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**NEW FANS, NEW PLACES: THE ROLE OF SPORT FANSHIP IN  
NEWCOMER ADJUSTMENT**

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**NEW FANS, NEW PLACES: THE ROLE OF SPORT FANSHIP IN  
NEWCOMER ADJUSTMENT**

**by**

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## Dedication

For my family and friends who have always believed in me:

To my boys – Zeek, Erob, and Moffy – from weekends in Rowe to late night falafel,  
you've always been there for me.

To my puppies – Remy and Henry – there was never a difficult dissertation moment that  
couldn't be solved with a walk, a game of fetch, and a good belly scratch.

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And to Kelly – you vowed to be my biggest fan and harshest critic, and you've lovingly  
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# **NEW FANS, NEW PLACES: THE ROLE OF SPORT FANSHIP IN NEWCOMER ADJUSTMENT**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. Individuals dedicate substantial time and effort into developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships with others, yet the structures and mechanisms through which individuals satisfy their need for belongingness has changed. Subjugated to the periphery of communal life are the geographically based communities and traditional forms of interest-based communities so popular among earlier generations (Putnam, 2000). In their place, modern individuals have created and joined new types of communities consistent with the wants and demands of the modern economy and lifestyle. Based on looseness and flexibility (Wuthnow, 1998), these modern communities are marked by fluidity of membership where individuals are free to enter and leave at their own peril. Yet, we know very little about the experiences of newcomers entering communities and the underlying processes through which newcomers join communities. Utilizing a longitudinal qualitative approach, the first goal of this dissertation was to develop a

substantive theory explaining the underlying processes through which newcomers join communities, resulting in the creation of the Newcomer-to-Member model.

In the second half of this dissertation, the focus shifts towards the impact of sport fanship as a mechanism to assist in the tumultuous newcomer adjustment process. Based on the experiences of 31 incoming college freshmen over a two-year period, four themes are presented that illustrate how sport fanship can positively affect the experiences of community newcomers: 1) Offering an early and flexible form of involvement; 2) Creating meaningful individual connections; 3) Promoting community ambassadors; and 4) Stimulating the identity negotiation process. Sport fanship is conceptualized in this dissertation not as a predictor of consumer behavior, but rather as a mechanism that can be specifically structured and designed to enhance the experiences and lives of individuals. The implications of the Newcomer-to-Member model and the four themes related to sport fanship are discussed in terms of theoretical implications for higher education, organizational socialization, and sport management. Moreover, practical implications for both higher education and sport management are also discussed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Individuals need to belong. The drive to form and maintain interpersonal bonds with others is among the most basic of human motivations and much of human behavior is done in service of satisfying one's inherent need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Yet in a modern world where traditional structures that promote and support meaningful connections are diminishing (Putnam, 2000), individuals are forced to reexamine the mechanisms through which they find interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging. Sport fanship, through its ability to create shared experiences, rituals, traditions, and a moral responsibility to something larger than oneself, represents one potential replacement as a mechanism to find and develop belongingness.

Belonging has long been considered one of the most paramount of human needs and is thought to be one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs for understanding human behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Individuals who successfully satisfy their inherent need to belong reap substantial benefits relating to mental health, cognitive functioning, emotional stability, and psychological development (Levett-Jones, Lathlean, Maguire, & McMillan, 2007). Moreover, those individuals who fail to achieve interconnectedness with others suffer from decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, and heightened rates of suicide (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). Given the benefits of belonging, it is not surprising that individuals strive to place themselves in situations and environments that promote opportunities to find and develop belongingness.

Throughout most of human history, the most basic strategy for ensuring one's sense of belonging is through participation in communities. The importance of living amongst others was an early behavioral adaptation of individuals, since those who lived



on their own had more difficulty surviving and reproducing (Johanson & Edgar, 1996) and consequently the small group quickly became the basic survival strategy of early humans (Barchas, 1986). Ever since, individuals have sought different structures and mechanisms through which to find belonging through participating in communities. There are generally two accepted types of communities: 1) communities as locality based on geographical location such as a neighborhood, town, or city; and 2) relational communities based on the social cohesion that develops with interpersonal ties independent of geographical location (Heller, 1989). Dating back to the writings of Tönnies (1887 [1957]) and Durkheim (1893 [1933]), scholars have noted the overall decline in the availability, impact, and prominence of geographically rooted communities. Resulting from technological and economic shifts from agrarianism towards industrialization, the growth of cities is often cited as a root cause in the decline of the traditional village-based notion of community. In their place, the number of interest-based or relational communities rose dramatically as individuals needed new ways to satisfy their need to belong.

More recently, scholars have noted another large-scale shift in the very nature and structure of modern communal life. Many of the structured, hierarchical, traditional forms of community that marked American culture in the early twentieth century, such as church groups, book clubs, political societies, and parent-teacher organizations, experienced significant declines in participation during the later part of the century (Putnam, 2000). As a response, individuals are once again searching for new structures of community to ensure their desire to belong is satisfied. What have replaced these traditional forms of communal involvement are organizations marked less by structure and hierarchy and more by their looseness and porousness (Wuthnow, 1998). The modern individual no longer searches for long-term commitment to structured organizations, but

rather seeks malleable forms of involvement that fit the flexibility and fast-pace of the modern society.

While the “looseness” that marks these modern communities (Wuthnow, 1998) represents their appeal to contemporary individuals, the very characteristics that make them attractive also present an inherent weakness as communal structures. One of the defining features of modern communities is the fluidity of membership that results from the elective and discretionary nature of involvement (Faraj, Jarvenpaa, Majchrzak, 2011). Since the modern interest-based community lacks geographical roots and avoids long-term financial requirements from members, participants are typically free to enter and leave the community on their own accord. Though some communities are inherently more fluid in membership than others, one of the important defining features of these communities is that members choose when to participate and when to detach. Accordingly, the long-term sustainability of any interest-based community is fundamentally dependent on the ability of the community and its membership to recruit, socialize, and maintain new members. Surprisingly, however, there is a lack of literature explicitly examining the experiences of newcomers joining communities and the processes that mark their transition from outsider to insider within the communal structure. Consequently, the first goal of this dissertation is to explore the underlying processes through which newcomers join existing communities.

Newcomers struggle. Though the community literature lacks explicit research on the experience of newcomers, there is a tremendous amount of research in both organizational socialization and student development that explores the experience of newcomers and demonstrates the inherent difficulties that newcomers experience as they enter an unfamiliar setting, role, or environment (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Whether a new student in school, a new employee at

work, or a new resident in town, lacking established networks and routines makes satisfying one's need to belong more challenging. As a consequence, it is perhaps not surprising that member turnover is highest among newcomers to an organization (Griffeth & Hom, 2001) and institutions of higher learning report the lowest retention rates for first-year students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Until newcomers are fully socialized into their environments and can achieve a sense of belonging, they represent the most fragile and vulnerable portion of a community's membership.

Yet appreciating the importance of the newcomer experience entails more than simply acknowledging the difficulties of the newcomer adjustment process. The early experiences of newcomers are linked with powerful future outcomes, both for the individual and the larger organization. In a work context, the adjustment process of new employees significantly influences future performance, satisfaction, commitment, intention to remain, and turnover (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). In the context of higher education, such factors as academic achievement, peer interaction, and campus involvement all impact retention to a stronger degree during a student's initial entry than at any other point in their tenure on campus (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999). In consideration of the importance of the newcomer experience, organizations may benefit from understanding not just how newcomers join communities or the challenges they face, but how communities and community members can best assist newcomers in their adjustment process.

Though the new forms of communities discussed earlier can take a variety of shapes and forms, there is one particularly relevant type of new community as it relates to this research. Coinciding with the growth of modern marketing strategies, consumer culture, and mass media, communities based on consumption preferences have become increasingly recognized by scholars as powerful examples of modern communities. These

communities grounded in commercialism and consumers' individual tastes or preferences have helped replace the void left by the decline of traditional forms of community. In place of neighborhood associations or parent-teacher organizations, individuals are increasingly finding structures that promote belongingness through groups of Harley Davidson motorcycle riders (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), Apple computer enthusiasts (Muniz & Schau, 2005), or Winnebago traveling clubs (Peters, 2004). Referred to as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), these communities of brand devotees represent powerful examples of finding belonging and community in the modern world, and marketing researchers have shown that brand communities promote and activate high levels of belongingness among participants (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). While this particular research does not explicitly examine a brand community, the findings from brand community research are relevant to understanding any modern community.

One particularly salient finding from brand community research in terms of understanding how newcomers join communities comes from the growing body of research recognizing fanship with sport teams as a powerful tool for promoting consumer communities (e.g., Grant, Heere, & Dickson; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2000). Since fanship has the ability to unite individuals into a common community around a sports brand, fanship may also be able to help newcomers join other communities as well. In other words, the existing work on sport brand communities is limited in scope since no research has yet examined the power and potential of sport fanship as a developmental tool for helping individuals find belongingness in non-sport related communities. Additional research, is needed to explore how sport fanship can assist in the difficult process of newcomer adjustment. Though newcomer adjustment has been extensively studied in organizational

socialization and student development, the potential of sport fanship to assist in this process is poorly understood. Thus, the second goal of this dissertation is to explore how sport fanship can assist in the process through which newcomers join existing communities.

Within the specific context of higher education, earlier scholars have suggested that sport fanship may help newcomers integrate into their new campuses (i.e., Clopton, 2008a; Wann & Robinson, 2002). Yet the existing literature in this area is limited to establishing associations and correlations between sport fanship and integration, sense of community, or intentions to persist; there is no attempt at explaining how sport fanship leads to these positive individual and organizational outcomes. There is nothing inherent to sport or sport fanship itself that causes such positive outcomes; rather the degree to which sport plays a salubrious or detrimental role in helping newcomers adjust and socialize is dependent upon the ways sport programs are designed and implemented (Chalip, 2006). Rather than merely identifying relationships between sport fanship and different outcomes, this research project is specifically designed to explore the underlying characteristics and structures that allow sport fanship to assist in reaching individual and organizational goals. The focus of this study is not *if* sport fanship can lead to specific outcomes but *how* sport fanship can lead to such outcomes. Consequently, sport fanship is viewed not as an outcome in itself to explain consumer behavior but rather as a mechanism that can be specifically structured and designed to help newcomers satisfy their need to belong.

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this longitudinal qualitative study is to examine the relationship between sport fanship, the newcomer adjustment process, and satisfying one's need to

belong. While sport fanship, belongingness, and newcomer adjustment have each been studied individually, the existing theoretical frameworks fail to adequately explain the relationship between these three constructs. Accordingly, this study was guided by a grounded theory approach because the goal was to generate a substantive theory based on patterns in a specific social process (Charmaz, 2012). While grounded theory is generally used in cases where a theory is not yet available to explain a process, grounded theory is especially pertinent when the goal is to develop a theory based on the experiences of research participants. Furthermore, because grounded theory is concerned with a process or action that has distinct steps or phases that occurred over time, a longitudinal approach was taken to allow a more thorough understanding of the social processes at play as they unfold over time (Creswell, 2013). Based on a constructive approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2012), this research began not with specified research questions but rather with more generalized statements of purpose, or points of departure, in order to maximize the benefits from the flexible nature of the grounded theory approach. Therefore, the following two purpose statements served as the guide for this dissertation

1. To develop a substantive theory explaining the underlying processes through which newcomers join existing communities.
2. To explore how sport fanship assists in the newcomer adjustment process.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Exploring the aforementioned purpose statements is significant for a number of reasons. First, given the shift in the structures through which individuals find belonging and the fluidity of membership that marks these new communities, additional attention is warranted to better understand how newcomers join communities. Since communal structures best allow individuals to satisfy their need to belong, belonging is dependent

on the long-term sustainability of communal structures. By understanding the processes through which newcomers join communities, community leaders or members can better develop programs or strategies to ease the burden of the newcomer adjustment process and increase their ability to recruit, socialize, and retain their fluid membership.

Second, the results exploring how sport fanship assists in the newcomer adjustment process have practical implications for managers of sport and managers of organizations connected to sport. By understanding how fanship can help newcomers, and the specific characteristics of fanship that best alleviate the challenges of the newcomer adjustment process, managers can better structure their sport programs to promote the aspects of fanship that best help newcomers. Moreover, since organizations and universities already dedicate substantial resources to socializing tactics, seminars, and other programmatic interventions to assist newcomers, the results from this study will offer organizations an additional tool, fanship, to use in their quest to assist new members. Since newcomers are generally the most vulnerable segment of a community in terms of retention, using fanship to ease their transition process is the most valuable practical significance from this research.

