Exploring the Properties of Community among Charity Sport Event Participants

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The purpose of this research is to analyze the sense of community derived among charity sport event participants by exploring and applying the six structural and cultural properties of Gemeinschaft among participants: dense and demanding social ties; social attachments to and involvement in institutions; ritual occasions; small group size; perceptions of similarity with others; and common beliefs in an idea system, moral order, institution or group. Specifically, an assessment of the structural and cultural properties of community was made allowing for an initial exploration of the extent to which this community can achieve desired social outcomes on behalf of a charitable organization. Semi-structured interviews (n = 46) were conducted with 2009 Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) LIVESTRONG Challenge participants. Results reveal that five of the six properties of community were present among participants. While a sense of community was found to be present, challenges within this community are identified that may

1 **constrain the charity from achieving desired social change. These concern consistency in**
2 **participant involvement with the charity, as well as similarities and common beliefs**
3 **creating too much sameness within the community. Suggestions are made for charitable**
4 **organizations to provide training and mentoring to event participants to facilitate**
5 **consistent and effective advancement of the charity's mission. Specific actions are outlined**
6 **to confront these challenges and assist the organization in advancing social change.**

7
8 **Keywords:** Charity sport events, community, advocacy, Gemeinschaft
9

INTRODUCTION

The term charity sport events refers to any participatory sport event in which individuals pay a registration fee to partake in an organized physical activity with all, or a portion of, event proceeds benefitting a designated charity. Charity sport events often require a fundraising minimum as part of their registration fees. These events have become increasingly popular and represent the opportunity to bring a local community together, while raising funds for a charitable cause (King, 2001; Ruperto & Kerr, 2009). The fundraising component of charity sport events can be quite lucrative. For instance, the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life has generated \$350 million in a single year (Cause Marketing Forum, 2008).

Charity sport events have gained in popularity for a variety of reasons. First, the pervasiveness of sport and sport events within society has contributed to their appeal (e.g., Cialdini, 2000; Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Second, charitable organizations have been confronted by a variety of challenges including increased competition among different causes (Sargeant, 1999), increased suspicion among potential donors of charitable causes (Kottasz, 2004), and public indifference (Polonsky, 2003). Such challenges have led charity managers to seek alternatives to traditional fundraising mechanisms, and the widespread societal appeal of sport events make them a popular fundraising vehicle.

More recently, the global economic climate has posed a significant challenge to charitable organizations. In 2008, total donations to charity decreased from previous years in a number of countries. In the United States, this drop in total donations marked the first decline in charitable giving since 1987. In addition, younger demographics (i.e., Generation Y) are believed less likely to donate money and more likely to volunteer (Brown, 2009). These economic and demographic trends suggest that charity sport event managers should not focus on

1 fundraising as the sole objective of charity sport events. Rather, managers are well advised to
2 consider additional outcomes of these events such as community engagement, increased
3 awareness, volunteering, advocacy, and lobbying among participants on behalf of the designated
4 charity. This research study represents an initial exploration of charity sport events as a means to
5 achieve these various outcomes.

6 To date, research in the charity sport event context has primarily examined the factors
7 contributing to individuals' participation in charity sport events (e.g., Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin,
8 & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008), as well as the factors contributing to the
9 meaning individuals derive from their participation in charity sport events (e.g., Cornwell &
10 Smith, 2001; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009). Research examining the potential outcomes of
11 charity sport events can extend this existing literature to evaluate how charity sport event
12 participation and the corresponding meaning derived from these events fosters a sense of
13 community among participants. In addition, an examination of the sense of community derived
14 from charity sport events can assist event managers in developing strategies to leverage this
15 community of participants to advance the charity's mission and assist in achieving desired social
16 outcomes.

17 The purpose of this research is to apply specific structural and cultural properties of
18 community to conduct a systematic analysis of the sense of community derived among charity
19 sport event participants. For this study, the 2009 Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF)
20 **LIVESTRONG** Challenge, representing a well established, annual charity sport event in which
21 participants choose among walking, running, and cycling activities, served as the research
22 setting. All event proceeds benefit the LAF's mission to inspire and empower individuals living
23 with cancer.

The current research extends existing research by exploring potential outcomes of participation. Ruperto and Kerr (2009) highlight the variety of objectives beyond fundraising relevant to charity sport events, including raising awareness for a cause and encouraging community engagement. More specifically, Wood, Snelgrove, and Danylchuk (2010) suggest that future research should examine related charitable behaviors including involvement in other fundraising and non-fundraising events, as well as volunteering for the charity. The current research responds to this suggestion by investigating the sense of community derived among participants, which allows for evaluation of the community's capacity to achieve desired social change outcomes. In addition, the current research responds to calls for research moving beyond economic impacts of events towards sport events designed to affect social change (Misener & Mason, 2006).

This article is divided into the following sections. First, community engagement and advocacy as goals of nonprofit organizations are introduced in the review of literature and are related to *Gemeinschaft*, the theoretical framework guiding this research. Second, the methods employed to address the research purpose are described. Finally, the results are relayed and are followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purposes of nonprofit organizations are commonly considered through an economic lens, with an emphasis on the demand for and supply of goods or services provided by the organization. According to general economic theory, nonprofit organizations exist as private entities that provide public goods (Hansmann, 1987; Weisbrod, 1974). Specifically, the services provided by nonprofits are nonrival (i.e., additional individuals are able to enjoy the "good" without reducing the utility of others) and nonexcludable (i.e., it is inefficient to exclude

1 individuals from consumption of the “good”) (Head, 1962). In the absence of nonprofit
2 organizations, the provision of such services would fall to the government. Thus, most levels of
3 government in the United States provide tax exemptions to incentivize the existence of such
4 organizations (Brody, 1988; Hansmann, 1987). Most nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers
5 who provide the human resources for the accomplishment of mission-related goals. Charity sport
6 events are one example of such nonprofit organizations, and the responsibilities of charity sport
7 event participants as volunteers are somewhat unique. As a condition of their participation, they
8 are expected to carry out the specific volunteer task of raising funds. Consequently, the
9 contributions of these volunteers to the organization (and their associated impact) are usually
10 quantified in direct financial metrics (e.g., how much money was raised). The authors
11 acknowledge instances in which for-profit organizations produce and manage charity sport
12 events in which a portion of funds raised by participants is directed to the for-profit entity. The
13 current research however focuses on charity sport events managed directly by the non-profit
14 organization, wherein all funds raised go towards that non-profit organization.

