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Perceptions of Athletic Identity: A Case Study of a Niche Club Sport

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Abstract

Research on athletic identity has been robust, however, there remains a gap in the literature regarding its perceived impact among collegiate club sport athletes. The subject of the present study was the niche sport of quidditch, a co-ed contact sport that is currently being played at over 200 colleges and universities across the United States. The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of athletic identity among quidditch participants. In addition, it was also of interest to understand the degree to which spectators perceive the athletic identity of the participants and the game of quidditch in general. A two-phase, case study approach was utilized which featured both club quidditch team members and spectators at a regional club tournament as participants. Results from our thematic analysis yielded four primary themes; quidditch as a sport, participation for sport, participation for social interaction, and the Harry Potter effect. Concurrently, many spectators identified the quidditch participants as athletes although they were not as defiant in their identification of quidditch as a sport. These findings have notable implications for college students seeking to continue their athletic endeavors via an alternative sport experience and administrators who are seeking to expand their sport offerings.

Keywords

Qualitative, Case Study, Club Sport, Athletic Identity

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Perceptions of Athletic Identity: A Case Study of a Niche Club Sport

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Research on athletic identity has been robust, however, there remains a gap in the literature regarding its perceived impact among collegiate club sport athletes. The subject of the present study was the niche sport of quidditch, a co-ed contact sport that is currently being played at over 200 colleges and universities across the United States. The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of athletic identity among quidditch participants. In addition, it was also of interest to understand the degree to which spectators perceive the athletic identity of the participants and the game of quidditch in general. A two-phase, case study approach was utilized which featured both club quidditch team members and spectators at a regional club tournament as participants. Results from our thematic analysis yielded four primary themes; quidditch as a sport, participation for sport, participation for social interaction, and the Harry Potter effect. Concurrently, many spectators identified the quidditch participants as athletes although they were not as defiant in their identification of quidditch as a sport. These findings have notable implications for college students seeking to continue their athletic endeavors via an alternative sport experience and administrators who are seeking to expand their sport offerings. Keywords: Qualitative, Case Study, Club Sport, Athletic Identity

“HARRY, THIS IS NO TIME TO BE A GENTLEMAN!” Wood roared as Harry swerved to avoid collision. “KNOCK HER OFF HER BROOM IF YOU HAVE TO!”

— J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

In 2005, undergraduate students from Middlebury College formed the first quidditch team based off J.K. Rowling’s fictional sport highlighted in the Harry Potter book series (Cohen & Peachey, 2015). Quidditch has now become a worldwide sport featuring hundreds of teams and a governing body, the International Quidditch Association (IQA). Teams from around the world are comprised of young adults, collegiate clubs, and individuals from local communities. Given the evident passion for the Harry Potter books and the up-and-coming nature of quidditch as an organized sport, it seems warranted to investigate the nature of athletes’ investment in the sport.

Athletic identity (AI) is a construct that is formed and reformed throughout an individuals’ life (Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006). This concept has been well established in the setting of traditional sports but has made little to no forays into alternative forms of sport. An understanding of AI within the context of quidditch, a highly unique collegiate sport, would allow sport marketers and universities alike to better understand this sports potential in areas such as college recruitment and retention. Therefore, the research questions for this study consisted of the following:

RQ1: How do quidditch participants perceive themselves in relation to their athletic identity?

RQ2: How do quidditch participants perceive the game of quidditch in the context of conventional sports?

RQ3: How do spectators, and fans of quidditch, perceive the athletic identity of the participants and the game of quidditch in comparison to conventional sports?

Literature Review

Quidditch is a modern version of an alternative sport. Alternative forms of sport are generally thought of as those enjoyed by a smaller group of individuals with unique personality traits and characteristics (Rhea & Martin, 2010; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). Common alternative sports include, but are not limited to, Ultimate Frisbee, slow pitch softball, surfing, skateboarding, and BMX biking (popularized by the X-Games). As such, alternative sports should be considered “activities that either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and mainstream sport values” (Rinehart, 2000, p. 506). The game of quidditch combines athleticism, imagination, creativity, and silliness, which makes the participants a different demographic when compared to traditional sports (Cohen et al., 2012). Quidditch is a co-ed full contact sport which makes it unique in the sense that no other sports, to our knowledge, exist with the same premise (the mandatory gender ratio for each quidditch team is five to two - five males and two females, or vice versa).

