and she blocks out her schedule from two o'clock forward. In her previous job, part of her initial negotiations for the job included leaving work early on Fridays to officiate. Heather noted that prior to a recent injury, the majority of her life revolved around her officiating schedule. Ellen commented, "When I'm not teaching school, I'm officiating and when

I'm not officiating, I'm training to officiate so it's a big part of my life." Mike, a graduate student described how he organizes his academic and social life around umpiring:

> My schedule is centered around umpiring. When I signed up for graduate school, I had to make sure that the classes I signed up for would still give me enough days open to umpire. And I tell my friends, "Hey, this Friday night I can't go out because Saturday morning I've got to be up. I've got games." But, it doesn't bother me, because that's what I want to do. Umpiring is the center of my schedule. It's what I want to do so I'll make the time for it.

Intrapersonal Constraints

Participants were asked about psychological constraints that might impact their ability or reduce their desire to officiate. Intrapersonal constraints involve psychological states and individual attributes which interact with one's preference to officiate. For the less experienced officials, lack of confidence and anxiety were noted and these were more problematic for the lacrosse officials. Although Kelly had experience as both a lacrosse player and a coach, she admitted to getting nervous before each game because she does not officiate often. Sara's biggest fear was making a wrong call and being yelled at. She commented:

Youth sports parents get really worked up. So, it's hard to like, do well right away, or have the confidence right away. No matter what, someone's gonna be yelling at you. I know I wouldn't want to be that person that people are like, "Oh my gosh, you're messing up the game for us."

The baseball umpires talked about how they were a little nervous when they first started, but were able to move past their fears due to training and mentorship. All of the baseball umpires were very confident, even the younger, less experienced ones.

When I first started out, I was a little nervous. But now that I've been doing it for about a year, I've seen improvements in my game. I'm much more confident - I know that I'm right, I know what I'm talking about, and I know what I'm doing. I've studied the game hard and I know the rule book. (Thomas)

Interpersonal Constraints

Interpersonal constraints pertain to barriers to officiating related to social interactions, social support, and relationships among individuals. The subthemes that emerged were: (a) *lack of support*, and (b) *lack of community*. Interpersonal constraints can result from conflicts with any number of stakeholders including coaches, players, parents, fans, other officials, and/or administrators. There was little consistency among the lacrosse officials about the source of the conflict.

Heather and Kelly had issues with coaches and some officials. Sara was concerned about coaches, parents, and players. Mary talked about challenges with fans, players, and past administrators. None of the baseball umpires in this study viewed interpersonal conflicts as problematic. They all believed conflicts "came with the territory" as expressed by Thomas:

Half the people think you're wrong. And that's okay. You can't make everybody happy. But it doesn't bother me. They - the fans get on you a little bit. "Oh, come on Blue" or "Come on Ref," you know, whatever. And that's okay, as long as you're doing the right thing. And I've never had a problem with another official, and I don't think I ever will. We're too tight for that. We're a family.

Lack of support was an interpersonal constraint identified by the lacrosse officials. Ellen noted, "We just don't have the numbers to set up a formal mentorship program." She also had concerns about training deficiencies and stated, "You have to train people…you can't just throw them out there. We need to start training earlier, not just two weeks before the season." Kelly commented about the lack of rigor with the local training for lacrosse officials. She said, "And the training sessions - I went to one. But I think they're so strapped for officials that they are a little bit lenient, especially for people who kind of know what they're doing." Mary shared how administrative consideration was lacking

when game assignments were made for a summer tournament.

> I was assigned seven lacrosse games on the same day, and I sent an email off, and said, "There's no possible way in the world I can do seven games in a day." The assignor was a bit offended. So, I got reassigned, and the partner I was with was doing nine games! When I left him after the fifth game, he could barely walk. He was not performing well and it wasn't good for the game.

None of the baseball umpires in this study encountered a lack of support. In fact, there were many accolades given about the excellent support they received. Nathan explained how the local baseball association has had a formal mentoring program in place for the past four years and it is working well. He also noted they had a structured six week training program, evaluators who provided performance feedback to umpires throughout the season, and a very supportive commissioner. Mike clearly appreciated the support as he stated:

> I think that the association I'm with does an excellent job of making sure everybody gets a fair amount of the games. There is an extreme loyalty to the officials from our commissioner. You know he has your back. He keeps the best interests of the officials in mind at all times.

The mentorship and support provided to the baseball umpires led to a strong sense of community. In contrast, lack of community was identified as an interpersonal constraint for the lacrosse officials. While some camaraderie was evident among the veteran lacrosse officials, the novice lacrosse officials did not have enough time interacting with other officials to build a sense of community.