15 In addition to their economic role, nonprofit organizations serve a social purpose. For
16 example, two specific social outcomes for nonprofits are community engagement and advocacy
17 (Suarez, 2009). Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans (2008) define community
18 engagement as a process of collaborating with a group, or groups of people, to address issues
19 impacting the well-being of those people. Community engagement is revealed through working
20 collaboratively with other individuals who share common goals such as improved public health
21 or affecting social change (Tindana et al., 2007). Community engagement is evidenced by
22 affiliation with formal and informal organizations (Funk, 1998) and participation in public

forums and private organizations (Putnam, 1995). In addition, charitable giving and volunteering reflect community engagement (Jones, 2006).

One other specific social outcome for nonprofits is advocacy, defined as taking action to help others say what they want to say, securing their rights, representing their best interests, and obtaining any services these individuals need (Rapaport, Manthorpe, Moriarty, Hussein, & Collins, 2005). A critical aspect of advocacy is that those individuals or groups for which action is taken are either underrepresented or devalued within society (Henderson & Pochin, 2001). Through advocacy, individuals or groups can be granted access to information they need, while coming to a better understanding of available options (Atkinson & MacPherson, 2001). In the charity sport event context, participants advocate on behalf of the constituents of the benefitting charity. In this way, managers of nonprofit organizations utilize advocacy to achieve organizational goals and to link constituents' perceptions of the common good with public interest (Reid, 1999).

Research has suggested that charity sport events can elicit community engagement among participants. Meanwhile, O'Brien and Chalip (2007) suggest that the community fostered through an event provides an opportunity to enhance positive social impacts of the event and advance social change. These authors further suggest charity sport event participants represent a target for managers of nonprofit organizations to achieve desirable social outcomes. Tonnies' (1974) conception of *Gemeinschaft* (i.e., Community) describes the properties of community and provides a framework for better understanding the potential developed within the event-created communities.

Gemeinschaft is associated with common beliefs, concentrated social ties, and frequent interaction. There are three distinct yet interrelated forms of *Gemeinschaft*: (1) *Gemeinschaft* of

1 blood, which refers to kinship ties; (2) *Gemeinschaft* of locality, which refers to a common
2 relationship through collective ownership of the land; and, (3) *Gemeinschaft* of mind, which is
3 represented by sacred places and ritual. Although Tonnies (1974) originally differentiated these
4 structural types as they relate to urban (*Gesellschaft*) and rural (*Gemeinschaft*) life, the
5 underlying concept has been applied to various communities that lack a physical neighborhood.
6 Tonnies notes that *Gemeinschaft* is found wherever human beings are related through their wills
7 and affirm each other in an organic manner.

8 Brint (2001) provides a review of specific structural and cultural properties of what he
9 termed “*Gemeinschaft*-like” relations. Four properties of such relations are structural: dense and
10 demanding social ties; social attachments to and involvement within institutions; ritual
11 occasions; and small group size. Identifying specific properties that approximate *Gemeinschaft*
12 allows for a systematic analysis of community. Two properties are cultural: first, perceptions of
13 similarity with the physical characteristics, expressive style, way of life, or historical experience
14 of others; and second, common beliefs in an idea system, moral order, an institution, or a group.

15 The structural and cultural properties presented by Brint can serve as a starting point for
16 understanding community. An overlap among these categories however exists, and specific
17 behaviors, characteristics, and beliefs of community members could simultaneously represent
18 different properties. For example, a community member may perceive similarity with others as a
19 result of dense and demanding social ties or involvement in the same institutions. Similarly, a
20 community member’s involvement in an institution may be because of common beliefs in a
21 moral order (e.g., church membership). The exceptions to this problem are the properties of
22 small group size and ritual occasions.

Brint's (2001) response to this problem of overlap is to create a typology of subtypes of community structure. For communities in which the context of interaction is geographic, subtypes are based on the primary reason for the interaction and the frequency of the interaction. For communities in which the context of interaction is choice, subtypes are determined by the primary reason for interaction, the location of other members, and the amount of face-to-face interaction. Brint (2001) claims that his typology allows for discrimination among subtypes; however, his typology suffers from the same problems. Using the primary reason for interaction proposed by Brint is especially problematic in the context of charity sport events. For example, if an individual wants to participate in a sport event that will benefit a charity, is his/her primary motivation to participate in the activity or the belief that the work benefits the charitable organization? Further, Brint's typology ignores foundational elements of Tonnies' (1974) *Gemeinschaft* concept. The social network is reduced to a measure of frequency of interaction or location, thereby ignoring the importance of reciprocity in communities. The ritual aspect of *Gemeinschaft* is similarly ignored, and social attachments or involvement in institutions is captured by the insufficient proxy of frequency of interaction.

Thus, in spite of their shortcomings, Brint's six structural and cultural properties have frequently been used to explore the concept of community.