Finally, the results from this study will help advance the field of sport management in terms of understanding the impact of sport fanship. Fanship is too often conceptualized as a passive form of sport involvement, while only those players on the field/court are considered active participants. Yet, the mere number of individuals who can participate on the field/court is heavily restricted. Under the right structure and organizational strategies, sport fanship may also represent a form of active involvement in sport and result in many of the positive outcomes often only associated with those playing the game. Rather than interpreting sport fanship as merely an indicator of

attendance and purchasing behavior, sport fanship can also be conceptualized as a mechanism able to enhance the experiences and lives of individual.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Individuals need to belong. Human beings are, by nature, social creatures that crave and desire contact and connection with others. As a consequence, individuals devote a substantial portion of their time, energy, and focus to ensure a state of interconnectedness with their surrounding networks and fulfilling their inherent need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The importance of belonging is largely intuitive; social scientists have long recognized and stated the intrinsic need for interconnectedness and developing relationships with peers. Yet it is only since the late twentieth century that scientists approached the study of belonging with academic rigor and authenticity. The discipline of psychology, for instance, witnessed a paradigm shift in the 1960s away from an individually oriented approach that was unresponsive to social needs in favor of a communal approach that emphasized the need for interconnectedness and belonging (Heller, 1989). Around the same time, Anant (1966, 1967, 1969) suggested that belonging was an important indicator of mental health and introduced the language of belonging into the mental health disciplines. By the end of the twentieth century, belonging was legitimately accepted as a fundamental human motivation that explained much of human behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The growth of belonging as an academic discipline led to a plethora of research examining outcomes of finding belonging as well as the dire consequences of social exclusion in a variety of contexts.

Given the implicit and explicit importance of belonging, the goal of this literature review is to connect the existing literature on belonging with a variety of other academic fields. Consequently, this literature review is designed to extend sense of belonging into arenas and literatures where belonging has yet to be fully explored. First, a discussion on the development of sense of belonging will help build the foundation for the rest of this

section. Next, a transition from the need to belong to the search for community will explain the relationship between belonging and community, and offer important distinctions between the two. Afterwards, an examination of how the notion of community has expanded as a result of larger shifts in modern society will take place with a detailed look at how such expanded interpretations of community have affected how individuals find belonging in the modern world. The second half of this literature review then shifts focus towards an analysis of newcomers and their heightened need to find belonging. Exploring established newcomer literatures in organizational socialization and student development in higher education, a thorough examination of how newcomers find belonging and join communities will follow. Finally, this literature review shifts in focus towards the sport management discipline to explore how sport might affect the newcomer experience.

### **THE NEED TO BELONG**

Most discussions of belonging trace the initial stage of the belonging literature to Maslow's (1943) influential Hierarchy of Needs. The basic need to belong was implicitly assumed by many before Maslow's work, yet his Theory of Motivation reflects the earliest explicit understanding of the importance of belonging. According to Maslow (1943), the need to belong occupied the third level of human motivation. Following the satisfaction of physiological needs (i.e., breathing, food, water) and safety needs (i.e., security of body, health), the need to find belonging becomes the most pressing human need. Moreover, finding belonging is a prerequisite for the fourth and fifth levels of his hierarchy, self-esteem and self-actualization; without first finding belonging individuals cannot progress to the more advanced stages of human needs.

While Maslow's (1943) proposed hierarchy represents an important first step in establishing the need to belong, his work alone did not launch the study of belonging. As Maslow himself admitted, his proposed hierarchy was based mostly from his own individual experience as a clinician rather than grounded in empirical research or strong data. While Maslow's (1943) work was instrumental in highlighting the need to belong, his work lacked the scientific rigor needed to establish belonging as a guiding theory explaining individual behavior. Later work (e.g., Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996) showed that belonging is not actually located after health in terms of human motivation, since belonging is an essential component for mental health in particular. Despite these limitations, Maslow's (1943) work continues to provide a framework for scholars exploring the importance of interconnectedness, community, and belonging.

Following Maslow (1943), the next wave of belonging research took place within the realm of mental health. Anant (1966, 1967, 1969) was among the first to connect sense of belonging with mental health, calling belonging "the missing link" in the quest to understand emotional growth. Anant (1966) referred to belongingness as a subjective feeling, related to how a particular member feels about their membership in a group and a concept intrinsically tied to being satisfied with one's particular group or system. Anant (1966) also differentiated belongingness from affiliation and identification, and proposed one of the earliest explicit definitions: "belongingness means personal involvement to the extent that a person feels himself to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" (p.21). Like Maslow (1943), Anant's (1966) earliest article is an anecdotal account lacking data or empirical examination. Anant was Chief Clinical Psychologist at the Saskatchewan Hospital in Canada, and thus his writings were reflective of his own practical experiences. Anant's subsequent works with belonging (1967, 1969) were grounded in primary data, though more recent work has questioned his methodology and

instrumentation (Hagerty et al., 1992). Nonetheless, Anant's attempts at empirically measuring belongingness and establishing an early definition of the concept were important stepping-stones in the development of belonging research. As the mental field refocused on belonging decades after Anant's work, his sentiments regarding the importance of belonging remained influential.

Although other scholars produced anecdotal work similar to Maslow (1943) and Anant (1966), such as Dasberg's (1976) account of Israeli soldiers and Kestenberg and Kestenberg's (1988) examination of children who survived the Holocaust, it was not until Hagerty et al.'s (1992) work that belonging really matured as a behavioral and psychological construct. Hagerty et al. (1992) proposed the first conceptual model of belonging as it relates to mental health, identifying antecedents (i.e., energy for involvement) and consequences (i.e., psychological, social, spiritual, and physical involvement) of belonging. Their analysis provided two defining attributes of sense of belonging: valued involvement and fit. Valued involvement refers to the perception that one is needed and important to the others while fit refers to the perception that one's characteristics are congruent with those same others. Hagerty et al.'s (1992) model was influential and Hagerty and colleagues produced a number of later works on belonging as well (e.g., Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1996; Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002). But for the most part, the work by Hagerty and colleagues was relatively specific to nursing; their measures and models were not intended for use outside of the nursing realm and remained influential mostly in nursing research along with the work of Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2008, 2009).

The arrival of belonging as an interdisciplinary construct was brought forth by Baumeister and Leary's (1995) seminal evaluation of the belongingness hypothesis. Since much of the early work on belonging was largely speculative and anecdotal,

Baumeister and Leary (1995) conducted an extensive review of empirical research from a variety of disciplines to test whether belongingness is truly a fundamental human motivation. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 497), the belongingness hypothesis states, “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.” Satisfying the need to belong required two criteria: 1) finding frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people; and 2) perceiving such bonds to be marked by stability, affective concern, and long-term continuation. After reviewing the empirical findings related to belonging, Baumeister and Leary (1995) concluded that belonging is a fundamental human motivation and suggested that “the desire for interpersonal attachment is one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature” (p. 522). Moreover, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that the loss of belonging for an individual resulted in such negative outcomes as stress, maladjustment, cognitive impairment, and overall health issues. Nearly two decades later, Baumeister and Leary (1995) remains the most influential examination of the fundamental human need to belong as their work truly placed belonging among the most prominent psychological constructs explaining behavior, emotion, and cognitive development.

In an aggregate sense, the research on belonging has posited a number of important themes relevant to the remainder of this research. First, belonging is a fundamental human motivation and need. Second, satisfying one’s need to belong requires only a small number of connections, yet these connections must be affectively pleasing and have the potential for long-term relationships. Third, belonging is inherently related to important behavioral, cognitive, emotional, psychological, and physical outcomes and processes; lacking a sense of belonging is also related to negative

outcomes in these areas. And finally, the need to belong has been verified through both clinical experience and empirical data.

### **SENSE OF BELONGING AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

Before continuing with a detailed exploration of the outcomes associated with belonging, it is important to discuss the term “sense of belonging” as it relates to the more popularly used “sense of community.” Sarason (1974) first coined the term sense of community, defining it as “the perception of similarity with others, an acknowledgement of interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157). Later, Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman (1986) defined sense of community as, “A feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met by their commitment to be together” (p. 11). Many previous scholars have used terms sense of belonging and sense of community interchangeably. McMillan and Chavis (1986), whose work is paramount to the larger sense of community literature, actually used the term belonging in their definition of sense of community. One of their proposed elements of sense of community, membership, was a matter of finding a sense of belonging and emotional safety within a group of peers. Likewise, most of the research involving sense of community often switches between the terms community and belonging as if they are synonyms of each other.

Other scholars have conceptualized belonging as a prerequisite to feelings of community. Furman (1998) wrote that community, according to its very definition, could not exist until individuals experience feelings of belonging, trust, and safety. Similarly, Strayhorn (2012) claimed that sense of belonging is a precursor to community, and while

similar to the notion of community is not its exact equal. Katz and Heere (2013) found that new sport fans developed a sense of belonging with small groups of individuals before experiencing a sense of community with the larger group of fans. The individuals in their study successfully fulfilled their need to belong through horizontal bonds with individuals, but they did not necessarily experience a sense of community with the larger community.

Within this research, there is no attempt to differentiate between the two psychological phenomena but rather to recognize both describe psychological measures of how some individuals feel within their environment. Rather than ascribing technical difference between the terms, the current study examines two different types of relationships within communal structures that relate to both an individual's sense of belongingness and sense of community: 1) vertical relationships; and 2) horizontal relationships. Vertical relationships describe how an individual identifies with the larger community around them. It is a relationship between an individual and the communal (and subcommunal) structure. Horizontal relationships refer to the relationships between individuals within a community. They are interpersonal connections between individual members marked by interaction between fellow members.

Differentiating between the vertical and horizontal relationships in a community adds specificity to the later discussions concerning how the research participants adjusted to their new settings. Rather than attempting to differentiate between one's sense of belonging and sense of community, this research conceptualizes one's need to belong and one's need for community as symbiotic and reciprocal psychological processes. Horizontal relationships within communities are explicitly concerned with interconnectedness at the individual level; they describe feelings experienced by individuals based on their perceived connectedness with others and the fit with those

around them. Vertical relationships in communities are primarily focused on environmental characteristics that affect how individuals feel in connection to others. Recognizing both relationships allows this research to emphasize the structures that shape sense of community while also focusing on the individuals within those structures.

### **OUTCOMES FROM BELONGING**

Given the individual emphasis associated with sense of belonging, to fully appreciate the importance of belonging it is necessary to explore all the individual-level outcomes associated with belonging. Generally, belonging is linked with outcomes concerning vital cognitive, emotional, psychological, and health-related processes.

#### **Cognitive Outcomes**

Baumeister and Leary (1995) reviewed the empirical work regarding belonging and cognitive processing and concluded that belonging is a powerful factor in shaping human thought. Resnick, Levine, and Teasley (1991) wrote that most, if not all, cognitive processes are socially shared and thus require interpersonal connections to develop and function properly. Interpersonal relationships are centrally important in the way that people think about themselves, others, and the world around them; as a consequence individuals devote a disproportionate amount of cognitive processes to both actual and possible relationship partners (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When belonging is absent, many typical cognitive processes are interrupted as well. Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss (2002) found that social exclusion is actually an impediment for overall cognitive development and those suffering from social exclusion perform worse on complex cognitive tasks such as IQ tests. In three different studies, their results indicated that people exhibited significant cognitive decrements after being informed they would end up excluded and alone. While the Baumeister et al. (2002) data was derived from



controlled experiments, primary-data from educational fields supports their findings. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) found that sense of belonging positive influences academic achievement and performance in college students, and Deci and Ryan (2000) similarly found that when students' belonging needs are not fulfilled they perform worse on academic tests.

### **Emotional & Psychological Outcomes**

Regarding the emotional importance of belonging, Baumeister and Leary (1995) reviewed the literature and concluded that many of the strongest emotions that individuals experience, both positive and negative, are linked to achieving or failing to meet one's need to belong. Happiness is strongly related to having close interpersonal connections and lacking such connections leads to not only unhappiness, but also depression (Myers, 1992). In fact, the belonging literature has repeatedly found that failing to belong strongly correlates with depression (Hagerty et al., 2002; Sargent, Williams, Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, & Hoyle, 2002). Extending one step further, Durkheim's (1951) seminal work on suicide stated that suicide was often the result of an individual failing to experience social integration and find interpersonal relationships. Individuals who are well integrated into larger society with strong connections are less likely to take their own life.

Anxiety has long been linked to notions of belonging, dating back to Anant's (1967) conclusion of an inverse relationship between anxiety and belonging. More recently, Baumeister and Tice (1990) found that individuals experience increased anxiety not only when interpersonal bonds are broken, but also merely at the idea of losing friendships and relationships. The connection between belonging and stress was similarly noted by Anant (1967) and has received extensive empirical support more

recently (Lindop, 1999; Lo, 2003). Other emotional states have been linked with failing to satisfy one's need to belong, ranging from jealousy (Pines & Arosen, 1983) to guilt, anger, and humiliation (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993).

### **SEARCHING FOR BELONGING**

Due in large part to the plethora of positive outcomes associated with belonging and the negative outcomes resulting from failing to belong, individuals spend a great deal of time and energy positioning themselves to find belonging. There is strong evidence in evolutionary psychology and anthropology that individuals in early human societies struggled to survive, reproduce, and defend themselves or their resources in environments that lacked the ability to inform interpersonal relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Buss & Kendrick, 1998). Living in groups was, in part, a method for ensuring one's overall safety as well as need to belong. Consequently, individuals developed a set of internal mechanisms that guided human beings into social groups and motivated them to develop lasting relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The consequences of these early internal mechanisms are still evident in modern society.