When asked to give descriptive adjectives of themselves, quidditch participants provided both common traits of athletes (athletic, dedicated, & competitive) as well as other non-traditional traits (nerdy, quirky, & creative; Cohen et al., 2012). The five most identified factors of quidditch participation were found to be identification with Harry Potter, camaraderie and friendship, desire to have fun, desire to try something new, and desire to get in shape. Most of these factors can also be the same for traditional sports, as are the found benefits of the game of quidditch: leadership skills, social gains, self-confidence/pride, and a positive sport experience (Cohen & Peachey, 2015).

The focal point for this research was to identify how the quidditch participants perceived their own athletic identity (AI). Additional consideration was also given to the perceptions that spectators had regarding the game and its participants. Studies involving AI generally do not include spectators or audience members, but we felt an examination of many aspects of the case of a fledgling sport that is rapidly burgeoning would provide a more thorough understanding of this alternative version of sport and its possible impact on collegiate recruitment and retention. The concepts surrounding athletic identity have been heavily researched in previous years and are understood to be the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role and looks to others, for example, spectators, for acknowledgement of that role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). To gain a better understanding of this concept, it is important to understand its foundational construct.

Athletic identity is derived from the well-known identity theory, which can be defined as “meanings one attributes to oneself in a role (and that others attribute to one)” (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p. 84), which are generally formed through social interactions. “Through interaction with others who confirm and validate one’s self-concept, individuals are able to establish identities” (Reifsteck, Gill, & Brooks, 2013, p. 272). These identities give everyone in society a way to define their self and impact their behaviors given the identity that they have established. Per identity theory, an individual will gauge their behavior based on whether that behavior aligns with the respective identity that they have created for themselves (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Activities that merit greater identification result in a greater frequency of engagement in behaviors consistent with those activities and vice versa (Callero, 1985). When utilizing identity theory to construct athletic identity, it is understood that to identify as an

athlete, you must behave as one (Reifsteck et al., 2013). Researchers have indicated that AI is continually developed throughout an individual's life and through ongoing sports participation at various levels. As such, many individuals who were not able to continue their athletic careers in more traditional settings have turned to alternative forms of competition, such as quidditch.

This study sought to examine the degree of athletic identity exuded by club quidditch participants. Further, we also attempted to understand how these individuals, and the sport itself, were viewed by spectators. AI has been extensively explored in relation to mainstream sports. What remains to be explored however, is the degree of AI exuded by alternative sport participants, and specifically, quidditch players. Findings from this study should be of interest to individuals who are seeking to maintain their athletic standing, spectators who are vying for a new form of entertainment, and administrators who are considering expanding their sanctioned/club sport offerings. These results can provide a framework for understanding how current athletes and spectators view this burgeoning sport and the impact that its adoption can have on a community and its constituents.

As quidditch becomes a more popular sport throughout the United States and the world, it is imperative that individuals are aware of its existence as a sport that can maintain and facilitate one's athletic identity. As former collegiate athletes, we have at times struggled to maintain our athletic identities to a level that was on par with our previous involvements. Prior to matriculating to our current institution, we had no knowledge of an organized quidditch team on campus but were enthralled by what we witnessed when we attended practices and matches. Our hope is that our findings will shed light on a version of alternative sport that does not receive a significant amount of attention. Moreover, it is our intention to provide readers with an understanding that quidditch can be an outlet for those seeking to maintain their athletic identities via a sport that is both unique and competitive.

