

Importance of Sense of Community

A sense of belonging and a sense of community is important to overall well-being and human development through life's stages. McMillan and Chavis (as cited in Dionigi & Lyons, 2010, p. 319) described a sense of community as a construct comprised of membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections.

Membership is the sense/feeling that one has invested/devoted a significant portion of oneself to become a member and has an expectation to belong (identifies with the community) (Dionigi & Lyons, 2010).

Influence refers to how an individual might influence others in the group, and how the group might exert influence on an individual (i.e. influence goes both ways) (Dionigi & Lyons, 2010). When influence is balanced, one feels a sense of community.

Fulfillment of needs refers to positive reinforcement or "reward" for being part of a group. There is some benefit from belonging to a community--social status, companionship, tangible rewards such as group discounts, etc (Dionigi & Lyons, 2010).

Shared emotional connections refers to the commonalities between the individual and group (or members of the group) (Dionigi & Lyons, 2010). The individual might share some common background, belief system, goals, or some kind of perceived connection that would motivate the individual to have vested interest in the group/community.

I think these elements of "sense of community" are important considerations when creating/structuring group activities/classes or even when opening a gym. Every program or facility needs some kind of target audience/demographic. Knowing how to connect to the target audience will create better potential for retainment and engagement.

Reference

Dionigi, R. A., & Lyons, K. (2010). Examining layers of community in leisure contexts: A case analysis of older adults in an exercise intervention. *Journal Of Leisure Research*, 42(2), 317-340.