In many ways, the purpose of communities and communal life is to satisfy the inherent needs of individuals. Nowell and Boyd (2010) viewed community as a resource for meeting the physiological and psychological needs of the individual. Likewise, Block's (2008) work on community is very explicit in the role of community in promoting belonging:

Community offers the promise of belonging and calls for us to acknowledge our interdependence. To belong is to act as an investor, owner, and creator of this place. To be welcome, even if we are strangers. As if we came to the right place and are affirmed for that choice (p. 3).

Similarly, Mason (2000) spoke of the role community plays in the need to belong:

Many have thought that communities also have considerable value in virtue of meeting a powerful universal need or desire. This is variously specified as a need or desire to belong or feel that one belongs...community therefore seems uniquely well suited to meeting this need (p. 52).

As both Block (2008) and Mason's (2000) comments indicate, community is an ideal structure for ensuring individuals satisfy their need to belong. An extensive discussion of types of communal structures will follow in the next section, but the important conclusion here is simply that community is a means for individuals to satisfy their need to belong. Likewise, other institutions are similarly grounded in meeting ones' need to belong. Religious organizations, for example, are strongly marked by the need for individuals to belong where the need to belong is often a stronger driving force to participate than the need to believe (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Mammana-Lupo, Todd, & Houston, 2014; ). The continuance of collective living, cooperative organizations, and shared experiences with peers was very much related to an individual's desire to belong. Individuals learned long ago that one of the most efficient ways to ensure belonging could be achieved through the formation of formal and informal communities.

### **COMMUNITIES AND BELONGING**

From a historical perspective, the origins of community as a form of academic research begin with the work of German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. Tönnies (1887 [1957]) distinguished between two types of communities, differentiating between the types of social ties that marked the relationships. On one hand, Tönnies (1957) identified *gemeinschaft* (community) as the traditional rural format of society where relationships between individuals are marked by traditional rules and customs of that locale. In this

form of community, people typically have relationships with their fellow members and have emotional connections and often shared experiences with their peers. With the rise of industrialization and the growth of urban centers, Tönnies observed that the traditional *gemeinschaft* form of organizations was being replaced by a new structure, which he named *gesellschaft* (society). *Gesellschaft* was marked not by traditional face-to-face relationships, but rather by impersonal and often indirect relationships developed based on self-interest and efficacy.

Interestingly, Tönnies (1957) wrote of the shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* as an inevitable part of the evolutionary process of humanity. While other research of his era scolded and chastised the perils of industrial life, Tönnies was among the first to detach his analysis from the sentimental belief in village life. He compared this shift to an individual developing from childhood to maturity, a process that was nature, expected, and inevitable. Though Tönnies (1957) classification of social relationships was originally published in 1887, the idea that structures of communal life were shifting based on industrialization and modernization remain an important theme in the community literature today. And while recent research has criticized Tönnies (1957) original work based for being overly reliant on contrasts and ultimately inconsistent (e.g., Brint, 2001), Tönnies' work legitimized the study of community and elevated the German approach to sociology as an appropriate field of research.

Unlike the classificatory approach that marked Tönnies' (1957) approach to analyzing communal social structures, Durkheim's (1897 [1951]) *Suicide* examined social relationships as an essential component of behavior and mental health. Rather than interpreting community as a social structure or entity, Durkheim's (1951) approach conceptualized community as a set of individual social relationships that helped shape humans. Durkheim (1951) most famously concluded that social relationships were

ultimately a safeguard against suicide and other harmful actions; the absence of relationships resulted in feelings alienation, isolation, depression, and ultimately suicide. Durkheim's (1951) interpreted the notion of suicide, often considered an individual-level problem, as a result of communal failures thus highlighting the importance of social structures in individual health and well-being. Durkheim's (1951) work represents an important evolution of the concept of community away from the classificatory nature of Tönnies' (1957) early work, and much of the modern sociological approach to community shared more in common with Durkheim than Tönnies.

One of the lasting impacts of Durkheim's (1951) work is the idea that community is the result of social and moral forces, rather than purely physical forces, which several decades later paved the way for Anderson's (1983) seminal work on imagined communities. Anderson (1983) was inspired by the rapid growth of nationalism during his era. He believed that both Marxist and liberal theory failed to adequately explain why individuals were so strongly inspired and motivated by sentiments of nationalism. Anderson (1983) felt the existing theoretical explanations simply could not explain why individuals would choose to kill others or die themselves based on relationships with individuals they had never met. Anderson (1983) coined the term "imagined community" because most of the individuals within a nation-state will never meet face-to-face yet they share a powerful bond and connection based on their mutual membership in the nation-state itself. Thus, community members could only imagine that the others existed because they lacked "real" evidence. Anderson (1983) emphasized the role of several factors in the growth of nationalism and modern communities, namely the rise of print capitalism, vernacular languages, and pilgrimages as important steps in the development of imagined communities. Though Anderson (1983) explicitly examined these factors in terms of

nationalism, they have become similarly important in the growth of community life in modern society as well.

Anderson's (1983) work helped solidify the place of the relational community in the study of community. The history of community often uses the term to describe some locality based on territorial or geographical notions of place. The local village, a church parish, and neighborhoods are prominent examples of these place-based communities. Yet following Anderson's (1983) work, community scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of relational-based communities. Heller (1989), for example, explained that relation communities, unlike locality communities, refer to qualities of human interaction and social ties that draw people together with an emphasis on networks of individuals who interact within formal organizations or informal groups. Based on this interpretation of community, individuals may very well belong to multiple communities simultaneously, thus community must be thought of as a multifaceted term (McKeown, Rubinstein, & Kelly, 1987). Without geographical limitations, the types of formal organizations and the very nature of informal groups through which individuals can find belonging may be almost unlimited. What is essential for this study is the realization that the types of relational communities that individuals connect through have changed substantially over a relatively short period of time.

Putnam's (2000) work on the collapse and revival of American community is similar in many ways to what Tönnies (1957) wrote many years earlier. Where Tönnies (1957) observed the shift from *gemeinschaft* social structures to *gesellschaft*, Putnam (2000) also noted a dramatic change in the types of communal structures popular in American society over a relatively short period of time. As he stated:

For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore American into ever deeper engagement in the life of the communities, but a few decades ago

– silently, without warning – that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century (Putnam, 2000, p. 27).

Yet Putnam (2000) ultimately explained this tide reversal not as the decline of community involvement, but rather in the revival of a different type of community engagement. While Americans of the early twentieth century were engaged in tightly knit social structures like church groups, neighborhood associations, or parent-teacher associations, American society today is marked by more loosely connected communities. Wuthnow (1998) similarly noted the declining membership in traditional voluntary associations yet interpreted this decline not in terms of communal demise but as an indication of changing trends in the communal structure of America. Wuthnow (1998) emphasized the emergence of “porous institutions,” lacking sharp boundaries, long-term commitments, and rigid hierarchical structures, as replacing the declining traditional forms of community noted by Putnam (2000). Just as Tönnies (1957) viewed the shift in community during his time as neither positive nor negative but rather an inevitable natural change, Wuthnow (1998) does not criticize the change in communal structure nor mourn the loss of traditional associations. Rather, he remarked that to ensure communal life continues, society must be aware of the types of structures which fit the needs of modern Americans and the loose connections of the modern world:

Porous institutions favor civic activities that are more loosely connected. In place of enduring membership organizations, we now see a wide variety of activities that involve short-term or sporadic commitments and task-specific relationships that bring together individuals and organizations from different sectors of the community...Americans do not know their next-door neighbor and live alone or

in blended families, most do have friends and associates who care about them and with whom they interact in meaningful ways (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 203-5). As Wuthnow (1998) and Putnam (2000) both emphasize, the structure of communal life in America has changed greatly over the past several decades. Change in communal structure is inevitable; as society itself adapts to technological, cultural, and social trends, communal life is bound to follow alongside to meet the changing tastes of the modern individual whose need to belong never waivers.

### **COMMUNITY EXPANDED**

As was discussed in the previous section, the structures that support modern communal life have evolved over the past few decades. While many may still associate the term community with an image of rural village life, the reality of modern society is that most communal involvement is not geographically based. Scholars use different terms for these new communal structures, but overall the conceptualization of community has greatly expanded to include a more diverse set of structures capable of supporting community. From online communities surrounding video games, support groups for victims of tragedies, or interest-based message boards for enthusiasts, individuals find communal structures that support belonging through many different sectors of their lives. The emergence of these new types of modern communities revived academic interest in the role of communities and the structure of modern communities. Researchers from academic disciplines like marketing and consumer behavior, for the first time, started examining different phenomena in the context of communities. As diverse fields of research emphasized the importance of community, new approaches to understanding community developed and enhanced new understandings and interpretations of communities in general.



For this purposes of this research project, there is one particularly pertinent example of how the modern conceptualization of community has expanded: brand communities. Brand communities are powerful social structures that enhance a members' sense of belonging with fellow community members. Marketing scholars have developed a substantial literature dealing with brand communities, and in an aggregate sense their research has depicted the ability of brand communities to activate sense of belonging among followers. The following sections outline specific components of the brand community research to illustrate one particular structure within the more modern and expanded conceptualization of community.

### **Rise of Consumption Communities**

Consumer behavior scholars began to seriously consider the notion of communal approaches to consumption during the 1990s. Gainer and Fisher (1994) helped lead the movement towards studying communal consumption, suggesting consumer research needed to look beyond individual-level phenomena. Furthermore, Gainer and Fisher (1994) claimed the reluctance of earlier consumer behavior research to embrace communal consumption was primarily the result of existing biases preferring the dominance perspectives focused on individual cognition and behavior. Along these same lines, Cova (1997) was another early proponent of communal approaches to understanding consumption, proposing that marketers should more thoroughly emphasize what he called "tribal marketing techniques" of groups of consumers. Grounding his work in postmodernism, Cova (1997) believed that society was marked not by the triumph and actions of individuals but of the interpersonal connections between individuals, Cova's (1997) tribes emphasized the relationships between tribal members. In fact, Cova (1997, p. 314) went so far as to claim that, "The link is more important than

the thing” for tribal members. Consumption, like much of human behavior, needed to be studied within the interpersonal contexts embedded in social structures and social relationships.

Just as the early research in the general communities literature focused exclusively on communities as localities defined in terms of geography, the first works exploring the communal approach to consumption similarly conceptualized community as a locality. McGrath, Sherry, and Heisley (1993), for example, examined a weekly farmers market where the participants created a communal environment grounded in consumption. In many ways, this farmers market community resembled an old-fashioned marketplace associated with rural village life and was more reflective of Tönnies’ *gemeinschaft* than modern loosely based communities. The first article that explored consumption communities unhampered by physical location was Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) ethnography of Harley Davidson riders. Schouten and McAlexander referred to these brand enthusiasts, who had developed a substantial network of fellow riders, as a subculture of consumption, which they defined as “a distinctive subgroup of society that self-reflects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity” (p. 43). Subculture of consumption members derived their understanding of Harley Davidson products not through their interactions with the company or the brand itself, but rather through interpersonal ties with other brand users. These riders rarely lived near each other or shared any geographical similarity outside of their rides together, hence their work really represents the first shift in the marketing literature away from community as locality.

While Schouten and McAlexander (1995) removed the dependence on location, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) removed all aspects of location in their conceptualization of brand community. In fact, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) defined brand communities as

non-geographically bound structures among admirers of a particular brand. Hence, the arrival of brand community marks the final shift from locality communities to relational communities. Much of what defines a brand community is strongly backed by Anderson's (1983) imagined communities, including the lack of face-to-face interaction and the importance of technologically-based communication advancements. Where Anderson (1983) wrote primarily of the rise of print capitalism, a good deal of brand community literature emphasizes the important role that the internet plays in allowing brand admirers from around the world to instantly connect through their mutual attachment to the brand (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008). The similarities between imagined communities and brand communities are extensive, including deriving pleasure from a rivals' misfortune (Hickman & Ward, 2007) and the incredibly strong bonds formed between members of these communities. In terms of affecting behavior, recent research has repeatedly demonstrated that how consumers perceive their relationships and interconnectedness with other community members has a greater impact on brand loyalty than traditional measures like satisfaction (Drengner, Jahn, & Gaus, 2012) or financial incentives (Rosenbaum, Ostrom, & Kuntze, 2005). As these similarities indicate, brand communities are not an entirely new phenomenon; rather they are examples of communities in a modern context that promote belonging.

### **Markers and Models of Brand Communities**

Continuing on the notion that brand communities are merely modern examples of traditional communities, the markers of brand communities proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) are strongly grounded in the traditional community and belonging literatures. They proposed the following three markers of brand communities: 1)

consciousness of kind; 2) shared rituals and traditions; and 3) a sense of moral responsibility.

Consciousness of kind refers to a shared sense of belonging that extends beyond personal similarities or mere shared interests (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). This marker is grounded in the early work of Gusfield (1978), who defined consciousness of kind as an intrinsic connection that members feel towards each other. Consciousness of kind is also similar to the traditions of Weber ([1922] 1978), who discussed the importance of a shared sense of knowing among community members. In essence, consciousness of kind reflects an acceptance that the individual is part of a collective “we” of brand community members. Additionally, this feeling of “we” is intrinsically accompanied by a strong sense of “they” which distinguishes group members from those not in the community and helps develop a strong sense of oppositional brand loyalty as well (Muniz & Hamer, 2001).