Methodology

The purpose of our study was to understand the relationship between athletic identity and participation in the emerging game of quidditch. We utilized a qualitative instrumental case study approach to address this relationship and to "understand a phenomenon, a process...the perspective, and the worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). By design, this approach is meant to investigate an issue within a bounded system and should include multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). Based on our intentions, a two-phase, or sequential exploratory, mixed methods design was chosen due in large part to eliminate any inherent biases associated with the data sources, researchers, or collection methods (Creswell, 1994; Jick, 1979). Given the deficiencies in prior research related to this subject area, a two-phase design was chosen based on the potential for expansion (i.e., increased scope and breadth of findings; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Such a design is grounded in the concept of triangulation, which was defined by Denzin (1978) as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (p. 291). By combining methods, overlapping and unique facets of this phenomenon may emerge that could increase the range of our findings (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

Participants

Approval was gained by the researchers from the University of Northern Colorado's Internal Review Board prior to conducting interviews. All guidelines and protocols related to data collection were followed throughout the research process. Through contact with the team president, 22 club quidditch team members, all undergraduate students, were interviewed prior to their upcoming regional tournament. This was representative of all those who attended

practice on two separate occasions. These members were also regarded as the most consistent participants in terms of their attendance. We also distributed questionnaires to spectators at the tournament, where we sampled every spectator that attended the event during its entirety. In total, 101 questionnaires were filled out by the spectators. One of the questionnaires did not contain responses to each of the questions and was removed from the sample bringing the final count to 100.

Data Collection Methods

Consistent with a two-phase approach, we first collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews of club quidditch participants on the quidditch practice field at a mid-size university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Our semi-structured interview process was guided by seven questions, which addressed the interviewees' perception(s) of their own athletic identity and took place on the teams practice. A list of the questions utilized for the interviews can be found in Appendix A. These initial questions were supplemented with further probes and inquiries that were tailored based on the interviewee (Adler & Clark, 2008). This type of interview was preferred over a structured or unstructured method since our primary objective was explore the *why* as opposed to the *what*.

In interviewing the participants, our aim was "to find out about what they have experienced and what they think and feel" (Fylan, 2005, p. 65), about quidditch and their personal involvement. Further, given that our topic was unique in nature and had not previously been studied, a true framework for interviewing participants had not been established. Thus, we sought a more versatile method for collecting data which would permit us to "develop a deeper understanding of the research question(s) by exploring contradictions within [the] participants' accounts (Fylan, 2005, p. 67). Interviews were digitally recorded and lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. We acknowledge that these interviews were relatively short based on the general guidelines of qualitative interviews. However, given that our demographic was younger (e.g., undergraduate age), we felt that shorter interviews would be more appropriate. This is consistent with the literature related to interviewing in qualitative research and the impact that age can have on interview length (Seidman, 2006). Moreover, in consulting with an expert in Applied Statistics and Research Methods, and qualitative inquiry specifically, the length was regarded as satisfactory given absence of previous interview designs and information regarding this subject area.

Phase two of our research design consisted of quantitative data collection and featured distribution of a questionnaire to spectators at an organized, seven-team, collegiate quidditch tournament hosted on the campus of mid-size university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. The questionnaires featured five items which included both open-ended and scale questions that were distributed by the researchers (Appendix B). Consistent with the two-phase design, these responses were examined separately from the interviewees' responses in an effort gauge spectators' views on the game of quidditch and the athletic standing of the participants.

Analysis of Data

Our analysis of data featured a mixture of qualitative (e.g., thematic) and quantitative analyses to identify themes and quantify responses. In regards to the responses from the semi-structured interviews, these were transcribed and coded for reoccurring themes in the text. In this case study, a theme should be understood to be a "pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations...or interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii). It was our intention to present both types of data to

better answer our research questions and provide a framework for future studies to build upon. In utilizing a two-phase design, we sought to inform the readers from two perspectives to provide a more holistic depiction of this sport, its participants, and its perception.

Our design and procedural choices enabled us to effectively answer our research questions and present meaningful data. While the theory of Athletic Identity informed our analysis, themes were inductively drawn from the raw information. That is, the raw information is what informed our thematic development. By working directly from the data, we were able to garner a greater appreciation from the responses while eliminating potentially contaminating factors that may arise from theory driven or prior research driven analysis. As such, our process followed the linear approach of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006): (a) familiarization with our data, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) formation of themes, (d) revision of themes, (e) defining and naming themes, (f) reporting findings.