According to Granovetter (1973), the strength of an interpersonal or social tie is determined by "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie" (p. 1361). Brint (2001) posits that a dense and demanding social tie specifically contributes to the creation of community. These social ties allow for frequent interaction and require reciprocity from community members. Individuals within this network may acquire information about opportunities for social action through these

1 social ties, which may result in participation in collective action (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993).
2 The possible outcomes associated with social ties are not limited to symbolic or political action.
3 For example, Neilson and Paxton (2010) found that the information dissemination function of
4 social ties can also lead to political consumerism (i.e., intention to purchase or refuse to purchase
5 [boycott] specific goods), as individuals view their purchase decisions as a form of civic
6 engagement.

7 Similarly, social attachment to and involvement within institutions may impact civic
8 outcomes. Specifically, group membership has been shown to increase self-efficacy, which is a
9 predictor of involvement in collective action (Craig, 1979; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Travers,
10 1982). Group members feel empowered by virtue of their active involvement within a
11 community, which allows them to effectively work together to address community needs.

12 Ritual occasions reflect an additional structural property of community, in which the
13 occasion can serve to bring the community together and reinforce group identity. Symbols and
14 logos featured as part of the occasion and group identity can also serve to represent and reinforce
15 group identity (Brint, 2001).

16 Research on the importance of small group size in establishing community and its various
17 associated outcomes is inconclusive. When there are numerous ties and the network becomes
18 too large, participation in civic activities may decline (Centola & Macy, 2007). As additional
19 members join the community, there is less accountability. There may also be a reduced sense of
20 urgency for individuals to become involved in addressing community needs, as there are more
21 people who could potentially assume responsibility in a large community. Contrastingly, Siegel
22 (2009) found that increasing average network size may encourage participation in civic
23 activities.

Regarding the two cultural properties of “*Gemeinschaft*-like” relations, perceptions of similarity or shared experiences and common beliefs among community members also have the potential to affect civic outcomes. Galaskiewicz (1985) suggests that a shared sense of identity can mobilize a group to engage in various advocacy activities, including lobbying legislators, educating publics, and disseminating information. Similarly, identification with a particular group can predict activism (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). The cultural sense of sameness reflects a high degree of cohesion; and, cohesive communities have been found to effectively mobilize and respond to different situational factors (Henig, 1982). In a community that shares common moral values, the altruistic behavior of one individual can inspire similar behavior among other members of the community, thereby reinforcing their commitment (Uphoff, 2000).

Existing research on the creation and maintenance of community through sport events has uncovered similar antecedents and outcomes. Chalip (2006) identified several strategies through which celebration and camaraderie could be achieved (e.g., enabling sociability, creating event-related social events, facilitating informal social opportunities, producing ancillary events, theming widely). While Chalip positioned celebration and camaraderie as the desired ends, research in a non-sport context suggests that when appropriately leveraged, the existence of community can produce tangible outcomes related to advocacy, education, collective action, and even consumer decision-making. In the context of sport, there is some evidence that volunteering for a sport organization or event can lead to increased volunteer engagement in non-sport settings (Cashman, 2006; Solberg, 2003). Furthermore, leisure activities such as sports and festivals can bolster sense of community and can facilitate community engagement by bringing community members together (Arai & Pedlar, 2003).

A number of motives and benefits have been identified as factors driving charity sport event participation. Won, Park, Lee, and Chung (2011) revealed support for the cause to be the most influential motive for MS Walk participants. Support for the cause was followed closely by socialise, which was characterised by sharing the experience with others and spending time with friends and family. Similarly, researchers have alluded to the sense of community in the charity sport event context and related settings. For example, Filo and colleagues (2009) uncovered community as a critical component of the camaraderie underscoring the emotional meaning derived from the event. Meanwhile, Berger, Greenspan, and Kahn (2007) suggested interdependence existed among the biking, the giving, and the travel for participants in the Alyn Wheels of Love Bike Ride, which created a “synergy wherein the whole was greater than the sum of the parts” (p. 31).

Charity sport event participation also aligns with the notion of project-based leisure (e.g., Stebbins, 2005), in that both reflect one-time or occasional leisurely undertakings completed in an individual’s free time. In presenting the concept of project-based leisure, Stebbins (2005) suggests that these activities have the potential to foster community through “collective altruistic activity” (p. 4-5). Finally, in tourism literature, the sector of fundraising adventure tours shares similarities with charity sport events. In describing this sector, Lyons and Wearing (2008) note the convergence of altruism, through the voluntary act of fundraising, and the hedonic aspects of touring, through the activity and social interaction.

With this in mind, the purpose of this research is to apply the six previously identified structural and cultural properties of community, based on Brint (2001), to conduct a systematic analysis of the sense of community derived among charity sport event participants. Specifically, conducting such a systematic analysis advances the following research question: do charity sport

events foster the properties of community among participants? To address this research purpose and question, qualitative data were collected from participants in the 2009 LAF LIVESTRONG Challenge following the event. The method employed to collect and analyze these data is detailed next, followed by a summary of results.

METHOD

Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in the 2009 LAF LIVESTRONG Challenge held in Austin, Texas. This LIVESTRONG Challenge was one of a series of events staged by the LAF in three cities (i.e., Austin, Seattle, Philadelphia) across the United States during 2009. Participants chose from a 5K walk or run, or a 10-, 20-, 45-, 65, 90-mile cycling ride. Participants were required to pay up to a \$50 registration fee (fee varied based upon registration date for event), in addition to a \$250 fundraising minimum. According to event organizers, the LIVESTRONG Challenge in Austin, Texas attracted over 4,000 participants with 55% male.

The respondents within this study were predominantly white (89%), ranging in age from 40 to 64 years (52%), educated with at least a bachelor's degree (44%) Thirteen percent of the participant base indicated that they were cancer survivors, while 85% of participants revealed that they had a friend or a loved one who was a cancer survivor. These interview data are reflective of 46 participants (i.e., 28 males and 18 females; 61/39 male/female ratio), all of whom resided within the United States. One interviewee was originally from England, while another was originally from Brazil. Of the 46 interviewees, 23 were individuals in their first year of event participation, while 23 had participated in the event over multiple years. All interviewees had selected a cycling ride within the event.