The second marker, shared rituals and traditions, serves to perpetuate the past events and culture of the brand (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Connecting with a common past was an important component of Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities and it became an essential part of brand communities as well. By celebrating rituals and traditions, individual members engage in the sharing of stories, memories, and often folktales about the celebrated pastimes of the brand. These interpersonal connections over the brand’s history serve to increase the psychological and emotional attachment to the brand itself. Moreover, the importance of shared rituals and traditions may also involve the developing of established behavioral norms and expectations. Since brand communities involve structured social systems and often hierarchies, norms and behaviors actually strengthen the social structures on which brand communities are built (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Similarly, rituals also play a prominent role in belonging.

Goffman (1971) wrote of the importance of certain rituals, such as particular farewell greetings, as an indication that the relationship will be maintained until those two individuals meet again. Similarly, Baumeister and Leary (1995) wrote that when individuals fail to appropriately communicate a shared ritual or tradition, others often experience a feeling of distress from fear of impending separation.

Finally, the third marker proposed by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) is a sense of moral responsibility. They define this marker as a sense of duty or obligation to not only the brand, but to the individual community members as well. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) wrote, “This sense of moral responsibility is what produces, in times of threat to the community, collective action” (p. 413). It is moral responsibility that drives members to act in certain ways that are beneficial for the community as a whole, such as integrating and retaining new members, helping other members in their use of the brand, or communicate positive word-of-mouth associations with others – all of these actions are motivated by a moral responsibility towards the brand community.

As the preceding discussion indicates, each of the markers of brand community are strongly grounded in the traditional community and belonging literature. So while brand community is often considered a modern phenomenon, the similarities with historical communal structures are overwhelming. Brand communities can be interpreted as potential replacements for the more historically prominent forms of community like church groups or parent-teacher organizations that Putnam (2000) indicated experienced a substantial decline in importance and participation over the last few decades. Moreover, the proposed models of brand communities further illustrate the ability of brand communities to provide individuals with a structure from which to find belonging.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) initially proposed that brand communities were best diagrammed as a brand community triad. As Figure 2.1 shows, their models represents a

dramatic shift away from the traditional dyadic relationship paradigm that dominated the marketing and consumer behavior literature previously. Unlike the dyadic relationship, the brand community triad included the consumer-consumer relationship as an integral part of the overall marketing relationship. The consumer-consumer relationship reaffirms the notion of horizontal relationships within communities, something discussed earlier in this review. The consumer-consumer relationship is indicative of value created for the brand; stronger bonds between consumers lead to strong consumer loyalty and commitment to the brand as well. The two different relationships within the brand community triad are consistent with the idea of vertical and horizontal relationships within communal structures.

McAlexander et al. (2002) reconceptualized the brand community model by including several other relationships in addition to those included in the brand community triad (Figure 2.1). Specifically, their proposed consumer-centric model included two additional relationships stemming from the focal customer: 1) the relationship between customer and product, and 2) the relationship between customer and marketer. This expanded model indicates that the social relationships between consumers are only part of the dynamic structure of the brand community, since the consumer-consumer relationship and consumer-brand relationship are affected by other entities and relationships as well. McAlexander et al. (2002) state that in the consumer-centric model, “the existence and meaningfulness of the community inhere in consumer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience resolves” (p. 39). The expanded model also indicates that brand communities are multidimensional constructs, since ultimately a brand community is composed of spatial dimensions, temporal dimensions, and exchange dimensions within the several relationships of the brand community model (Devasagayam & Buff, 2008).

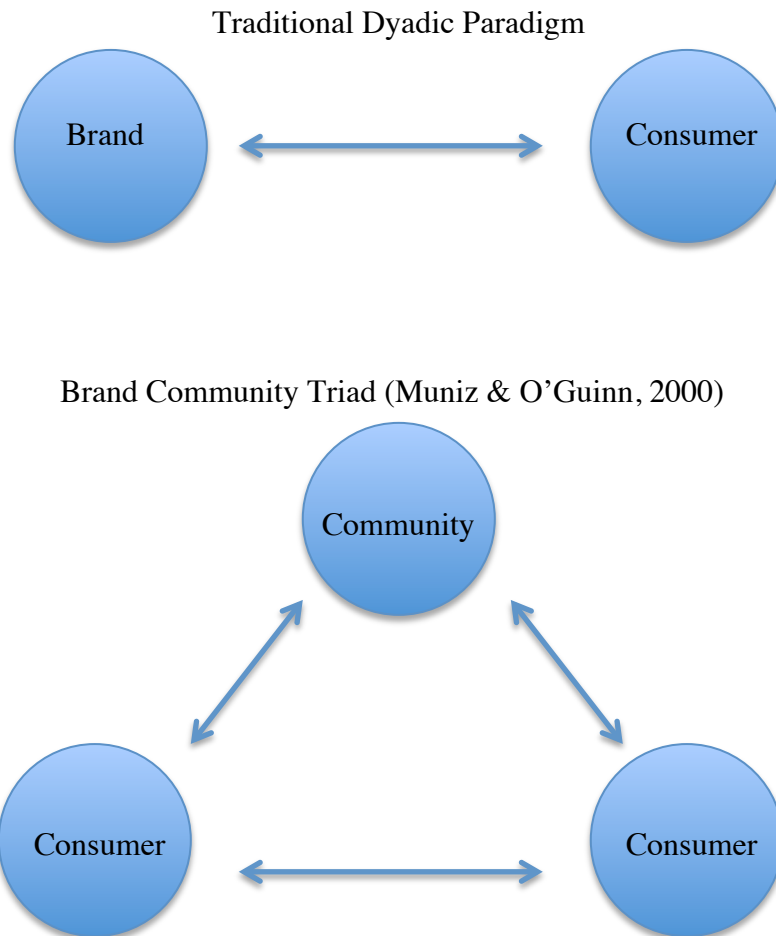


Figure 2.1: Brand Community Models

Building on the notion of multiple relationships within the brand community, Katz and Heere (2013) proposed a more advanced model that allowed scholars to differentiate between community members specifically within newly formed brand communities. In these newly formed communities, which lacked much of the history and experiences typically associated with brand communities, most of the community members may actually have little investment with the brand itself; rather these weakly identified members connect with one of the select few highly identified consumers. It is

only through their relationship with the highly invested hubs of the network that most consumers actually connect to the brand. In other words, brand communities in the early stages of development are marked not by tens of thousands of followers but rather a few hundred highly invested consumers who bring their own personal networks into the brand community periphery (Katz & Heere, 2013).

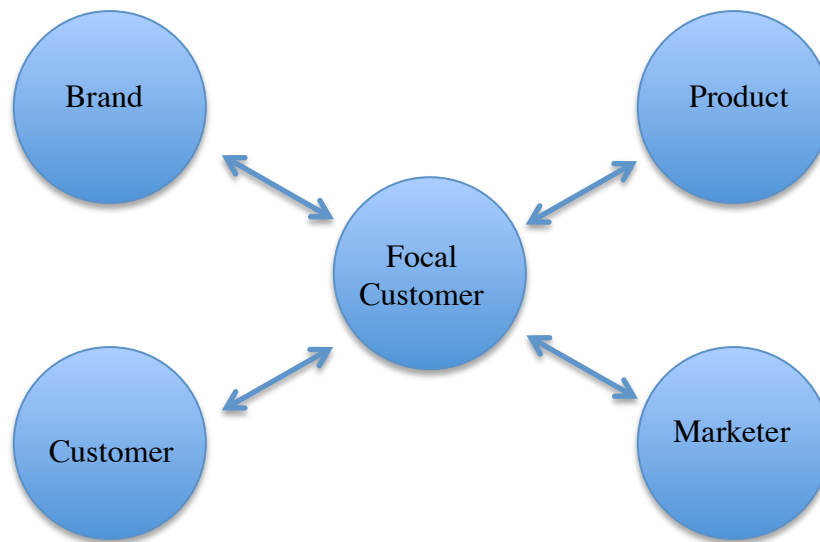


Figure 2.2: Customer-Centric Model (McAlexander et al., 2002)

Although the Katz and Heere (2013) model dealt with a newly formed brand community, their findings speak to an important characteristic of brand community membership: heterogeneity. Early studies on brand community often overemphasized the homogenous nature of brand community members. Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann (2005), for instance, wrote of membership in a brand community, “In contrast to other identities, which may render a person unique and separate, this is a shared or collective identity” (p. 20). McAlexander et al. (2002) similarly wrote, “Brand communities tend to be identified on the basis of commonality or identification among their members” (p. 38).



To some extent, the shared identity of members has led to the mistake of describing brand community members as a homogenous group, where each individual member acts and feels similarly. The reality, however, is that brand communities are marked by heterogeneity. As Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) demonstrated, individual brand communities have varying levels of commitment marking their members. As they concluded, “Brand community members constitute a specific group of customers, but treating them as a single, homogenous group may be a serious mistake...members can and do differ in many respects” (Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008, p. 580).

In an aggregate sense, these various models of brand communities each highlight the importance of consumer-consumer relationships, but add different levels of complexity to the model. By including more relationship in the model, researchers can better capture the dynamic nature of the community since there are more relationships evolving and continuously developing. While the various presented models differ in shape and scope, each represents the inherent individual need to belong. Since the dominant relationships in each of the different models of brand communities highlight the importance of consumer-consumer relationships rather than brand-consumer relationships, the need to belong and create interpersonal relationships supersedes the individual’s attachment with the actual brand or product. There may be value in recognizing that while brand communities are centered around a brand, they are powerful examples of modern structures that allow individuals to find belonging and strong interpersonal connections with others.

## **Brand Community Practices and Fluidity of Membership**

As a final discussion point on brand communities, the goal of this particular section is to examine the actions of individuals within brand communities. Since belonging is generally an individual-level analysis, understanding the phenomenon of brand community requires exploring how individuals behave and act within brand communities. The most comprehensive list of brand community practices was developed by Schau, Muniz, and Arnould (2009). After examining the existing research on brand communities, Schau et al. (2009) identified 12 practices (Table 2.1) that mark the process of collective value creation within brand communities, divided into four categories: 1) social networking; 2) community engagement; 3) brand use; and 4) impression management. While their goal for developing such a list was ultimately organizational in nature, several of the identified practices also speak to actions leading to belonging within brand communities and are thus pertinent within this study.

Of particular relevance within this research, several of Schau et al.'s (2009) practice explicitly relate to recruiting, socializing, and assisting new brand community members. Welcoming, for instance, is defined as, "Greeting new members, beckoning them into the fold, and assisting in their brand learning and community socializing" and evangelizing is described as the act of "sharing the brand 'good news,' inspiring others to use, and preaching from the mountain top" (p. 43). While Schau et al. (2009) make no attempt to rank the practices in terms of importance; intuitively both welcoming and evangelizing are among the most valuable practices because they ensure the brand community continues to attract new members. Since membership in brand communities is inherently fluid, the long-term sustainability of the overall brand community depends on attracting new members

Table 2.1: Brand Community Practices (Schau et al., 2009)

Category	Practice	Description
Social Networking	Welcoming	Greeting new members; assisting in their brand learning
Social Networking	Empathizing	Lending emotional and/or physical support to other members
Social Networking	Governing	Articulating behavioral expectations
Impression Management	Evangelizing	Sharing the brand good news
Impression Management	Justifying	Rationalizing devoting time and effort to brand use
Community Engagement	Staking	Recognizing variance marking intragroup distinction
Community Engagement	Milestoning	Noting seminal events
Community Engagement	Badging	Translating milestones into symbols
Community Engagement	Documenting	Detailing brand relationship journey
Brand Use	Grooming	Caring for the brand
Brand Use	Customizing	Modifying brand to suit group-level or individual needs
Brand Use	Commoditizing	Distancing/approaching marketplace

One of the defining features of modern interest-based community is the fluidity of membership within the community. Because participation in these communities is free and members can join and leave liberally, Faraj et al. (2011) cite fluidity of membership as the single most important characteristic of modern consumer communities. In one particular online brand community example, Ducheneaut (2005) found that more than half of participants did not return following their first participatory act. While this example may be an extreme representation of participant turnover due to the online nature of the community, it is nonetheless an important reminder of the high turnover rates in communities that require little investment to participate in the first place.

In one sense, the fluidity of membership is what makes these modern structures of community attractive in the first place. Wuthnow (1998) described the rise of porous social institutions and the permeable structures that shape the way contemporary individuals find community engagement. Wuthnow (1998) suggested porous institutions are marked by pervious boundaries that allow individuals to easily enter and exit the community at their own discretion. And it is exactly this type of flexibility that makes porous institutions so popular to modern individuals:

They are experimenting with looser, more sporadic, ad hoc connections in place of the long-term memberships in hierarchical organizations of the past. Many people find it hard to join community groups that demand years of commitment, and so busy men and women do the best they can, giving a little of their time, seeking to be responsible citizens in small way, and being creative in the ways they relate to their neighbors” (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 5).