Responses from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and coded based on reoccurring concepts and statements within the text. Predetermined codes were chosen for questions that pertained to specific lengths of time and were naturally more quantifiable. For example, questions two and three asked participants to describe the extent to which they participated in organized athletic competition prior to becoming involved in quidditch and how long they had been playing quidditch, respectively. Since this question would likely elicit a numerical response, responses were coded as either 0-1, 2-4, or 5+ for question two, and 1, 2, or 3+ for question 3. Responses that were more qualitative in nature were assigned codes that allowed the information to be differentiated appropriately and subsequently organized into appropriate themes. Figure 1 provides an example of codes applied to a short segment of data.

Data Segment	Codes Applied
I mean, well, yea I've been kind of trying to get people to come to our home tournament this weekend just because I mean a lot of people joke around about the sport and then we're just like dorks playing with sticks between our legs which is kind of what we are but it's actually like a serious sport and we do full contact sport and we get to tackle each other and its great.	Important for others to know. Referred to as a sport.

Figure 1. Data segment with applied codes.

As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing [sic] and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). In our case study, a theme should be understood to be a “pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations...or interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii). Themes were formed in a way that permitted us to “concentrate on directly and clearly quantifiable aspects from the text content” (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000, p. 55). While a variety of themes were initially produced, they were revised and condensed to present more parsimonious results.

Consistent with a two-phase, mixed methods design, findings from the spectator questionnaires were analyzed and will be displayed separately from the interviews. Since much of the information contained within the responses could be easily quantified, the frequency of responses for each question will be reported along with an analysis. This will permit the presentation of more concise results regarding the perceived athletic identity of quidditch participants and the game itself, which may serve as a foundation for future research.

Trustworthiness

As it pertains to validity and reliability, a variety of methods and processes were carried out to ensure that standards of trustworthiness and dependability were achieved. A series of member checks and peer/colleague examinations were utilized to ensure confirmability. Member checks were performed by five participants on the quidditch team. For these participants, we asked them to assess our transcripts of their interviews to ensure that they were reflective of their experience(s). We also utilized peer/colleague examinations to ensure that our analyses aligned with our research questions. Given that our topic dealt with an emerging sport, we felt it best to consult individuals within the field of sport management and/or sport administration who were familiar with the terms and concepts presented but were not involved in the study in any way. Moreover, this permitted us to gain comprehensive and unbiased insight into our methodology analysis. Additionally, an expert in Applied Statistics and Research Methods, specifically in qualitative research design, also reviewed our research design and format.

To ensure dependability, we kept a detailed audit trail of our research actions to verify the steps that we went through in arriving at our conclusions. Further, to be reflexive, we kept a journal to track our biases to ensure that they were separated, as best as possible, from our interviews with participants. Given that we were all former collegiate athletes, we wanted to ensure that any potential biases that we may have had regarding the athletic identity of quidditch participants and the game itself did not appear in our interview questions and process. Lastly, our study reached saturation both in terms of our interviews and distribution of our questionnaire. All participants who were current and active participants on the club team were included in our study while the questionnaires were distributed to all individuals in attendance at the tournament during the hours in which it was set to run (8am–5pm).

Findings

A total of 22 individuals participated in the first phase of our analysis. 10 males and 12 females made up the sample which limited the potential for a gender-bias to skew our results. Phase two involved the distribution of questionnaires at a regional quidditch tournament. In total, 101 questionnaires were filled out by the spectators. One of the questionnaires did not contain responses to each of the questions and was removed from the sample bringing the final count to 100. Findings will be presented in two sections. The first will feature results from the thematic analysis that dealt with the interviews of the participants. The second will present frequency information related to the spectator questionnaires with analysis related to our third research question.