1 **Materials**

2 The first author drafted a list of interview questions as a guide to dictate the sequence of
3 questions. In select instances, the first author asked follow up questions to clarify points raised
4 by the interviewees. All questions were intended to have participants elicit the meaning they
5 derived from the event and charity, and to have participants outline involvement and engagement
6 with the charity, based around the event. Sample questions and prompts included: “Describe
7 your connection with this event?; “What does this event means to you?” and, “Beyond
8 participation in this event, how are you involved with the Lance Armstrong Foundation?”
9 Employing open-ended questions regarding the connection with and meaning held for the event,
10 allowed participants to describe the inspiration they had to become involved, which led to an
11 emergence of the commonalities shared among the participant base. Meanwhile, as the first
12 author probed respondents about their involvement with the charity outside of the event, they
13 shared how the event and all of its attributes contributed to charitable activity.

14 **Procedures**

15 The interviews were conducted both in person and over the telephone following the event
16 (n = 46). In-person interviews were conducted during the post-event party held on the event
17 grounds where the first author approached participants from 10:00am to 6:00pm and asked if
18 they would take part in a brief, audio recorded interview regarding the event for a research
19 project on behalf of the LAF. The first author had been granted approval by the LAF to
20 approach participants in this manner, and participants had been informed of the researcher’s
21 presence in advance of the event. All whom the first author approached agreed to participate and
22 have their interviews digitally recorded. Each interview lasted 10-15 minutes on average, and
23 were conducted through the conclusion of the post-event party.

By the end of the post-event party, the first author believed the interview data had not yet reached a qualitative information isomorph or saturation point (Jennings, 2001), leading to an arrangement for additional interviews, which were conducted by telephone. A sample of event participants who had agreed to receive communication from the LAF following the event was sent an e-mail invitation to take part in the interviews for a research project on behalf of the foundation. Every participant who had opted in for this communication from the LAF received the invitation to take part in the interviews. All interested participants contacted the first author via e-mail to schedule a day and time for the telephone call. Once contact was made, the first author asked all interviewees for permission to audio record the interview. The first author asked these additional interviewees identical questions to those interviewed at the event. Again, each interview lasted 10-15 minutes on average. The relatively short duration of the interviews can be attributed to the contexts in which the interviews took place. In person, the respondents were limited in time because they had just completed the demanding event. Meanwhile, a longer conversation was difficult over the telephone.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed verbatim at a later time. The transcriptions were then analyzed thematically in six phases: (1) getting familiar with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and, (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In getting familiar with the data (step 1), the first author transcribed the data and repeatedly read the transcriptions, while applying the six structural and cultural properties of Gemeinschaft as a guiding and organizing premise so as to generate initial codes (step 2) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through this process, the following themes were found, reviewed, defined and supported through the data

(steps 3-5): (1) dense and demanding social ties; (2) social attachments and involvement in institutions; (3) ritual occasions; (4) perceptions of similarity with others; and, (5) common beliefs in an idea system, moral order, an institution, or a group.

After these initial codes and themes had been identified, they were sorted with specific data extracts (i.e., direct quotations from interviewees) and defined, then organized according to each theme. Reviewing these themes for overlap and homogeneity then followed. Within this review process, the first author submitted the themes and the corresponding data extracts, along with the data transcriptions, to his co-authors for independent assessment and validation. The co-authors were in agreement regarding the themes and data extracts. The results from these analysis efforts follow and are described narratively below with sample quotes to reflect respondents' views.

RESULTS

In this section, the results are presented as aligned with each of the six structural and cultural properties of Geimeinschaft-like relations introduced in the literature review, and as analyzed within these data. Based upon the typology presented by Brint (2001) and the charity sport event context, operational definitions were adapted for the six structural and cultural properties of Geimenschaft. The properties, operational definitions, representative quotes, and prompting question are outlined in Table 1. Psuedonyms are used in place of participants' names to introduce quotations. After a discussion of the results, the implications, limitations, and future directions for this research are detailed.

Insert Table 1

Dense and Demanding Social Ties

1 This property is defined as the participant base reflecting a collective action network
2 wherein individuals feel an obligation to take action on behalf of the charity, spread the word,
3 and support the organization. The respondents described the **LIVESTRONG** Challenge as an
4 event that allowed for the development and reinforcement of social ties among participants. In
5 describing these social ties, individuals acknowledged the participant base as a like-minded
6 collective from which individual participants derived inspiration. In acknowledging the
7 participant base and in describing the inspiration derived from their fellow participants,
8 individuals frequently used the terms ‘family’ and ‘collective.’

9 In addition, a majority of respondents indicated drawing pleasure and inspiration from
10 being around their fellow participants at the event. When asked to elaborate upon her event
11 experience, Michelle stated, “there are a lot of amazing people out here today.” Similarly, Blair
12 indicated that “it’s so inspiring to see all these people out.” Mitch further highlighted the
13 inspiration derived from the participant base in saying, “one person can only do so much, it’s
14 much more powerful to have a collective.” This point was further extended by Peter, who noted:

15 Yeah, I think you get enough of us together...each of us individually, you know, if each
16 of us thinks we’re just by ourselves then we can’t do anything....But then you see all
17 these people, and I recognize the power of the collective.

18 A key feature of the social ties formed during and after the event was the responsibility
19 that members have to each other. Having developed *demanding* social ties through their
20 participation in the event, participants noted that the information dissemination function was
21 inherent and important to these relationships. The responsibility members felt towards one
22 another reflected the reciprocity inherent to demanding social ties. Meanwhile, the information
23 and experience gathered through the event led to social action. Individuals repeatedly used terms

1 such as “spreading the word”, “support”, and “staying connected” to express their relationship
2 with the LAF. When asked to describe whether participation in the event inspired him to further
3 engage with the organization, Stan replied, “we spread the word. My whole family is a great
4 **LIVESTRONG** supporter in word, in deed, in philosophy, in spreading the word of the LAF.”