Structural Constraints

Structural constraints are features of the external environment that intervene between one's preference to officiate and actual participation in officiating. Several subthemes emerged related to structural constraints including: (a) *job and/or school schedules*, (b) *family demands*, and (c) *time spent traveling and training*. The most frequently mentioned obstacle for both baseball umpires and lacrosse officials dealt with time conflicts due to job schedules. Several of the umpires successfully negotiated through this constraint by modifying their working hours.

> I start work at six o'clock in the morning during the spring so that I'm able to leave at two thirty to make the games, whether I'm scheduled for a game or not. I'm always available because I get called out. It's not uncommon to get a call that another umpire had to cancel at the last minute. (Rob)

Mike struggled with trying to balance grad school with umpiring while Gayle spoke about family demands as she stated, "Just trying to juggle, you know, this parenting, and getting on the field for the games, because it's the same time, the demand for

my time is at the same time of the day." Travel time to local games was viewed as problematic by three individuals (Kelly, Gayle, Aaron). Time for training was a concern for the novice lacrosse officials. In comparison to the lacrosse officials, the baseball umpires spent much more time at training sessions; however, none of them complained about the time invested in training. In fact, Thomas commented, "The classes are definitely not a burden. I love going to the classes. I learn something every class."

Discussion

Shortages of sport officials are impacting sport organizations at all levels (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2004; Thornley, 2010). Thus, there is a need to better understand factors associated with officiating involvement. This study was designed to compare and contrast the experiences of officials from two distinct sports to gain a better understanding of underlying psychosocial connections individuals have with officiating involvement. Seven boys' baseball umpires and seven girls' lacrosse officials were interviewed about contributing motives and constraining factors associated with their involvement with youth sport officiating. The results revealed some similarities shared by these two groups; however, there were also notable differences, especially in regard to support and community.

Contributors to Involvement

Contributors to involvement were classified into six themes – connection, support, community, hedonic value, symbolic value, and centrality. Similar to the findings of Furst (1989, 1991) and Purdy and Snyder (1985), individuals in this study became involved with officiating primarily through a personal connection with the sport. All of the baseball umpires had played baseball in high school whereas only three lacrosse officials had playing experience. Opportunities to play lacrosse in high school did not exist for most of the lacrosse officials. Instead, their connections were through their daughters who played lacrosse or through friends who officiated. In emerging sports such as lacrosse, the pool of potential officials with playing experience is smaller. Therefore, greater effort is needed in the recruitment process. Also, without a background in the sport, there is a steeper learning curve to understand the rules, mechanics, terminology, and nuances of the sport. Thus, additional training may be needed. Interestingly, however, the training for lacrosse officials in this study was deficient in comparison to the training received by baseball umpires. This was primarily due to the shortage of girls' lacrosse officials in the region and subsequent scarcity of individuals to organize and implement training sessions.

The most striking contrasts between the baseball umpires and the lacrosse officials were in regard to support (mentorship,

training, and administrative consideration) and community. The findings from this study echo conclusions from previous research that identify organizational support as a key factor for retaining officials (Forbes & Livingston, 2013; Kellett & Warner, 2011; Tingle et al., 2014; Warner et al., 2013). The local baseball association had a structured mentorship program in place and much more rigorous training requirements in comparison to the local lacrosse association. The impact of this support was profound and ramifications were evident. The mentorship program and training sessions cultivated confidence and led to a strong sense of community among the baseball umpires. Previous research has revealed that a sense of community can promote greater identity with one's role as an umpire (Phillips & Fairley, 2014), it can help umpires learn how to deal with abuse (Kelly & Shilbury, 2007), and it contributes to referee retention (Kellett & Warner, 2011; Warner et al., 2013).

A collective sense of community was not evident for the lacrosse officials. In contrast to the local baseball umpires' association, the lacrosse officials' association did not have a full-time paid commissioner to plan and manage the training and development of officials. The local leaders of the girls' lacrosse officials' association were doing their best to recruit and retain officials, but they faced many challenges. There was a very limited pool of potential officials in the region with any type of connection to girls' lacrosse. Also, the

lacrosse leaders were constrained by their own full-time jobs and other obligations.