Phase One: Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Four main themes emerged from phase one of our analysis: (i) *quidditch as a sport*, (ii) *participation for sport*, (iii) *participation for social interaction*, and (iv) *the Harry Potter effect*.
Quidditch as a sport

The most dominant theme that emerged through our analysis was the identification of quidditch as a sport in the conventional sense. There were no instances in which respondents indicated that they were simply participating in a “game” or an “activity.” As one individual stated:

Yea I mean like sports is just something I've done my whole life so it was just something - I mean I can't really think about what it would be like if I wasn't

playing a sport. I don't know what I would be doing with my time but it was just kind of like an automatic thing, I'm going to play a sport.

Playing quidditch provided this individual an outlet for competition that was on par with more conventional mainstream sports. Despite other students and members of the public at large not giving similar credence to its status as a sport, that did not deter this individual from stating the following:

I mean a lot of people joke around about the sport and then we're just like dorks playing with sticks between our legs, which is kind of what we are, but it's actually like a serious sport and we do full contact sport and we get to tackle each other and its great.

Given its club sport status on this campus, many individuals cited that their involvement with the quidditch team was no different than any other club sport program.

Participation for Sport. The competitive nature of quidditch is what inspired many individuals to participate. Their participation allowed them to extend their athletic endeavors in a setting that was described as fun, fast/athletic and aggressive. In general, most participants had been involved in organized athletic competition to varying degrees before joining the quidditch team. As such, quidditch was utilized as an outlet to maintain athletic standing and engage in what they considered to be a sport. One individual, who chose to play quidditch instead of swimming cited that:

I was debating this or swim team and this seemed much more fun than swimming back and forth laps. I love swimming but it can get a little tedious.

From this response in particular, it is easy to see that this participant had a desire to identify with the athlete role and considered quidditch to be a comparable sport to swimming in regard to its competitive nature and unique properties. Further extension of AI was supported by respondents indicating that they actively sought to tell people of their involvement in quidditch, a central tenant of AI. Answers such as "I love telling people I play quidditch" and "it's the best decision I've made in college," illuminate this theme of AI extension.

Participation for Social Interaction. While a large contingent of respondents cited their participation in quidditch as a way to extend their athletic careers, there were a host who replied with responses of indifference related to competition. Their responses took various forms that indicated competition was not a driving force in their participation nor were they seeking acknowledgement from others through their involvement. For example, one individual cited "I like it just because its fun and I've made a lot of friends." Another stated, "I like to have fun. I don't care about winning or losing, as long as I have fun and get along with the other people." A sense of social involvement and community therefore emerged as a central component of participation. As one interviewee responded,

Competition isn't the biggest part of it for me. I think obviously it's fun to do ... I think having people with the same goal and mindset like you on campus that you're with three days a week and a lot of time outside of quidditch is really important just in terms of your social involvement.

Such a finding of using sport for social interaction is not uncommon among college-aged individuals. A central component of AI is that it is negatively correlated with the age, that is, the older an individual the becomes the less likely they are to seek identification with the athlete role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). This is due in large part to the selective nature of college athletics and the understanding that many individuals will not participate in organized sports once they matriculate to campus. Focus therefore shifts from competitiveness to social interaction.

The Harry Potter Effect. One of the most interesting themes that emerged through our analysis is what we termed the *Harry Potter effect*. Many individuals cited their appreciation and love of the Harry Potter franchise as a primary driver of their participation. In fact, every interviewee responded that they either watched and/or read at least one of the installments in the franchise. While the differences between the two variations (fantasy versus real life) are obvious, in that players do not fly on broom sticks (they hold pieces of PVC pipe between their legs), the rules and basic gameplay structure are similar. As one individual commented: “That was like the main reason that I wanted to come out.” Another cited their lifelong fandom as a primary reason for participation: “I’ve been a HP fan since like I can remember so I grew up listening to it so when I heard that we had it I was like I’m going to be on it - I was thrilled.”