5 When asked the same question, Brad disclosed that advocating for the LAF was an
6 integral aspect of his life, stating, “I try to live what the Foundation [stands for], as part of their
7 mantra and part of their mission statement. I feel like I try to live that everyday.” June
8 expressed a similar responsibility, revealing: “I talk about it [**LIVESTRONG**] with everybody I
9 know....When I support something, I go all out.” Furthermore, Sam commented: “I’m certainly
10 willing and able to engage as an individual. My involvement in cancer survivorship, with the
11 Foundation, and survivorship issues, is a daily, ongoing thing.”

12 Participants outlined specific activities they took part in as a result of the event. Stu
13 described his advancement of the mission of the LAF through interpersonal interactions:

14 Well, I am very much on the grassroots level. It’s kind of a one-on-one change. And I’m
15 really here to provide support to people who are newly diagnosed. I have found that I’ve
16 become sort of a local magnet through family, friends, and associates. If anybody knows
17 anybody who’s just been diagnosed, a lot of people come to me right away and say:

18 ‘How can you help? What information can you provide?’

19 Jerry revealed a specific activity that he takes part in as a result of realizing the
20 importance of raising awareness via event participation. When asked how he was involved with
21 the charity as a result of the event, he replied, “we publish a newspaper article about once a
22 month in our little newspaper at home, and in it we talk about awareness and early detection [of

cancer].” Jackson described a similar awareness-based initiative he undertakes as a result of the event:

It’s advocacy. I have an awareness program that I do in schools and churches with civic groups...I appreciate getting things from the Foundation by email that I can use when I go out and talk. Anything that the Foundation can funnel our direction in that respect that I can use when I go out and talk with others. I think that’s really helpful.

Karen believed that both participating in the event and telling others about the event and charitable cause served as forms of advocacy or information dissemination of behalf of the LAF. She stated, “I think everybody who gets out and does this, you spread the word. It’s just amazing.” Jorge revealed that fundraising and speaking with others about the LAF only served to open doors to further spread the word. He described this with the following:

It’s that referral process through the fundraising. Like to go back to people I had dealt with before, and they’re referring me to other people who want to contribute either by participation or by donations. That’s kind of how I have measured my successes, if you will, in getting the word out there.

In this study, the interviewees described the participant base of the LIVESTRONG Challenge as a collective for which inspiration and responsibility were derived creating dense and demanding social ties, wherein participants supported the charity, spread the word, and took action on behalf of the cause. Participants engage in a variety of support and awareness building initiatives, both individually and collectively with other participants, to advance the LAF’s mission.

Social Attachments to and Involvement in Institutions

This property is defined by involvement and attachment to the charity and event, reflected through a sense of empowerment. In this study, the notion exists that the

LIVESTRONG Challenge represents an institution that empowers participants. The empowerment underscoring participants' attachment to and involvement within the event and charity is built upon their acknowledgment of the participant base and cause.

Melissa further elaborated on the sense of empowerment she derived from her participation saying, "Seeing all the people here that have a sign on their back that they are a survivor or a fighter. It's just, WOW! I definitely feel that everyone can make a change." James made a direct connection between participating in the event and feeling a sense of empowerment, stating:

Well, I mean, I don't know how to put that in words, but being out here with a group like this makes you feel like you are a little part of a big thing, and that's really cool. It absolutely is empowering.

In this study, this particular structural property is manifested in the LIVESTRONG Challenge as a feeling of social empowerment shared among participants. This attachment and involvement is reinforced through occasions such as the event.

Ritual Occasions

These occasions are complemented by symbols and logos that serve to cement the group identity shared among participants. By its very nature, the LIVESTRONG Challenge represents a ritual occasion in that it is an event taking place each year in the same locations, and consists of the same elements (i.e., the fundraising, the training, the ride, the post-event party). Thus, this structural property of community is a component of the event. The importance of the event as a ritual occasion reinforcing group identity within the participant base is demonstrated by Keith, who states:

1 Just to prove it right now, we've got over 3,000 riders who put their lives on hold for a
2 day, for a weekend, and came to support a greater cause. It just goes to show there is
3 strength in numbers and those numbers are put together by a collection of individuals.

4 As described within the literature review, group symbols are a critical component of the
5 sense of identification derived from ritual occasions. In this specific instance, the merchandise
6 associated with the LAF, **LIVESTRONG** apparel and more specifically, the **LIVESTRONG**
7 wristband, represent a symbol that reinforced participants' identification and sense of
8 community. June casually revealed, "I'll wear **LIVESTRONG** gear to work some days."

9 The pervasiveness of the **LIVESTRONG** wristband and its associated meaning, was
10 discussed frequently. Donny portrayed the **LIVESTRONG** wristband as a mechanism to initiate
11 dialogue by stating, "Of course, you wear the yellow band. You see everybody else with one.
12 You ask them why they wear it and it then opens up a conversation." Aaron shared a similar
13 sentiment in describing the **LIVESTRONG** wristband not only as a source of pride, but as an
14 impetus for conversation about the community:

15 Initially, it's how many yellow bands you see when you walk in a room. To me, that's
16 the most obvious...You really haven't seen a decline in those, I don't think anyway. They
17 seem to be getting more and more abundant...and everytime I see a kid wearing a yellow
18 band, I ask them 'why are you wearing that yellow band?' Just to get the feedback, the
19 response.