When asked about positive aspects of officiating, a number of subthemes related to hedonic value emerged. These included enjoyment, love of the sport, staying involved, being physically active, challenge, and opportunity to earn money. Surprisingly, enjoyment has not been highlighted in previous literature. Perhaps this is because much of the research on referees has focused on negative issues related to stress and attrition. The hedonic subthemes of love of the game, staying part of the game, and challenge all support previous findings related to officiating motives (Furst, 1991; Purdy & Snyder, 1985; Warner et al., 2013). Physical fitness was identified as a motive in previous studies on ice hockey referees (Forbes & Livingston, 2013) and Australian Rules football umpires (Phillips & Fairley, 2014). In the current study, being physically active had hedonic value for lacrosse officials, but not baseball umpires. For sports that require physical exertion, promoting officiating as a way to stay in shape may be a good way to recruit physically active individuals.

Similar to Warner et al.'s (2013) results on remuneration, this study found the opportunity to earn money was an attractive feature for newer officials; however, continued involvement with officiating was more dependent on symbolic value and support. For both baseball umpires and lacrosse officials, symbolic value became important as officiating took on more

meaning and became a central part of their lives, a finding similar to Phillips and Fairley's (2014) investigation. Thus, strategies and communication tactics designed to recruit new officials may need to be crafted differently than those used to retain veteran officials.

Constraints to Involvement

Constraints were perceived as more problematic for lacrosse officials. Intrapersonal constraints are related to psychological states and individual attributes. Three of the novice lacrosse officials expressed apprehensions about lack of confidence and anxiety; however, all of the baseball umpires, even the novice ones, exuded confidence. Due to past playing experience, mentoring, training, administrative support, and a strong sense of community, the baseball umpires were better equipped to overcome any intrapersonal concerns. There was also a notable contrast between lacrosse officials and baseball umpires in their perceptions of interpersonal constraints. These constraints involve barriers related to social interactions, social support, and relationships among individuals. Lack of support and lack of community were issues impacting the lacrosse officials, but not the baseball umpires. Almost all of the lacrosse officials acknowledged having interpersonal conflicts with various sport stakeholders. The baseball umpires, on the other hand, were not bothered by conflicts with coaches, players, or fans. Similar to the

findings of Kellett and Shilbury (2007) and Wolfson and Neave (2007), the baseball umpires expected and accepted interpersonal conflicts as part of their role.

Structural constraints are features of the external environment that intervene between leisure preferences and participation and these were common to lacrosse officials and baseball umpires alike. Both groups identified full-time jobs conflicting with game times as the most problematic structural constraint. A number of the participants were able to negotiate through this constraint by modifying their working hours. In regard to resources, the baseball umpires' association had a full-time paid commissioner to oversee the training of umpires and the assigning of games. In contrast, the lacrosse officials' association had a part-time assigner who received a small commission for assigning games. Training and development of the lacrosse officials was done on a volunteer basis by a few of the veteran officials. Although it was noted that excellent training resources were available from the national lacrosse association, it was not possible to effectively implement these materials and provide one-on-one mentorship due to insufficient numbers of veteran lacrosse officials at the local level.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of underlying psychosocial factors that impact involvement with youth sports officiating by

comparing and contrasting the experiences of officials from two distinct sports. This research has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it is the first to apply the constructs of leisure involvement and leisure constraints to the context of sports officiating. Although findings are not generalizable beyond the sample due to the qualitative design, this work provides a unique perspective to understanding the nexus between support and overcoming constraints. By investigating two divergent officiating situations, prominent differences emerged. The most salient finding was the impact of support on helping the novice baseball umpires to overcome fears (intrapersonal constraints) and to develop confidence in dealing with confrontational social situations (interpersonal constraints). In addition, the support received by the baseball umpires led to a strong sense of community which seemed to contribute to greater centrality and symbolic value associated with their role as an umpire. All of the baseball umpires were willing to modify their work and social schedules to carve out time for umpiring. While this was also true for the veteran lacrosse officials, the novice lacrosse officials were less inclined to rearrange their lives to make officiating a central priority. The lacrosse officials perceived more constraints to involvement, which were exacerbated by a lack of support and lack of community.

Given the growing concerns about declining numbers of sports officials, efforts to attract new officials and strengthen connections with current officials is important. Building a sustained base of qualified sports officials is vital to meeting the needs of sports leagues and organizations. Practical implications gleaned from this study can inform strategies for recruitment and retention of officials. Knowing that initial entry into officiating often comes from a personal connection to the sport, a pool from which to recruit potential officials could be current or former players, coaches, and/or parents of athletes. For emerging sports with fewer former players, it may be necessary to widen this pool to also include athletes and officials from other sports. While these individuals may not have a strong personal connection to that particular sport, there could still be hedonic value related to the activity of officiating such as enjoyment, challenge, being physically active, and staying involved with sports in general. Also, the opportunity to earn money is attractive to most novice officials so promotional materials used to recruit new officials should highlight financial rewards.