While many players made the important disclaimer during the interview process that in no way was having prior knowledge of Harry Potter a requirement for participation (perhaps they made this disclaimer not to discourage others from joining), it became clear that the lore of Harry Potter had a resounding impact on their decision to become club quidditch players. As one player commented in regard to furthering the popularity of the sport; “you don’t need to like Harry Potter, even though I do, but like it’s not a requirement.” Participation in quidditch allowed these individuals to partake in a sport that allowed their passion for this series and whimsical characteristics to stand out in ways that were not constrained by the stigmas of mainstream sport. Moreover, playing quidditch appeared to motivate individuals to become physically active, which is something that they may not have done if their only options were to participate in traditional team sports or adhere to the standard rec center routine (e.g., cardio and weights) of many college students.

Phase Two: Questionnaire Responses

Analysis of the questionnaires required a quantitative analysis in order to produce interpretable results. Question five, however, required additional consideration. Given that it was formatted as an open-ended question, responses were coded based on what influenced the individuals’ attendance. In total, 16 codes were created that ranged from “friends/family were playing” to “just curious about the sport.” While frequencies will still be reported for this question, we felt it necessary to highlight the way in which this question differed from the rest. For reference, the questionnaire that we distributed can be found in Appendix B.

We designed questions 1 and 2 to gain a better understanding of the audiences’ familiarity with quidditch. Of the 100 respondents, 69 indicated that their attendance at the tournament was their first time watching organized quidditch, while 13 indicated that they had attended at least one match in the past. Such findings were not surprising given the sports widespread lack popularity. Responses to question 2 were also on par with what one might expect, with 90 of the 100 respondents indicating that they had not played quidditch, in any capacity, in the past. Given that this crowd of individuals did not have a strong history with the sport of quidditch, we were confident that their answers would reflect their true feelings and emotions regarding the sport and its participants.

Questions 3 and 4 featured Likert-scales that indicated the degree to which spectators viewed the game as a sport and participants as athletes. Figure 1 reports the findings from both questions. From the responses, it is clear that while spectators viewed quidditch as a sport, they did not exhibit the same responses in terms of the participants being called athletes. This could be in part to the fantasy nature of quidditch and/or the fact that it does not conform to the mainstream model of sport. Moreover, the responses could be driven by a simpler answer of unfamiliarity with the game, thus making it difficult for them to label it a sport. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to find that the spectators regarded the participants as athletes, which we believe is a step in the right direction toward the more widespread adoption of quidditch.

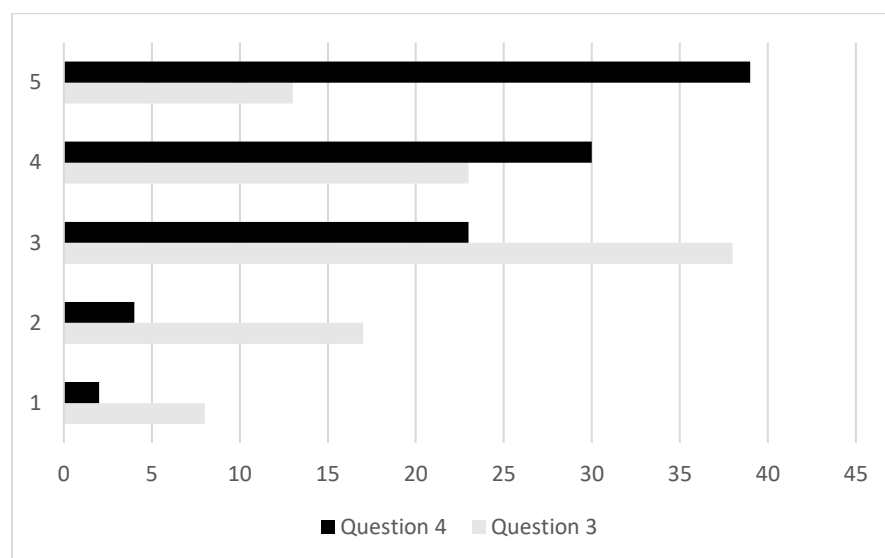


Figure 2. Frequency responses to questions 3 and 4 of questionnaire.