20 Melvin also portrayed the **LIVESTRONG** wristband as a critical mechanism towards raising
21 awareness, stating: "I guess I can affect change within my sphere of influence, my friends.
22 When you pass out **LIVESTRONG** wristbands for Halloween, which we're now going to do this
23 year. Hopefully that raises some kind of awareness."

Small Group Size

The fourth structural property of community is based upon the notion that if a particular community becomes too large, accountability may diminish and participation in civic activities may decline. Notably, small group size as a central aspect of sense of community was not highlighted within the interviews with event participants. In fact, the opposite held true. As described above, participants frequently mentioned the sheer size of the participant base as a source of inspiration and identification, while elaborating upon a sense of strength in numbers. Counter to Centola and Macy's (2007) contention towards large networks and a decline in civic action, the large number of participants in the event did not appear to affect nor contribute to diminished accountability. Thus, this structural property did not apply.

Perceptions of Similarity with Others

This cultural property of community is represented by participants' perception of similarities with other community members across physical characteristics, style, way of life, or history. Interviewees described similarities shared among **LIVESTRONG** Challenge participants. First, while differences existed among the participant base with regard to demographics, fundraising level, years participating, and involvement with the charity, similarities existed among the participant base with regard to the passion for the cause and the connection to cancer, either as survivors themselves or as friends or loved ones of survivors, as indicated by all interviewees. Second, participants' interest in cycling pervaded the entire participant base as a shared similarity. Throughout the interviews, respondents highlighted their "passion" for cycling and noted how it was evident that so many participants "love to ride." Jarrod commented specifically on this shared interest: "Man, we've got a ton of people who love

riding their bike. This is great.” These similarities were further touched upon by Gregory, describing his event experience:

Like the announcer just said, ‘\$4 million was raised in Austin alone.’ That’s not a little bit, that’s a big number...Not only that, I don’t think most of the participants here, it’s not about the money. You talk to anybody here, they really want to be here. The money, it’s a bonus to raise that much, but they want to be here, they want to participate.

Similarly, Ronnie described his perception of the event with the following: “you bring all these people with similar interests together and try to help people out, try to have fun. And try to engage people in something good.” In this study, similarities were found to be shared among participants (i.e., connection to cancer and the cause, interest in cycling), thereby justifying the existence of this cultural property.

Common Beliefs in an Idea System, Moral Order, Institution, or Group

Interviewees mentioned their belief in the LAF as an institution as well as their belief in their fellow participants to successfully advance the mission of the organization. Such beliefs in the LAF as an institution as articulated by participants was supported by publicity the organization has received as a result of its efforts. This property is depicted in the following description from Stan regarding the success of the LAF:

There are all kinds of tangible evidence. The lobbying that Lance and the LAF does. The publicity that it gets. The appearances that he makes. His carrying the message around the world through his professional racing. It’s substantial and obvious to us.

The successes of the LAF have also translated to successes with individual fundraising. Such success further serves to reinforce belief in the organization. Joel demonstrated this point through his description of his own fundraising accomplishments:

1 Probably the easiest way is through dollars. I actually had to up my fundraising goal, I
2 think, three times because I kept passing it as I was gearing up for the **LIVESTRONG**
3 Challenge. I think that opened my eyes that there's something that really speaks to
4 people about this and that it is an extremely effective mechanism for change.

5 Meanwhile, when participants discussed the strength in numbers inherent to the
6 participant base, their belief in the collective emerged reinforcing the dense social ties
7 highlighted earlier. Margaret discussed the group as a mechanism to advance social change as
8 well as her belief in this group, stating: "Anytime you get a large amount of people behind one
9 cause, you have a better chance of making that difference." Megan echoed that sentiment with
10 the following, "When you see how many people from all over are involved in achieving a goal of
11 raising money for cancer research, it makes me think we can do anything."

12 Meanwhile, Jeffrey explicitly acknowledged the community and belief in the group as
13 forces behind his activities to advance the mission of the LAF:

14 Well to be a part of a community, and to not be alone, means a lot. We are leading a
15 team from our church to promote building relationships through the survivorship process
16 so we can get to know one another and share our struggles....We can influence our
17 neighbors, our church, our workplace, and it's been a really powerful response as we've
18 got the message out.

19 The belief in the group is further reflected through Aiden's description of his individual efforts
20 as a reflection of the wider efforts of the entire participant base, revealing:

21 I think every little bit helps, so I raised \$485? I completed the event, and how many
22 people did I talk to and tell them that I was doing this event? All of my friends have been

1 exposed. I feel that I have made a difference...So, I mean look at all these people around
2 here. Everyone is having a great time, and everyone is thinking about beating cancer.
3 In this study, interviewees described a belief in the LAF as an institution as evidenced by the
4 success of the organization, along with a belief in their fellow participants to contribute to that
5 success. Together, these beliefs reflect this cultural property of community.

6 **DISCUSSION**

7 The purpose of this research was to apply specific structural and cultural properties of
8 community to conduct a systematic analysis of the sense of community derived among charity
9 sport event participants. Specifically, this research advanced the following research question: do
10 charity sport events foster the properties of community among participants? The results reveal
11 that five of the six properties of community were found among participants in the 2009 LAF
12 **LIVESTRONG** Challenge (e.g., Brint, 2001). Uncovering five of the six properties of
13 community suggests that charity sport events are associated with: common beliefs (i.e., belief in
14 making a difference, belief in advancing the cause); concentrated social ties (i.e., the participant
15 base described as a collective or family); and, frequent interaction (i.e., event participation,
16 socializing at the event) (Tonnies, 1974).

17 The dense and demanding social ties revealed among participants were underscored by a
18 connection shared among participants, as well as the inspiration derived from one another. This
19 connection reflects the emotional intensity and intimacy inherent to social ties (Granovetter,
20 1973). Attachment to and involvement in institutions was represented by the sense of
21 empowerment derived among participants. The social ties shared among participants, along with
22 their attachment to the event and the charity, empower them to take action on behalf of the
23 organization (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993), by spreading the word and promoting the LAF.