Brint (2000) similarly agrees that the attractiveness of modern communities is intrinsically related to the lack of long-term commitment and the flexibility of involvement within these loose social structures, stating that loosely connected and

activity-based groups represent the best hope for maintain the virtues of community in an ever-changing modern world.

Since members are continuously entering and leaving communities and avoiding long-term commitment, the long-term sustainability of said community is inherently at-risk. Without geographical roots, financial commitments, or historical pedigrees, many of interest-based communities struggle with retaining members. The very flexibility and porousness that initially makes them attractive also serve as the inherent flaw in their longevity and stability. The mobility that marks the current global economy exacerbates the likelihood that participation in interest-based community is disrupted at various times in the life cycle of an individual. Just as individuals need interpersonal relationships to function properly, communal structures need participants to survive. Despite the grave importance of recruiting and welcoming new members to communities marked by fluid membership, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding how newcomers join communities. Schau et al.'s (2009) brand community practices is a notable exception in that they addressed the importance of welcoming newcomers and evangelizing, yet even their work lacks any specific attention to the processes that mark the newcomer experience. Consequently, the community literature requires a detailed description of how newcomers join existing communities. Though this subject has yet to be explicitly studied in the community literature, there are two established fields of study which have extensively examined the experiences of newcomers and their adjustment process: organizational socialization and student development.

### **THE NEWCOMER LITERATURE**

The goal of the subsequent section is to explore the existing literature in organizational socialization followed by a discussion of the newcomer literature within

the field of student development and higher education. What ensues is not intended to be an exhaustive exploration of either field; rather the purpose is to highlight the pertinent research and findings as they may help better explain how newcomers join communities.

### **Organizational Socialization**

While the need for belonging is inherent for all individuals (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the importance of belonging is amplified in the case of newcomers. By the very nature of being new to a location or a community, newcomers often lack the structures, social support systems, and interpersonal networks crucial for individual happiness and quality of life. One's introduction into a new environment is often an arduous and trying experience, as the newcomer faces a great deal of uncertainty and heightened levels of anxiety (Wanberg, 2012). Griffeth and Hom (2001) found that member turnover is highest among newcomers to an organization, and in combination with the escalating costs of training new employees, organizations have a profound interest in helping their new employees adjust into their new roles and understanding the specific socialization tactics that best assist in this process. The initial experience of newcomers has important short-term and long-term impacts for the individual and organization ranging from satisfaction, commitment, and intention to remain (Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007). Because these outcomes are of great significance for organizations, there is a plethora of research exploring the experiences of newcomers in organizations, the tactics that help newcomers adjust to the organization, and the various indices that measure the newcomer adjustment process into the organization.

#### ***The Development of Organizational Socialization***

The origins of the organizational socialization literature are often traced to Van Maanen and Schien's (1979) seminal publication, which remains the most cited

organizational socialization research to date. Van Maanen and Schien (1979) proposed the first definition of organizational socialization, describing it as the “process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (p. 211). Their early conceptualization of organizational socialization described it as an ongoing process for individuals that occurred whenever boundaries were crossed and the newcomer entered unfamiliar territory. Over the subsequent decades since Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) seminal article, the organizational socialization literature has grown in size and scope into a prominent field of research within organizational and management studies. The field has shifted its focus considerably over the years, employing new methods, and developing new theoretical constructs along the way. To best explore the developments within the organizational socialization literature, the existing research can be split into three distinct waves, each defined by a change in overall focus (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012).

The earliest wave of research is marked by the seminal works of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Feldman (1976). Socialization was conceptualized as an ongoing process, something that individuals experienced with greater and lesser intensity through their lives as they crossed important personal and professional boundaries. The overall focus of the early socialization research was explicitly placed on the organization rather than the individual. Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) most lasting impact is their inclusion of six specific tactics which organizations can use to most effectively socialize their new members. Each tactic was expressed as a bipolar continuum; organizations had to choose between one of the opposing options in the following six tactics: 1) collective vs. individual; 2) formal vs. informal; 3) sequential vs. random; 4) fixed vs. variable; 5) serial vs. disjunctive; and 6) investiture vs. divestiture. By selecting among these six possible tactics, organizations could differentiate themselves based on their approach to

socialization. In other words, by creating “optimal” combinations of the listed tactics based on the specific demands of the organization and the job, organizations could most effectively improve their socialization programs and thus create a competitive advantage.

While the works of the earliest wave of organizational socialization research greatly influenced the development of the field, this first wave lacked focus dedicated to the individual in the newcomer process. Most research of this era focused explicitly on how organizations can best plan socialization programs for improving organizational outcomes following the newcomer adjustment period. Not surprisingly, the second wave of research compensated for the exclusion of individual agency and focused almost exclusively on the role of the individual. Marked by the works of Ashforth and Saks (1996), Ashford and Black (1996), Morrison (1993), and Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994), this second wave of research transformed the individual from a passive receiver of socialization tactics into an actor with agency in the socialization process.

Ashford and Black (1996) offered perhaps the best example of this change in focus, arguing that socialization outcomes were not determined by the six organizational components proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), but rather the socialization experience was impacted by three individual factors: 1) role negotiation, 2) feedback reception, and 3) relationship building. Similar work by Ashforth, Saks, and Lee (1997) and Jones (1986) also argued that individual dispositions such as self-efficacy and growth-needs moderated the impact of organizational socialization efforts.

The most lasting impact of this second wave of research is the emphasis on newcomer information seeking as an antecedent to the larger newcomer adjustment process. Miller and Jablin (1991) produced a three-tier typology of information sought by newcomers, differentiating information seeking into referent information, appraisal



information, and relational information seeking. Referent information involves understanding what is needed to function in one's position in the organization, appraisal information refers to how newcomers are able to function in relation to role requirements, and relational information deals with quality of personal relationships with organizational insiders (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Overall, information seeking was included as one of the antecedents in Bauer et al.'s (2007) model of newcomer adjustment and information seeking was significantly related to both role clarity and social acceptance.

The third and most recent wave of organizational socialization literature has tended to combine the organizational focus of the first wave with the individual experience emphasis of the second wave, resulting in a heightened emphasis on fit. Many of the more recent socialization articles have demonstrated the importance of tailoring a specific socialization experience to a particular employee and the demands of their specific position in the organization. Morrison's (2002) work is perhaps the best example of this recent wave. Using a social network approach to understanding socialization, Morrison (2002) built upon earlier works of Burt (1992) and Granovetter (1985) by emphasizing the importance of informal networks and structural holes as they relate to socialization.

Morrison (2002) sought to determine if there was an "ideal" network location related to successfully completing the socialization process, emphasizing the differences in each individual's needs and experiences. Morrison's (2002) results indicated that different network locations resulted in different socialization outcomes, but no overall ideal position existed. Those individuals with a highly centralized and dense informal network tended to measure highly in role clarity and self-efficacy, but much lower in organizational goals. Conversely, those with wider networks scored lower on role clarity, but much higher in organizational commitment and organizational goals. What these

results indicate is that the optimal network location in terms of socialization outcomes is highly dependent upon the individuals fit within the larger organizational structure (Morrison, 2002).

### *Newcomer Adjustment*

Within the larger organizational socialization literature, there is a particular emphasis on the specific process of newcomer adjustment. Following a meta-analytic review of the existing socialization literature, Bauer et al. (2007) constructed the most extensive and detailed model of newcomer adjustment during the organizational socialization process (Figure 2.3). Newcomer adjustment specifically refers to the indicators that mark the process of an individual transitioning from an outsider to insider. Their model included three explicit indicators: 1) role clarity; 2) self-efficacy; and 3) social acceptance. For the purposes of understanding the relationship between newcomers and belonging, the social acceptance indicator is particularly relevant since it relates to a feeling of acceptance among ones' new peers and a general sense of belonging within their new organization.

The results of the Bauer et al. (2007) model indicate that both information seeking and socialization tactics were both significant related to measures of social acceptance. Moreover, social acceptance was the only indicator of newcomer adjustment that was significantly related to all of the included outcomes: performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to remain, and turnover. Role clarity and self-efficacy were significantly related to several of the outcomes, but only social acceptance was significantly related to all outcomes of the socialization process. A similar meta-analytic study by Saks et al. (2007) that focused on particular socialization tactics also indicated the importance of belonging in the newcomer adjustment process. Specifically,

Saks et al. (2007) found that social tactics, rather than context tactics or content tactics, are the strongest predictors of newcomer adjustment. As a consequence, Saks et al. (2007) explained that to best assist newcomers in their adjustment process, newcomers should have frequent opportunities to meet and interact with other members of the organization, and they suggested that providing newcomers with opportunities to socialize with organizational insiders before and after entry should be viewed as a fundamental component of a successful socialization program.

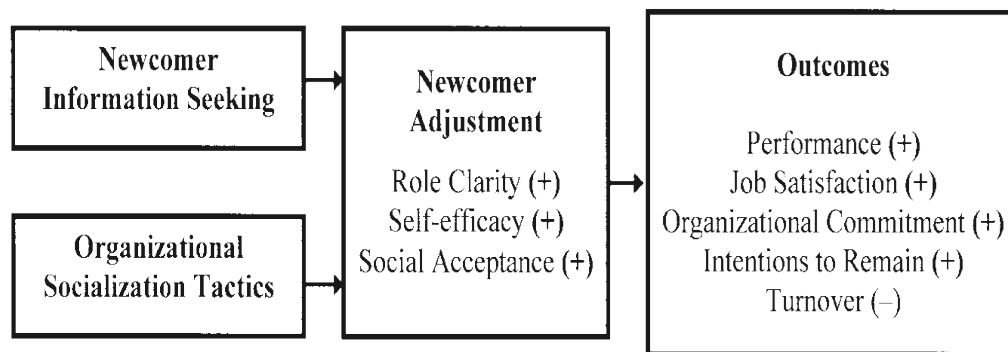


Figure 2.3: Newcomer Adjustment Model (Bauer et al., 2007)

### ***Conclusions from Organizational Socialization***

After reviewing the literature from organizational socialization, there are a number of important findings that specifically relate to this study and the goal of exploring how newcomers join communities. Even though organizational socialization is explicitly concerned with helping new employees in a work context, the findings from prior research has important implications for how newcomers join communities. These two processes inherently have different objectives and are not identical, yet the similarities between the two are enough to warrant connecting the findings from

organizational socialization to communities in general. Presented here is a list of four most salient findings as they relate the newcomers joining communities.

First, perhaps the most basic finding from the organizational socialization literature is that the newcomer experience is difficult yet influential. Entering a new environment brings forth a number of challenges for any newcomers, from dealing with increased stress and anxiety to lacking interpersonal relationships and familiarity with specific cultures and customs. Yet the reason organizational socialization has grown as a field of research is not simply because of the difficulties associated with newcomer adjustment, but due to the integral individual and organizational outcomes associated with the early steps of the adjustment process. These general findings provide justification for explicitly studying how newcomers join communities. Since interest based communities are marked by fluidity of membership and thus dependent on recruiting new members, better understanding how to help newcomers with that transition has long-term implications for the sustainability of the community.

Second, the results from the most recent wave of socialization literature indicate that newcomer networks matter, especially Morrison's (2002) work on network location as it relates to socialization outcomes. Networks are inherently related to belonging, as individuals with strong interpersonal ties satisfy their need to belong more readily than individuals lacking strong ties. Consequently, network development and network location should play an important role in how newcomers join communities. In many ways, the newcomer adjustment process is not merely about meeting people and making relationships, but ensuring newcomers make the right connections and position themselves accordingly. Properly identifying which organizational members from whom to learn about the organization plays a pivotal role in the socialization process (Fisher, 1986).

Thirdly, the notion of fit is important in understanding newcomer adjustment. Not all newcomers require the same socialization experience; a successful newcomer adjustment process is a matter of fit between individual characteristics and the socialization tactics employed by the organization. As such, the newcomer entry process should offer flexible opportunities and allow individual newcomers to find the right socialization path that best fits their needs. Rather than designing a specific and controlled socialization experience, communities should allow individuals choices and agency to develop their own experiences. The specific tactics of socialization as stated by Van Maanen and Schien (1979) remain the most studied aspect of organizational socialization and creating the right combination of said tactics based on individual characteristics and needs is a vital component of the newcomer adjustment process.

And finally, finding belonging early in the newcomer experience is essential to a successful socialization process. The findings from Bauer et al. (2007) and Saks et al. (2007) indicate that social relationships and interconnectedness are more important indicators of socialization and more strongly related to the outcomes of socialization than any other indicator of newcomer adjustment. Ensuring individuals find belonging should be conceptualized as the first priority of any newcomer experience. The success or failure of an individual's initial search for belonging in a new context has large-scale and long-lasting implications for the newcomer and the organization.

### **Higher Education Literature**

While organizational socialization focused explicitly on employees and organizations, there is a vast literature available on the process of newcomer adjustment among students within institutions of higher education. There are two distinct lines of research within the higher education literature of particular relevance to this study: 1)

student development; and 2) retention and persistence. The subsequent sections first explore the dominant theoretical frameworks within student development and student change, followed by a detailed discussion of current research in retention and persistence, and finally an analysis of how the findings from these two lines of research help explain the experience of newcomers joining communities.