Question 5 asked respondents to indicate their intentions for attending the quidditch tournament. Responses varied to such a degree that 16 codes were created to appropriately categorize each response. While not directly tied to the theory of athletic identity, this question sought to understand that factors that affected attendance. In more mainstream sports, a variety of factors including financial constraints, entertainment value, social interaction, and emotional attachment (Hall, O'Mahony, & Vieceli, 2010; Ross, 2006; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004). While factors that influence attendance at quidditch matches has yet to be conducted, these results provide a foundation for this understanding. While not a direct concern of our research, we found the responses to be interesting and informative. Out of the 100 responses, either having a friend or a child on the team were the leading factors that affected attendance (30 and 22, respectively). Two other responses were common as well, those being other family members were playing (11) and significant others (7) were on the team. In order for quidditch to be more widely adopted, we believe that consistent with previous research, responses needed to indicate that the entertainment was, if not the primary, a highly ranked factor for consumption. The fact that it was only provided as an answer five times, is indicative of the fact that quidditch has a long road ahead in becoming more widely utilized for both participation and consumption.

The final two questions related directly to the *Harry Potter effect* theme found in phase one of this analysis. In alignment with responses from the quidditch participants, spectators exhibited strong ties to both the Harry Potter books and movies, with a majority indicating that they had either watched or read at least one installment of the franchise. Similar to the responses relating to the factors that affected their attendance, in order for this sport to become more

widely recognized, we believe that it will need to find a way to separate itself from the Harry Potter theme to a degree that will permit non-Harry Potter followers to feel comfortable either participating and/or watching.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to conduct an analysis of quidditch participants and spectators that related to perceptions of athletic identity and sport identification. From our thematic analysis, we concluded that while not all participants exuded answers that would suggest that they viewed themselves as athletes, many did. As evidenced by our interviews, more than half of the participants expressed that they had been involved in organized competition for five or more years; Thirteen expressed that continual involvement in competition was a driving factor in their decision to play quidditch competitively. Further, most (15) participants did not have a problem telling others of their involvement in quidditch and were in fact eager to tell their friends and family about their participation. Such a finding came as an initial surprise, given the presumed unfamiliarity of quidditch within the framework of everyday society. The fact that the players were actively seeking to converse with individuals about their athletic endeavors was a finding that we found particularly interesting.

This desire to be involved in organized competition and willingness to engage in open dialogue regarding their involvement would suggest that the participants identified with the athlete role and were looking to others for acknowledgement of their role. This being through conversation, attendance at a tournament, or otherwise. In the same way that mainstream athletes invite friends and family to their competitions for support and recognition, so did 15 quidditch participants. Our findings further contribute to the literature on athletic identity, yet provide new information regarding this sport, in particular. While results from our thematic analysis align with those concerned with more mainstream and even other alternative forms of sport, the growing popularity of quidditch among college-aged individuals should intrigue administrators who are seeking to expand their competitive sport offerings.

The findings of the questionnaire provided interesting insight into the perceptions of quidditch and its participants from a spectators' point of view. For questions one and two, whether quidditch is viewed as a sport and whether the participants are athletes, respectively, we initially thought that we would see very similar responses. However, we instead saw a typical bell curve for whether quidditch is viewed as a sport, and a positively skewed response rate regarding the perception of the participants as athletes. This is interesting from the standpoint that athletes are typically thought to participate in sport. In this case, the spectators saw the players as athletes but not did not entirely view the game as a sport. This may be attributed to the infancy of the game, but it could also be credited to respondent bias in the sense that each spectator had their own definition of sport and what a sport should look like.

For many collegiate sports, it is common practice to hypothesize that most spectators are either friends or family of the players, a notion that is consistent with our findings from question three. However, for sports that have high levels of attendance (Division I football, for example), it is often the case that individuals attend games for entertainment purposes. In this case, five of the respondents stated that they came to the event for fun or entertainment, which may show that quidditch is in fact appealing to a spectator audience to some degree. Yet in order for the sport to become more widely recognized, it will need to become a source of entertainment for a larger audience.