To retain current officials and strengthen their attachment to officiating, it is important for sport associations to provide support. Mentoring and training programs along with administrative consideration can assist officials with negotiating constraints and provide them with a nurturing community, leading to greater involvement with officiating. However, a critical mass of qualified individuals is needed to implement these

programs and this may be lacking with emerging sports.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, there are limitations to be noted. This study focused on officials of just two youth sports in one region. While these two sports were purposely selected due to their distinctions from one another, there may be features unique to these sports and/or the local officials' associations that do not transfer to other sport populations. The interviewees volunteered to participate in this study and their willingness to discuss their officiating experiences could reflect a pre-existing enhanced connection with the activity. The sample included umpires and officials currently involved with their sport and their perceptions may differ from officials who have discontinued involvement with officiating. While both men and women participated in this study, these two groups of individuals did not officiate the same sport and thus, comparisons attributable to gender would have been speculative. Further research is needed to understand how gender informs officiating involvement. Future studies should include samples with male and female officials from the same or similar sports (e.g., baseball/softball and girls'/boys' lacrosse) to glean greater knowledge related to gendered aspects of sports officiating. Also, further research is needed to better understand the unique challenges faced by administrators of emerging sports as they

struggle to recruit and retain officials. Finally, this study, along with much of the recent research on sports officials, is qualitative and therefore limited to a small sample. Future investigations utilizing quantitative survey methodology could capture views from a much larger and diverse population of sports officials.

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Tables

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Sport/s Officiated	Years as an Official	Playing Experience	Coaching Experience
Rob	56	Baseball	30	Yes	Yes
Steve	59	Baseball	22	Yes	Yes
Nathan	50	Baseball	10	Yes	No
Aaron	30	Baseball & Football	7	Yes	No
Mike	22	Baseball	4	Yes	No
Thomas	22	Baseball	1	Yes	No
Zach	21	Baseball	<1	Yes	Yes
Mary	58	Lacrosse & Field Hockey	30	No	Yes
Ellen	52	Lacrosse, Field Hockey, Basketball, Volleyball	20	Yes	No
Heather	46	Lacrosse & Field Hockey	11	No	No
Gayle	47	Lacrosse	7	No	Yes
Kelly	25	Lacrosse	4	Yes	Yes
Denise	39	Lacrosse	1	No	No
Sara	20	Lacrosse	<1	Yes	No

Table 2

Themes Related to Involvement with Officiating

Contributors to Involvement

- *Connection* - having an association with the sport through past experience or via a significant other
- *Support* – reinforcement and encouragement from others to stay involved with officiating
    - Subthemes
      (a) *mentorship*, (b) *training*, and (c) *administrative consideration*
- *Community* – nurturing relationships formed with fellow officials
- *Hedonic Value* – feelings of pleasure or enjoyment derived from officiating
    - Subthemes
      (a) *enjoyment*, (b) *love of the sport*, (c) *staying involved*, (d) *being physically active*, (e) *challenge*, and (f) *opportunity to earn money*
- *Symbolic Value* - importance or meaningfulness derived from involvement as an official
- *Centrality* - the central role officiating plays in one's life

Constraints to Involvement

- *Intrapersonal Constraints* - psychological states and individual attributes which interact with one's preference to officiate
- *Interpersonal Constraints* - barriers to officiating related to social interactions, social support, and relationships among individuals
    - Subthemes
      (a) *lack of support,* (b) *lack of community*
- *Structural Constraints* - features of the external environment that intervene between one's preference to officiate and actual participation in officiating
    - Subthemes
      (a) *job and/or school schedules*, (b) *family demands*, (c) *time traveling and training*

Appendix

Interview Guide
1. How did you first get involved with officiating?
2. Why do you continue to officiate?
3. What are the positive aspects of officiating?
4. How important or meaningful is officiating to you?
5. Is a lot of your life organized around officiating?
6. Do you have a lot of friends who also officiate?
7. Tell me about your officials' association and your involvement with its administration.
8. What are the biggest risks or challenges associated with officiating?
9. What are some of the constraints that impact your ability or desire to officiate?
    a. Intrapersonal
    b. Interpersonal
    c. Structural
10. What would you miss most if you stopped officiating?
11. What can be done to recruit new officials?
12. What factors are important in retaining current officials?