### *Student Change and Development*

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the literature on student change and development is best grouped into two broad families: 1) developmental theories; and 2) college impact models. By exploring how students change throughout their time and experience in college, the findings from this line of research are relevant to better understanding how newcomers evolve throughout their transition into a community. The first research typology identified by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) is primarily concerned with the processes, nature, and structure of individual growth. Furthermore, research in this area is best categorized according to the four-category structures originally proposed by Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978), modified by Rodgers (1989), and updated by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). The first category involves psychosocial development theories, which conceptualize student development as the result of individuals experiencing a series of developmental challenges, such as Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of student development.

The second category includes research grounded in cognitive-structural theories that approach student development through the epistemological structures which students construct in order to provide meaning to their worlds and experiences. Most cognitive-structural theories, such as Kohlberg's (1972) Theory of Moral Development, propose a series of stages that individuals pass through in the process of creating meaning for

themselves. The third category, typological models, emphasizes the differences in how individual students perceive and understand their new surroundings and their subsequent responses to their environment. Typological models such as Kolb (1984) attempt to explain why individual students respond in very different ways to similar environments, experiences, and settings. Finally, person-environment interaction theories and models mark the fourth category of developmental theories. Person-environment interaction models focus primarily on the campus environment and its role in influencing individual change and development.

While the developmental theories remain important in student development, they are of less significance to understanding the newcomer experience than Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) second family of student change models, those exploring the origins and processes of change. The earliest of the college impact model is Astin's (1970, 1991) well-known Input-Environment-Output model. Based on this model, college outcomes are conceptualized as a function of inputs (i.e., demographical characteristics), environment (i.e., campus culture, experiences), and finally outcomes (i.e., knowledge, skills). According to the model, inputs affect outcomes both directly and indirectly through the environments and how the student interacts with the environment.

Astin might be most well-known for his I-E-O model, but for the purposes of this research his proposed Theory of Involvement (1985) is more relevant and influential. Astin (1985) interpreted student change as a matter of involvement. As students devote physical and psychological energy to their academic experience through joining formal or informal clubs and organizations, students increase their connection with the university as a result. In many ways, Astin's (1985) emphasis on involvement is the foundation for the purpose of student affairs and extracurricular opportunities so prevalent on college campuses today. While Austin (1985) used the term "involvement", another well-known

and influential theory of student development referred to a similar process as “integration” (Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto (1987), new students need and seek connections to the campus culture, both academically and socially. As the student becomes integrated into the community through finding and strengthening academic or social connections, the student increases their commitment to both personal and organizational goals. In many ways, Tinto’s (1987) “integration” is closely related to Astin’s (1985) “involvement” as both emphasize the importance of newcomers finding structures and individual through which to create attachments to their new communities.

A third influential college impact model of student change is Pascarella’s (1985) general causal model for assessing change. Pascarella’s (1985) model includes five different sets of variables that together shape the learning and cognitive development of students. More specifically, Pascarella (1985) states that a student’s background characteristics and the organizational features of the institution shape a college’s institutional environment. Consequently, these three variables together influence a fourth set of variables concerned with interactions with agents of socialization on campus. Finally, the quality of student effort is a function of the four previous variables, and altogether these variables affect learning and cognitive development.

In an aggregate sense, the three models by Astin (1985), Tinto (1987), and Pascarella (1985) indicate that newcomers are agents of their own socialization process. Just as the third wave of organizational socialization research emphasized the role of the individual within the specific context of their organization, each of the college impact models places a great deal of responsibility on the individual newcomers for finding connections in the community. For Astin (1985) it was a matter of finding involvement; for Tinto (1987) newcomers needed to find ways to integrate themselves into the community; and Pascarella (1985) emphasized the importance of students finding and



interacting with agents of socialization on campus. Yet each of these models also gives a prominent role to the campus environment and the nature of environmental stimuli. Students might have the responsibility of seeking and finding connections on campus, but the campus administrators could ease their burden by helping create an institutional environment that encouraged involvement.

### ***Student Retention and Persistence***

Few issues have received more attention in the higher education literature than matters regarding retention and persistence of students. In the past decade colleges and universities have received increasing criticism over escalating costs of tuition, low graduation rates, and disappointing retention rates (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008; Swail, 2004). After reviewing all the relevant literature concerning both retention and persistence, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded, “as the growing pressures have grown on public and private universities to increase retention and degree completion, so has the research examining the effectiveness or programmatic interventions designed to promote both outcomes” (p. 398). As a result, there exists a great deal of literature examining both between-college effects on retention and within-college effects as they relate the retaining newcomers.

The first category of retention literature is related to institutional differences and their effect on retention, and these findings are generally less relevant to the research goals of this project than within-college effects, yet are worth briefly exploring here. In an aggregate sense, much of the effect of institutional characteristics on retention is small, often indirect, and sometimes contradictory. Institutional size, for instance, has been linked to both positive and negative effects on retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that the research on institutional size was inconsistent and sometimes

contradictory, and that institutional size is ultimately more important as a mediator of effects from other aspects of the college experience. The difference between private and public institutions was more consistent, yet not overly powerful. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Horn (1998) found that students at private institutions have a 5% statistically significant advantage of graduating than their public school peers, yet that difference virtually disappears when controlling for other individual characteristics.

There are two institutional characteristics with some effect on retention, and thus relevant to our discussion of newcomers joining communities: continuous enrollment and selectivity. Ganderton and Santos (1995) found that when students temporarily interrupt their enrollment, their likelihood of eventually completing their degree significantly decreases, just as delaying ones entry into college also significantly decreases the odds of graduating. Continuous enrollment and participation is an important factor related to increasing chances of eventual graduation. Finally, there is also evidence that selectivity of an institution is related to retention as well. After reviewing all research on retention and institutional quality, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded, “The higher the selectivity of an institution, the greater the odds an enrolling student has of completing a bachelor’s degree” (p. 388). Yet, even when controlling for academic and background characteristics, Mullen, Goyette, and Soares (2003) found that measures of institutional quality have a small, positive, significant effect on retention. The relationship between institutional quality and increased retention is not simply explained by the ability of students attending more selective institutions.

Overall, the impact of institutional characteristics and individual retention is surprisingly small. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) wrote that institutional characteristics are too small, too vague, and too far removed from students to produce large effects on retention rates. Similarly, there appears to be little value from the institutional

characteristics literature in helping to explain the newcomer experience in joining communities. There is some support for ensuring that newcomers remain a part of the community continuously after their initial joining, since any break or interruption in participation may have detrimental effects on long-term participation. Also, the findings regarding institutional quality indicate that interest-based communities may increase their chances of retaining members if they distinguish themselves in terms of quality from other similar groups.

The research findings concerning within-college effects are more relevant to understanding the newcomer experience in joining communities. Of the many within-college effects that increase persistence and retention, one of the most powerful predictors is related to academic performance (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While grades and tests may not translate to newcomer and communities, the interesting finding is that academic achievement is most influential on retention during a student's first year in college (DesJardins et al., 1999). In subsequent years, the effect diminished substantially, highlighting the importance of initial success for institutional newcomers. After the initial entry period, the impact of success loses its value and impact on persistence behavior.

The importance of succeeding during the initial entry stage is additionally supported by research on programmatic interventions and their effect on retention. In particular, nearly 95% of college and universities have adopted some form of first-year seminars (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Participants in first-year seminars are more likely to persist into their second-year than nonparticipants (Rogerson & Poock, 2013) and first-year seminars appear to benefit all categories of students in terms of gender, race, and age (Glass & Garrett, 1995). The results from first-year seminar research are consistent with the findings from organizational socialization; institutions have the ability

to design programs through certain socialization tactics to significantly impact the newcomer adjustment process and experience.

In addition to programmatic interventions, there is substantial research examining how various forms of social interactions impact retention and persistence. First, newcomer interaction with faculty members outside of classroom setting significantly increases persistence decisions (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Milem & Berger, 1997). Furthermore, newcomers' perceptions of their teachers' availability has a significant and positive effect on persistence as well (Johnson, 1994). While communities outside of education may lack formal teacher-student relationships, interest-based communities may very well contain individuals who newcomers look up to, respect, and admire in a similar way to how students view teachers. In terms of brand communities, this could be a highly ranked employee from the company or perhaps a well-known endorser of the product. In addition to teacher-student interaction, the importance of peer interactions is also statistically significant to persistence decisions (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990; Eimers & Pike, 1997). Astin (1993) called a student's peer group the single most potential influence on growth and development and consequently a major force in a newcomer's decision to return. The role of peer interaction is strongly supported in the sense of belonging literature; in fact, one could interpret interaction with peers as an indication of a newcomer achieving a strong sense of belonging.

A final finding from the within-college effects, and perhaps the most salient finding in terms of explaining newcomer adjustment, is the important role that engagement plays in retention decisions. The importance of engagement was briefly discussed as it relates to student development, but the importance of engagement warrants an additional discussion as it specifically affects retention. Whether engagement is conceptualized as a matter of becoming "involved" under Astin's (1985) theory or

“integrated” in Tinto’s (1987) work, the importance of a student finding engagement is substantial. The importance of finding a means of involvement is heightened for newcomers; Gerdes and Mallinkrodt (1994) found that the earlier students become involvement the greater the positive effects of involvement on persistence behavior. The importance of engagement is strongly supported in empirical research. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) concluded that the level of student involvement and integration into any component of an institution’s academic or social structure is a critical factor in a student’s persistence decision. The idea that involvement through *any* component of an institution is especially relevant to this research, and the notion that involvement may take any form is consistent through the literature. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), for instance, concluded, “The evidence consistently indicates that academic and social involvement in whatever form (but some more than others) exert statistically significant and positive net influences on student persistence” (p. 440).

Researchers have examined a wide spectrum of engagement possibilities in their quest to explore if certain types of engagement are more effective than others, including participation in intercollegiate athletics. Both Long and Caudill (1991) and Pascarella and Smart (1991) found that student-athlete participation increased the probability of graduation for both males and females. A more recent and extensive study by Shulman and Bowen (2001) found that student-athletes at select prestigious universities graduate at higher rates than non-athletes on the same campus. What is most interesting about their study, however, is that there was no difference in graduation rates between those same student-athletes and non-athletes that were heavily engaged in any type of organized activity. In other words, the effects of participating as a student-athlete were identical to participating in other groups on campus. Yet, restricting the interpretation of participation in intercollegiate athletics solely to student-athletes is troublesome. The presence of

intercollegiate athletics on campus does not affect only student-athletes; university intercollegiate teams unquestionably affect non-athletes as well. And since engagement with the larger university of any sort impacts persistence behavior, it is conceivable that non-athletes should similarly benefit from their involvement with sports teams as fans of the teams. Fanship may very well be a type of participation in sport as well, and thus our understanding of the impact of intercollegiate athletics on persistence and retention is incomplete without a thorough understanding of the role sport fanship plays in the newcomer adjustment process and persistence decision-making process.

### **SPORT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

Given the popularity and prominence of intercollegiate athletics in American culture and society, it is no surprise there is a plethora of research exploring various aspects of sport on college campuses. Primarily, researchers have focused on the financial impacts of college athletics. Goff's (2000) empirical assessment of college sport research begins with a discussion of the direct financial impacts of intercollegiate athletics, citing the "profitability issue" of college sport as the most popular research topic in this field. Fulks (2013) annually publishes an extensive review of revenues and expenses for college athletic programs, demonstrating the bleak financial realities of college sports. For example, in 2012 Fulks (2013) found that only 23 of the roughly 1,000 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic programs reported positive net revenues yet all of these 23 profitable programs participated in the highest level (Football Bowl Subdivision) of NCAA sports. Despite myths that intercollegiate athletics are profitable, the inverse is the reality. As Sperber (1990) wrote, "One of the best-kept secrets about intercollegiate athletics – well guarded because athletic departments are extremely

reluctant to open their financial books – is that most college sports programs lose money” (p. 2).

Since college athletic programs cannot substantiate their expenditures in terms of direct revenue, many researchers have examined the indirect financial effects of college sport via increased exposure. While a thorough review of this extensive literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Clotfelter’s (2011) recent work provides a synopsis of the important research findings. Clotfelter concluded that exposure resulting from college sports can potentially benefit the university in four ways: 1) inducing more potential students to apply for admission; 2) stimulating more charitable donations; 3) distracting alumni from noticing how different the values and opinions of the faculty are from their own; and 4) causing the state governments to act more favorably toward the institution. After thoroughly reviewing the available literature, Clotfelter (2011) concluded there was only sufficient empirical evidence to support the first claim regarding the effects on applications. More recent studies by Pope and Pope (2009) and Pope and Pope (In Press) offered additional support for the notion that college sports can impact applications. For each of the other claims about the benefits from exposure via college sports, the empirical findings are generally inconsistent and often contradictory.