Ritual occasions are inherent to charity sport events in that the event in and of itself represents a ritual occasion. In this study, the event allowed individuals to gather to share their connection and attachment. Meanwhile, the purchasing and wearing of **LIVESTRONG** merchandise, and the **LIVESTRONG** wristband in particular, reflected a form of civic engagement for participants, whereby this merchandise allowed them to not only celebrate their connection, but also engage in conversation regarding the charity.

Perceptions of similarity with others, along with participants' common beliefs were revealed in a number of ways. First, participant connection as cancer survivors themselves or as friends and loved ones of cancer survivors demonstrates a common bond among participants. In addition, a passion for cycling and overall interest in the event reveals other similarities. Also, the belief in the charity and the overall success of the LAF, and participant's role in that success, underscore participants' common beliefs. Collectively, this shared sense of identity provided a further impetus for advocacy on behalf of the organization (Galaskiewicz, 1985).

The socialising among participants facilitated by the event, along with the meaning participants ascribed to **LIVESTRONG** merchandise provided evidence of enabling sociability and theming (e.g., Chalip, 2006) via symbolic elements in creating and maintaining community through sport events. Furthermore, the symbolic potential of **LIVESTRONG** merchandise as described by participants provides additional evidence of sport as a means to express meaning for a group (Henry, 1997). In addition, the results highlight that participants who volunteer for the event (via the fundraising required for the event) lead at least in part to being engaged in non-sport based volunteering such as the promotion of the LAF. This provides support for the notion that volunteering for a sport event leads also to increased volunteer engagement in non-sport settings (e.g., Cashman, 2006; Solberg, 2003).

1 The results provide empirical support for the contention that charity sport events can
2 provide a sense of community. Filo and colleagues (2008) advanced the thinking of community
3 as a potential outcome of participant attachment to a charity sport event. Meanwhile, Filo and
4 colleagues (2009) have also mentioned community as a component of the camaraderie shared
5 among charity sport event participants. The presence of five of the six properties of community
6 aligns with past research findings that charity sport events can foster community among
7 participants.

8 **Managerial Implications**

9 The sense of community revealed by charity sport event participants introduces a number
10 of implications for both event managers and charitable organizations. As noted, community
11 allows for groups of people to address issues impacting that community (Bowen et al., 2008).
12 Addressing these issues can be accomplished through charitable giving, volunteering, and
13 advocacy on behalf of the charity (Jones, 2006; Rapaport et al., 2005). The results reveal a
14 community is in place, and these findings underscore a willingness to advance the mission and
15 activities of the charity. The community of participants, along with their various efforts however,
16 pose a number of managerial challenges to charities as well.

17 A sense of community on its own is not sufficient for achieving desired social change.
18 Beyond their demonstrated willingness, participants must accurately reflect and effectively
19 communicate the charity's mission, activities and operations. While it is safe to assume that
20 participants' advocacy and promotion of an event or charity is well intentioned, such intentions
21 or actions could be nullified if the participants do not have the resources, information, and skills
22 to be effective. Participants described how they 'appreciated' receiving information from the
23 LAF to assist their advocacy and promotional efforts, but did not speak of this information as a

prerequisite for such actions. Participants also spoke of advocacy efforts and awareness groups they formed on their own, but did not specify whether the LAF had a role or input in these groups. As a result, the LAF faces challenges harnessing the efforts of the community to ensure effective and consistent communication and action.

To address this and make efforts to align appropriate messaging from the organization with participant actions, charities can hold training workshops or seminars in which charity managers instruct participants on how to promote the organization in a consistent and professional manner. These training sessions can be held as part of the event weekend (i.e., at the post-event party) or can take place over multiple dates following the event. Also, a mentorship program can be introduced to allow participants to learn directly from staff members and receive guidance on the most effective means to promote the organization.

In addition, the perceived shared similarities among participants may pose a challenge of too much sameness within the community of participants. The connection shared among participants could also obstruct the LAF's efforts to communicate their mission to a wider audience. Reinforcing this mission to this community with these existing similarities could potentially create an echo chamber effect in which the information, ideas or beliefs are predominantly shared among like-minded individuals. Accordingly, the organization should strive to create incentives for participants to reach out to individuals and groups outside of this community to speak to the activities and mission of the LAF. Again, workshops and seminars could be introduced in which event participants are linked with staff members and integrated into communities outside of the participant base to speak on behalf of the organisation.

Limitations and Delimitations

1 Limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, the willingness of
2 participants to be interviewed may reflect a bias insofar as their engagement with the charity. In
3 particular, those who volunteered to be interviewed by telephone had self-selected to receive
4 follow up communication from the organization. As such, this group may reflect biased
5 participation due to their already enthusiastic involvement in the LAF event. Furthermore,
6 participants interviewed at the event could have been influenced by the “warm glow” energy that
7 is developed within the context of the event, thus creating further response bias within the data.
8 Volunteering to take part in the interviews may underscore an existing enthusiasm for the
9 charity.

10 Second, a limitation exists in that the demographic makeup of the interviewees—and in
11 particular, those quoted within this manuscript—may not reflect the demographic makeup for the
12 event overall. Specifically, the ratio of males to females interviewed for this research was 61/39,
13 and the ratio for those quoted within the results is 80/20. Furthermore, event organizers reported
14 a ratio of male to female event participants as 55/45. In addition, discrepancies may exist across
15 other factors such as first-year versus multi-year participants, and participants who are cancer
16 survivors versus those who have not had cancer. This constitutes a delimitation also in that the
17 current research is not a comparison of charitable activity across these different demographic
18 segments.