As is the case with all research endeavors, we must consider the limitations of this study that may have influenced our findings. First, the potential of bias exuded by the quidditch participants and spectators must be considered. The high identification with the club sport team by participants and the fact that the primary motivator for attendance was watching a family

member, may have led individuals to respond more favorably to the questions. Next, participants during the interviews may have provided responses that were indicative of what they thought we as the researchers wanted to hear. To address this specific limitation, we sought to do two things. First, we created interview questions that were not considered to be leading, to discourage false responses. Second, we conducted the interviews on the team's practice field to reduce the risk of bias associated with location or setting. Lastly, the lack of prior research in this topic did not afford us a general framework for the ways in which to analyze this construct. Through consultation with an expert in qualitative inquiry and through our own research endeavors, we sought to craft this study in a way that was both informative and interesting to the reader.

In reviewing our findings, we do not feel as if they provide generalizability to other settings or situations outside of quidditch given its unique construct. Nevertheless, we feel as if they do provide unique insights that could be of particular interest to athletes, spectators, and administrators. For athletes specifically, or those who wish to be physically active, our findings should illuminate the fact that quidditch can be utilized as an outlet for competition where the pressures associated with mainstream sports are not present. Participation is as much about winning to the athletes as it is about having fun and being active. Further, quidditch provides a sense of community and social interaction for individuals which is an integral component in the life of any college student. For spectators, quidditch provides a source of entertainment that cannot be matched by any other sport. As previously mentioned, all three researchers were collegiate sport athletes who had never watched a quidditch match prior to beginning this research. After attending our first practice however, we were immediately captivated by what we saw. The fast-paced, full-contact, spirited nature of the sport made it truly enjoyable to watch. Therefore, we hope that our findings open the minds of individuals who are seeking new forms of entertainment.

Lastly, administrators, at both the high school and collegiate level, may find our results of interest. As is the case in the current economic landscape, schools are being forced to cut programs that can no longer be supported given their budgetary necessities. Quidditch, however, provides an alternative form of sport that can be started and maintained on a minimal budget. While we are not suggesting that quidditch will take the place of mainstream sports such as football, baseball, or basketball, it has the potential to provide an after-school or club sport offering in lieu of other, costlier sports.

The sport of quidditch is evolving and growing in a way that few thought it would. Alex Benpe, International Quidditch Association CEO and founder of the sport, stated that "it's evolved from a funny, kind of quirky game inspired by *Harry Potter* into a serious sport, and we're getting more and more people who are now coming out who haven't read the books or seen the movies and who are just looking to get involved (Stott, 2014)." The sentiments voiced by Benpe closely align with the findings and conclusions of this case study. As the game continues to grow, we would expect individuals to begin acknowledging it as more of a sport in the traditional sense. The biggest hurdle in our opinion will be in attracting those individuals who are not fans of the Harry Potter series. As one participant stated, "quidditch is becoming a really big sport and people should get into it more. You don't need to like Harry Potter, even though I do, but it's not a requirement." Based on the findings of this case study, quidditch has clearly become an outlet for those individuals who hold a high degree of athletic identity and will continue to emerge as an option for those who have a desire to identify with the athlete role.

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Appendix A

Participant Interview Questions

1. Tell me what inspired you to start playing Quidditch.
2. To what extent did you participate in organized athletic competition before becoming involved in the game of Quidditch?
3. How long have you been playing Quidditch?
4. Is it important for others to know about your involvement in Quidditch? Why or why not?
5. How important is it for you to be involved in organized competition?
6. Provide descriptive adjectives (3-5) that you associate with yourself as a Quidditch participant.
7. Have you read or watched any of the Harry Potter series? If so, did the series influence your participation in any way?

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. On a scale of 1-5, do you think others view the game of quidditch as a sport? (1=not a sport, 5=sport)
2. On a scale of 1-5, to what extent do you consider the participants to be athletes. (1=not an athlete, 5=athlete).
3. Briefly describe what influenced your attendance at today's match.
4. Have you read any of the books in the Harry Potter series?
5. Have you watched any of the Harry Potter movies?

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