The variance within institutional effects of intercollegiate athletics is important for this dissertation because it speaks to one of the major flaws in the existing literature assuming there is some inherent and fundamental impact of college sport. Chalip (2006) wrote that it is not sport in itself that impacts socialization, development, or other individual and communal outcomes; rather it is the ways in which sport programs are designed and implemented that determine the impact of sport. Yet previous researchers have for the most part lumped different intercollegiate programs into a single entity and examined their impact on specific outcomes. Some researchers have differentiated “big-

time” college sport programs from the rest (e.g., Oriard, 2009; Sperber, 2000), but Chalip’s (2006) quote about examining implementations of sport necessitates that scholars examine the impact of college sport on a much smaller scale to better understand the specific characteristics of intercollegiate athletics that do (or do not) lead to particular outcomes.

Moreover, the previously discussed institutional effects of college sport largely ignore individual-level data concerning how college sport impacts individuals rather than institutions. As a consequence, much of the institutional-level analysis omits details explaining individual behavior that may more fully explain the mechanisms that lead to the institutional outcomes noted in the research findings (cf., Goff, 2000). While institutional-level analysis undoubtedly has important implications for university decision-makers, additional work is needed to better understand how college sport affects individual stakeholders (i.e., students, alumni) to more accurately understand the impact of college athletics on individuals, especially as it relates to improving individual experiences like the newcomer adjustment process.

### **Social and Communal Impact of College Sport**

Given the stated objectives of this research, the most relevant findings from previous research exploring college sport are those findings related to social impact. Specifically, this dissertation is concerned with the community-building potential of sport. Scholars have long noted the ability of sport on campuses to develop feelings of community (Boyer, 1990), yet the existing findings in this genre are limited in important ways. First, the early works exploring the relationship between college sport and levels of community on campus were largely anecdotal in nature. Consider the following passage from Toma (2003, p. 76):



Only at a football game might you hear the entire university community – fraternity brothers of Delta Tau Delta and the gay and lesbian student alliance; Young Republicans and Democratic Socialists; corporate executives and machine shop workers; \$50 donors to the annual fund and \$5 million donors to a named building; visiting assistant professors and senior faculty with endowed chairs; campus custodians and the chief academic officer – all speak with one voice at one time shouting “go Blue” at Michigan, or “Geaux Tigers” at LSU, or “We are Penn State.”

Similarly, Chu (1989) wrote, “By affiliating with that [university] team, by caring for its scores, we declare allegiance to an interest greater than oneself – the community” (p. 160). Chu’s (1989) claim was based not on empirical evidence but rather on subjective experience. The anecdotal support for sports building community on campus dates back to the origins of college sports, as Clotfelter (2011) cited a report from the 1920s claiming that intercollegiate football:

Creates a strong sense of common interest...and intensifies the consciousness of human community, and the sense of the emotional solidarity of each stand, strengthened as each stand participates vicariously in the act of the runner, or passer or tackler, is in itself a stirring thing. This sense of common interest, continuing throughout the season, tends to develop a common bond of loyalty. It affords for the entire football season a clean and interesting topic of conversation and thought (p. 155).

Such anecdotal accounts of the communal value of college sports are abundant throughout the history of intercollegiate athletics in the United States (e.g., Smith, 1990). Yet anecdotal research is inherently limited in validity and reliability. As a response to the limitations of the early research examining college sport, the second-wave of college

sport research consisted of studies focused on adding an element of empirical support to the oft-cited communal value of college sports.

With the explicit goal of empirically examining the social impact of college sports, Clopton (2007) explored the relationship between level of intercollegiate athletics, athletic success, and perceived sense of community. He found support for anecdotal notions that college athletics do provide a “rallying point” for students. While Clopton (2007) lacked individual-level data related to athletics, namely any measure of individual fanship, his later work (2008a, 2008b) addressed this initial limitation. Clopton (2008a) found a significant relationship between the extents to which respondents connected with their school’s athletic teams and the subsequent sense of community they perceived. Even after controlling for such variables as campus residence or Greek affiliation, fan identification remained a significant predictor of perceived sense of community. Similarly, Clopton and Finch (2008) found that fan identification with sport teams was significantly related to perceived levels of social capital on campus. This connection established an empirical link between the communal benefits of sport fanship and contribution to the overall campus community. Combined, these two studies provide empirical validation for the relationship between college sports and positive outcomes on both the individual and institutional levels.

Wann and Robinson (2002) explored the relationship between fanship and integration into the university community. Building on the earlier findings from Wann, Inman, Ensor, Gates, and Caldwell (1999) and Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, and Henriksen (1993) that student identification was positively associated with identifiable and measureable academic and psychological benefits, Wann and Robinson (2002) found that identification with college sport teams was positively correlated with intentions to persist at the university. However, their claim of a relationship between fan identification and

persistence at one's university was not supported by their data. There is an important distinction between intention to persist and actual persistence behavior (Berger & Milem, 1999), and Wann and Robinson (2002) offered no data regarding actual persistence behavior.

Two recent studies took a different approach to empirically measuring the relationship between college sport and feelings of community by examining recently formed college football teams. Heere and Katz (2014) found that a new team significantly impacted how both students and alumni connect and identify with the larger university. They found that measures of team identification significantly explained individual variations in measures of university identification. In a different study of a newly formed college football team, Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, and Harrison (2011) found no evidence of an increase in sense of community measures among students following the team's first year of play. Based on their results, Warner et al. (2011) concluded that fanship did not engage students powerfully enough to impact community level outcomes. It is important to note, however, that Warner et al. (2011) did not measure fanship but rather attendance. There are important differences between sport fans and sport spectators (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003), and Warner et al.'s (2011) conclusions may have differed had their study specifically measured fanship rather than attendance.

In an aggregate sense, there are two important limitations to the existing research concerning the relationship between college sport and perceived levels of community on campus. First, the correlational nature of most of the discussed studies (e.g., Clopton & Finch, 2008; Wann & Robinson, 2002) prevents further understanding of the directional relationship between fanship and communal outcomes. The relationship between fanship and sense of community, social capital, or persistence intentions may very well be reciprocal in nature; or perhaps sport fanship is actually an outcome of increased feelings

of community rather than a driver of communal sentiments. Interestingly, many of the cited authors (e.g., Clopton, 2008b) recognized this limitation and suggested that only a longitudinal study could better explain the directional and causal nature of the explored relationships – yet such a study had yet to be conducted. This suggests that a longitudinal study is needed to increase our understanding of the relationship between sport fandom and communal outcomes – something this dissertation is specifically designed to accomplish.

Secondly, the quantitative designs of the existing research fail to satisfactorily explain *how* sport fandom is related to the utilized communal outcomes. The nature of the previously discussed studies conceptualizes college sport as some unified phenomenon; some researchers have differentiated between levels of college sport (e.g., Robinson, Trail, Dick, & Gillentine, 2005), yet previous research has not placed enough emphasis on the design and implementation of programs as they relate to communal outcomes. As Chalip (2006) explained, the degree to which sport plays either a salubrious or detrimental role in specific outcomes is not dependent on the sport, but rather on the experiences of those involved. Following an exhaustive historical review of sport fandom across the world, Guttman (1986) similarly concluded there is nothing inherent to sport fandom that leads to positive outcomes; rather increasing sense of community or belonging via fandom is a matter of structuring fandom in ways that maximize the positive and minimize the negative effects of fandom. So while Wann and Robinson (2002), Clopton (2008a, 2008b), Clopton and Finch (2008), Warner et al. (2011), and Katz and Heere (2014) have each examined *if* sport fandom on college campuses is related to communal outcomes, none has explicitly examined what structures and characteristics of college sport lead to positive communal benefits – the qualitative nature of this dissertation is intended to resolve this existing limitation. It is only through

recognizing *how* college sport helps build community that decision-makers can specifically structure college sport programs to maximize the impact of sport fanship on helping newcomers and others find community on campus.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

The results presented and discussed in this research derive from a longitudinal grounded theory study designed to understand the experiences of newcomers during their adjustment process into a new community. According to Charmaz (2012), grounded theory research aims to create theoretical categories grounded in the lived experiences of research participants and subsequently analyzes relationships between key categories. What differentiates grounded theory from most other qualitative approaches is the explicit goal to move beyond description of an event or experience and to generate or discover a theory for some process or action (Creswell, 2013). By focusing on individual experiences, grounded theory aims to account for a pattern of behavior that is relevant and problematic for the research participants; a grounded theory study is defined by a focus on some action that the researcher is trying to explain in order to generate a substantive theory of said action shaped by the views and experiences of a set of research participants (Creswell, 2013).

Grounded theory is often used when a theory is either not presently available to understand some particular process or if existing theories do not adequately explain the specifics of said process (Wuest, 2012). The use of grounded theory in cases where existing theoretical understanding is absent dates back to the origin of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), yet grounded theory is also advantageous for other reasons. Namely, grounded theory is designed to explore patterns in a specific social process (Charmaz, 2012). In this particular research, the newcomer experience was the social process being studied and grounded theory allowed for using the participant's experiences to better understand the patterns underlying that process.

Another defining feature of grounded theory is the flexibility offered through its approach to research. Rather than preconceived rules, themes, or categories to guide the research process, grounded theory methods are marked by systematic and flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories “grounded” in the data themselves (Charmaz, 2012); the research process is inductive rather than deductive. Since the present research began with relatively broad points of departure rather than overly specific research questions, the flexible nature of grounded theory allowed this research to evolve and proceed as the data indicated. Grounded theory research is not designed to linearly move from start to finish exploring consistent themes; rather grounded theory permits researchers to follow leads that emerge from the experiences of the participants. Charmaz (2012, p.14) explained the flexibility of grounded theory in the following metaphor:

Grounded theory quickens the speed of gaining a clear focus on what is happening in your data without sacrificing the detail of enacted scenes. Like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently, you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view.

The dynamic approach offered by grounded theory is vital because grounded theory research begins with the data. Grounded theory calls for researchers to build levels of abstraction directly from the data and then gather additional data to check and refine emerging analytic categories (Charmaz, 2012).

Since the current research followed a longitudinal design, the dynamic nature of grounded theory research was used to generate meaningful and trustworthy theoretical understandings of the participants’ experiences. Longitudinal research inherently demands continuous comparison of data, and constant comparison was one of the original

hallmarks of the grounded theory tradition (Saldaña, 2003). Allowing for changing paradigms in research midstream, promoting attunement and sensitivity to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of one's methods are core features of longitudinal qualitative research, and the grounded theory method encourages these types of systematic adjustments better than other qualitative approaches (Saldaña, 2003).

Based on the flexibility of grounded theory methods, the lack of existing theory explaining the impact of sport fanship on the newcomer experience, and the underlying goal to explore patterns in the social process through which newcomers join a community, grounded theory guided this longitudinal research project. More specifically, a constructivist approach to grounded theory was used to explore the newcomer process and the role of sport fanship in affecting that process within the complexities of particular settings, views, and actions. A constructivist approach to grounded theory research necessitates looking beyond merely how an individual views their situations by acknowledging that any resulting theory is an interpretation dependent on the researcher's particular views, the specific of the research setting, and other factors embedded in larger hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships (Charmaz, 2012). The constructivist view does not minimize the role of the researcher in the process, but rather places priority on the social phenomenon and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships between the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2012).

## **RESEARCH SETTING**

The present analysis derives from the longitudinal qualitative study of the newcomer experience of two groups of incoming freshman at a small, private, liberal arts college in the Southwestern United States. To protect the anonymity of the research



setting and participants, the specific college at which this research took place will be referred to as Central College. Central College enrolls approximately 2,000 undergraduate students and offers a small number of graduate classes as well. Central is defined by the Carnegie Foundation as a small, highly residential institution and classified as a “more selective” institution based on a liberal arts approach to education. Central is often ranked as one of the premier private institutions in the Southwestern region and enrolls students from 48 states and over 50 international countries. The majority of students graduated high schools in the same state in which Central dwells. The racial makeup of the institution is predominantly White (62%), followed by Hispanic students (13%), International students (7.3%), Asian students (7.2%), and African-American students (2.8%). Central is located in an affluent neighborhood within the borders of a major metropolitan city, but the setting of the campus is distinctively suburban. All underclassmen are required to live on-campus and nearly 75% of the entire student body lives on-campus. Central has 14 Greek organizations that roughly 15% of the student population participates in. Additionally, Central sponsors a student radio station, a weekly campus newspaper, and sponsors scores of other clubs and organizations on campus. Central does not have any particular religious affiliation.

In terms of athletics, Central sponsors 18 varsity sports that compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) Division III and approximately 30% of students on campus participate in intercollegiate athletics. To protect the anonymity of the research setting and participants, the sports teams at Central will be referred to as the Bulldogs. Division III institutions are not allowed to offer athletic scholarships to their student-athletes. Division III athletic programs are typically financed and controlled through similar procedures as other departments on campus, and the expenses and revenues of Division III athletic programs are typically much smaller than their Division

I peers - yet Division III programs still dedicate substantial financial investment to their athletic departments. Fulks (2013) reported the median total expenses of Division III programs was roughly \$3 million, a nearly 6% increase from the previous year. Central was among the upper quartile institutions in terms of athletic expenses, reporting a grand total athletic expenses of just under \$4 million for the 2012-2013 academic year (EADA, 2014). Their commitment to athletics consistently yields successful athletic teams, as the Bulldogs finished in the upper echelon of the Division III Learfield Sport Directors' Cup Standings based on total athletic success across all sports. The Bulldogs compete for national championships regularly in a variety of sports, and won a number of conference championships over the past two years.