19 **Future Directions**

20 Using the current research as a starting point, a number of future studies are warranted.
21 First, longitudinal research can be conducted tracking participant engagement with the charitable
22 organization over time. Within the current research, interviews were conducted with participants
23 both immediately after and some time following the event, where they discussed existing

behavior, as well as behavioral intentions. Interviews with the same cohort of charity sport event participants immediately following the event, and then at 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals could be employed to assess whether participant engagement with and enthusiasm towards the community of participants and the charity overall, persists over time.

Next, the community of participants could be examined from the charity's perspective. For example, the charity's specific objectives for the community of participants could be qualitatively identified in addition to the broader social outcomes the organization is striving to achieve. Notably, the strong ties present within this community could potentially create a situation in which the community develops strong ties to the same individuals (i.e., **LIVESTRONG** Challenge participants), which can hamper efforts to support the LAF. Such an examination could then allow for the development of specific strategies to highlight these outcomes and action steps to communicate the role of the community of participants in accomplishing these objectives, while possibly uncovering unrealised objectives. From such a qualitative examination, quantitative data could then be collected from event participants to assess their awareness of and engagement with these strategies. This research could ensure that a consistent message is advanced to the desired audience on behalf of the organization.

In addition, sponsors and event partners represent resources worthy of investigation to determine strategies for how these entities can be leveraged to access additional audiences in which the community of participants could be integrated. Finally, research can explore the social networks that are activated via charity sport events and whether such social networks reflect communities that can be leveraged by the charity. As noted, charity sport events frequently employ a fundraising minimum as part of the registration requirement. Participants often rely upon a social network of friends, family, and colleagues to provide sponsorship in the

form of monetary donations in meeting this fundraising minimum. The analysis of social networks focuses on how the connections shared among individuals can influence their relationships (Szmigin, Canning, & Reppel, 2005), and the outcomes of those relationships (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). Research could be conducted to determine strategies for the charity to engage these social networks either as a means to recruit new charity sport event participants or to develop additional engagement strategies with the charity beyond sponsorship.

Future research can also examine donor motives among these social networks (i.e., relationship-based, cause-based) to evaluate whether the charitable cause serves as a source of connection among these networks. Donors within related leisure management sectors such as the arts have been found to be motivated by community and civic concerns (Kim, Gibson, & Ko, 2011). Research could evaluate these motives to allow event managers to leverage donor motives to expand the sense of community.

Conclusion

This research provides an initial qualitative exploration of the outcomes of charity sport events. Specifically, this research evaluated the sense of community derived among charity sport event participants using structural and cultural properties of community according to Tönnies's (1974) conception of *Gemeinschaft*. From the results, participants revealed that five of the six properties are evident within the **LIVESTRONG** Challenge. Factors such as social ties among participants, attachment to and involvement within the event and charity, ritual occasions (i.e., the event itself and **LIVESTRONG** merchandise), and similarities and common beliefs were identified, suggesting that participants derive a sense of community from the event. Meanwhile, the structural property of small group size was not evident; in fact, the opposite was revealed that even in light of the 4000 participants, community was still developed.

1 The sense of community, inherent to charity sport events, provides opportunities for
2 charitable organizations to leverage the participant base towards additional mission related
3 activities and the achievement of desired social outcomes. Challenges exist, however, in
4 managing the community effectively and in ensuring that the advocacy and engagement in which
5 participants take part is consistent with organizational-wide advocacy. It is hoped that this
6 research leads to further examination of charity sport event outcomes beyond fundraising dollars
7 in an effort to assist charitable organizations and event managers in making charity sport event
8 participants into agents of social change.

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1 Table 1

2 Matrix of Properties, Operational Definitions, Representative Quotes, and Prompting Question

Property	Operational Definitions	Representative Quotations	Question
Dense and demanding social ties	The participant base reflects a collective action network, and as a result of recognizing the participant base, individuals feel an obligation to take action on behalf of the charity, spread the word, and support the organization.	“We spread the word. My whole family is a great LIVESTRONG supporter in word, in deed, in philosophy, in spreading the word of the LAF.” (Stan)	Beyond participation in this event, how are you involved with the Lance Armstrong Foundation?
Social attachments and involvement in institutions	An attachment to the event, the charity, and the participant base reflected through a sense of empowerment.	“Well, I mean, I don’t know how to put that in words, but being out here with a group like this makes you feel like you are a little part of a big thing, and that’s really cool. It absolutely is empowering. ” (James)	Beyond participation in this event, how are you involved with the Lance Armstrong Foundation?
Ritual occasions	The event as an occasion complemented by symbols and logos (i.e., LIVESTRONG wristband and merchandise) serving to reinforce group identity.	“Just to prove it right now, we’ve got over 3,000 riders who put their lives on hold for a day, for a weekend, and came to support a greater cause. It just goes to show there is strength in numbers and those numbers are put together by a collection of individuals.” (Keith)	How do you feel holding this event allows the LAF to advance its mission?
Small group size	Ensuring that a community does not become too large to avoid diminished accountability	<i>Not manifested in representative quotes</i>	

and decreased civic action
as a result of this size.

Perceptions of
similarity with others

Perceptions of similarity
with the physical
characteristics, expressive
style, way of life, or
historical experience of
others reflected through a
connection to the cause
and a shared interest in
cycling.

“You bring all these people with similar
interests together and try to help people
out, try to have fun. And try to engage
people in something good.” (Ronnie)

What does this event mean to you?

Common beliefs in an
idea system, moral
order, an institution, or
a group

A belief in the charity as
an agent of social change,
as well as a belief in the
participant base to
advance the mission of
the charity.

“When you see how many people from all
over are involved in achieving a goal of
raising money for cancer research, it
makes me think we can do anything.”
(Megan)

How do you feel holding this event allows
the LAF to advance its mission?