The specific level of competition is important to this study because Division III athletic programs lack the regional and national media exposure associated with big-time college athletics; while the average Football Bowl Subdivision attendance was roughly 45,000 spectators, the average Division III attendance for a football game was fewer than 2,000 spectators (Johnson, 2013). As a consequence the Central College setting increased the likelihood that participants were truly newcomers with no preconceived attachment or allegiance to Central or the Central Bulldogs. Besides national championship contests, Division III competitions are rarely televised regionally or nationally and few Division III institutions receive media coverage beyond their local market. The overall lack of publicity and media coverage decreased the likelihood that the research participants had existing experiences of connections to Central or the Bulldogs; hence these newcomers are truly new members to the organization. Freshman at large public institutions like the University of Texas at Austin or Louisiana State University are undoubtedly familiar with these institutions and the sports teams they sponsor. As such, they are not truly newcomers to the sports nor the university brand; such pre-existing connections at large

state schools further supports the use of a smaller, private, Division III institution as the research setting for this study. The combination of academic prestige, athletic excellence, and the lack of publicity associated with Division III athletics made Central College an appropriate research setting to examine the experience of newcomers.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The particular research participants for this study were all first-year students at Central College during the Fall 2012. Central College divides all incoming students into freshman orientation groups consisting of roughly 20 students. While some of these orientation groups are formed around a common major, the two orientation groups used in this study were not predetermined by any common major, extracurricular activity, or demographic category. Rather, these two groups are representative of the entire incoming class at Central College. The first orientation group consisted of 19 students and the second group had 18 students, for a total of 37 potential research participants. Each orientation group lived in the same hallway during their freshman year in one of the freshman dorms and each group shared a common resident mentor. Following their first-year on campus, individuals were free to choose different roommates in a variety of dorms on campus. The same two orientation groups were used for the entirety of the research.

There were two exclusion criteria: 1) the participant must have been 18 years or older at the start of the study; and 2) the participant could not have identified as a fan of Trinity growing up. None of the participants violated either of these sampling restrictions, which created a participant pool of 37 newcomers. 31 of the newcomers chose to participate in the study; two individuals requested not to participate and four newcomers never responded to requests to participate. The 31 participants contained 19 female and

12 males (Table 3.1). Since the larger Central population is roughly 55% female, there is an overrepresentation of female participants. Such an overrepresentation is not problematic for a grounded theory study, because initial sampling provides only a point of departure in grounded theory research and then initial sampling is replaced by theoretical sampling once data collection has begun – a process discussed more thoroughly in the Procedure section.

Grounded theory research has no definitive rule on sample size. Rather, grounded theory research is concerned with reaching a point of saturation in data collection whereby a full range of variation in conceptual properties is identified (Wuest, 2012). The exact number of participants needed to reach saturation depends on the topic being studied. Nonetheless, several scholars have proposed rough guidelines for appropriate sample sizes in grounded theory research. Creswell's (2013) review of the grounded theory literature culminated in a recommended sample size of 20 to 30 individuals in order to develop a well-saturated theory, but insists grounded theory research is not intended to be generalizable but rather to elucidate the particular and the specific. Charmaz (2012) offered a similar number, yet indicated that 25 interviews may suffice for certain projects, but other considerations may supersede sample size such as the grandness of the social phenomenon being studied and whether one's claims contradict established research. Finally, Morse (1994) suggested that 30-50 interviews are needed in the case of a broader domain while a more narrowly defined domain may need as few as 10 participants. Given these various sample size recommendations, the 31 participants used in the current research was considered sufficient for allowing the research to reach theoretical saturation. Moreover, since longitudinal research produces a greater amount of data (Saldaña, 2003) than traditional qualitative research, 31 participants in a longitudinal grounded theory met the requirements and suggestions for reaching theoretical saturation.

Name	Gender	Race	Age	First Gen	Varsity Athlete	IM Sports	HS Sport	Hometown	Interviews
Alex	Male	White	18	No	No	No	Yes	Large City	1
Allison	Female	Latino/White	18	No	No	No	No	Large City	4
Alysea	Female	Latino	19	Yes	No	No	Yes	Large City	2
Bailey	Female	Black	19	Yes	No	No	Yes	Large City	2
Billy	Male	White	18	No	Yes	No	Yes	Large City	2
Christine	Female	White	18	No	No	No	No	Large City	3
David	Male	White	18	No	Yes	No	Yes	Large City	2
Farrin	Female	White	18	No	No	Yes	No	Large City	3
Hailey	Female	White	18	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Large City	2
Julie	Female	White	19	No	No	No	Yes	Large City	1
Katie	Female	Latino	18	No	No	No	Yes	Small City	4
Lauren	Female	White	18	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small City	3
Leah	Female	White	18	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small Town	4
Margaret	Female	White	19	No	Yes	No	Yes	Small City	1
Mary	Female	White	18	No	No	Yes	Yes	Large City	1
Matt	Male	White	18	No	No	No	No	Small Town	1
Melissa	Female	White	18	No	No	No	No	Small Town	4
Meredith	Female	Latino	18	No	No	Yes	Yes	Large City	2
Michael	Male	White	18	No	No	Yes	Yes	Small Town	2
Morgan	Female	White	19	No	No	No	No	Large City	3
Nicholas	Male	White	18	No	No	Yes	Yes	Large City	2
Patricia	Female	White	18	No	No	No	No	Large City	3
Patrick	Male	White	18	No	Yes	No	Yes	Large City	3
Rachel	Female	Latino	18	No	No	No	No	Large City	4
Ricky	Male	Latino	19	No	Yes	No	Yes	Large City	1
Russ	Male	White	19	No	No	Yes	Yes	Small City	1
Samantha	Female	White	18	No	No	No	Yes	Large City	4
Sean	Male	White	19	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small City	2
Stacy	Female	White	19	No	No	Yes	No	Small City	2
Tommy	Male	Latino/White	18	No	No	No	No	Large City	3
Tyler	Male	White	19	No	No	No	No	Large City	1

Table 3.1: List of Participants

### **PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE**

Each of the 37 potential participants was initially contacted via email by the researcher requesting their participation in the study. The email explained that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, that students would not be penalized for choosing not to participate, and that no direct benefits would result from their willingness

to participate. The email asked each participant if they were willing to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher during a list of specific dates and times early in the semester. Participants were given a list of potential days and time when the interviewer was available, and asked to respond through email if they were interested in participating. All interviews took place in a reserved classroom inside one of Central's academic buildings. The criteria for initial sampling were different from the theoretical sampling employed in the later rounds of interviews. Initial sampling served as a point of departure and invited all willing participants to schedule interviews since theoretical sampling was not yet attainable.

During the second wave (Spring 2013), third wave (Fall 2013) and fourth wave of data collection, the procedure explicitly followed a theoretical sampling strategy to best explicate the categories from the initial data collection. Theoretical sampling is designed to enhance conceptual and theoretical development and is not intended to represent a population or increase statistical generalizability of results (Charmaz, 2012). Sampling for the later rounds of interviews was a matter of determining whose experiences and perspectives would help delineate the properties of an emerging category, identify variations in a particular process, or to distinguish between categories. Theoretical sampling also guides researchers to intentionally search for negative cases to find new variables, provide new alternatives, or alter the researcher's overall understanding of a process (Creswell, 2013). In each wave of research, interviews continued until the researcher was confident that theoretical saturation was achieved. Charmaz (2012, p. 189) wrote that theoretical saturation "refers to the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory." Theoretical saturation entails more than simply

finding the same patterns and responses repeatedly; rather it is a matter of finding no new properties in the patterns of the specific social process being studied.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The primary form of data collection in this study was semi-structured interviews. Grounded theory calls for intensive interviewing, where the goal is to have the participants describe and reflect on his or her experiences. Since the participants in this study had all recently experienced the newcomer adjustment process, the goal of intensive interviews was to encourage the participants to shed light on their experience. Charmaz (2012) wrote that intensive interviewing is particularly well suited for grounded theory methods because both are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent. The researcher prepared for the interviews not with a specific list of questions, but with generalized points of departure from which to begin the conversation. Broad and open-ended questions were used to elicit detailed and in-depth responses from the participants, such as the prompts, “Tell me about your first few days here” or “What, if anything, did you know about Central sports when you arrived on campus?” Following the responses by the participants, follow-up questions were used to encourage further explanation of the participant’s experience, such as, “How did you learn to handle that?” or “How has that changed since?”

What is specific to the grounded theory method of research is the notion of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), whereby the researcher continuously takes the information from the data collection processes and compares it to emerging categories during the subsequent stages of data collection. In the present study, the comments from one interview dictated the specific questions and topics asked in subsequent interviews; additional interviews were used to gather new data, fill in gaps, and elaborate on the

findings from previous interviews. Additionally, based on the grounded theory method, field notes were taken during the interview process to ensure that important categories or themes were identified and the elaborated on during the rest of that interview and subsequent interviews. Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally proposed that field notes should be the only form of data from interviews and that interviews should not be transcribed; yet the more modern approach to grounded theory has combined field notes with interview transcriptions.

Over the course of two-years of collecting data, a total of 31 different newcomers participated in the interview process. A full list of interview participants can be found in Table 1. In total, 73 interviews were conducted by the researcher, lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to 90 minutes with an average of 45 minutes per interview. All interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and later transcribed by both the researcher and a professional transcription service. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, the names of participants were removed from the interviews and replaced with unique identification numbers and later pseudonyms were randomly generated for each participant. All transcriptions were entered into the qualitative software “Dedoose” to effectively organize and maintain the collected data.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The first step in the grounded theory data analysis process is memo-writing. Charmaz (2012, p. 72) called memo-writing the “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts” and memo-writing played an important role in this research process. Following each day of interviews, the researcher wrote extensive memos as a way to analyze the data collected, make connections and comparisons with previous data collected, and crystallize questions and direction for the next day of interviews. In many



ways, memo-writing served as both an organizing technique and the means to constantly compare the data and adjust the prompts and points of departures for successive interviews. Since each wave of interviews lasted several weeks, memo-writing was the initial step in analyzing the data prior to a thorough coding after the wave was completed.

Once a point of theoretical saturation was reached for each wave of interviews, the transcribed interviews were analyzed through a two-level coding technique popular in grounded theory research (Creswell, 2013). First, an initial coding process was completed involving a line-by-line coding technique with the goal of remaining open to all possible theoretical directions and categories found in the data. The initial coding process stuck closely to the data, invoking a language of action rather than topics (Charmaz, 2012). Following the initial coding process, a process of focused coding was completed that required grouping initial codes into overarching categories that captured the theoretical basis of numerous initial codes. The goal of focused coding was to identify theoretical relationships between the data, not simply identifying relationships or providing descriptions of events. The resulting focused codes became the stages in the Newcomer-to-Member model proposed in Chapter 4 and the four themes related sport fanship presented in Chapter 6.

The coding process used in this research was intentionally flexible and non-linear. Because the data collected encompassed two years of experiences and individual insight, connecting the focused codes into a coherent theory was a difficult and messy process. Visual models, flow-charts, and diagrams were created to better understand the categories and themes derived from the data, and these pictorial representations were often adjusted and altered, followed by a return to the data themselves and then a new attempt at interpreting the theoretical meaning of the collected data. Charmaz (2012) suggested using “theoretical playfulness” in order to try out new ideas and follow wherever those

idea may lead. This research embraced such playfulness in order to construct a meaningful and innovative understanding of the newcomer adjustment phenomena. The theories and results presented later in this research represent the final step in a long process of coding, writing memos, adjusting, rewriting, and reworking the data until substantive level theories were created that explained the relationships and experiences expressed by the research participants.

## **Chapter 4: From Outsider to Insider: How Newcomers Join Communities**

This chapter addresses the first research objective of examining how newcomers join existing brand communities. To best develop a substantive model explaining this phenomenon, the experiences of the newcomers were used to create a framework examining the transition from outside to insider. The participants' rich descriptions of their own experiences as newcomers provided the basis for the proposed framework, which presents the psychological and behavioral changes that mark the newcomer transition from their initial entry until their achievement of full membership status in the community. The model consists of three distinct phases characterized by five different stages in the process. The model indicates an overall flow through which newcomers progress, with noted loops indicating possible alternatives following completion of the framework. The arrows indicate the directional progress of the process and movement between the various stages.

To best present and explore the proposed framework, the subsequent chapter explains each stage of the newcomer to member transition. The individual stages represent the final results from the axial coding strategy and are displayed as an integrative diagram (Figure 4.1), titled the Newcomer-to-Member Model. Each stage will be presented independently in this chapter. Selected quotes are used to illustrate the important components and changes within the overall process. The model will be discussed in Chapter 5. A visual representation demonstrating the role of subcommunities and subcommunal involvement is displayed as well (Figure 4.2). Each part of Figure 4.2 is discussed individually throughout the following chapter.

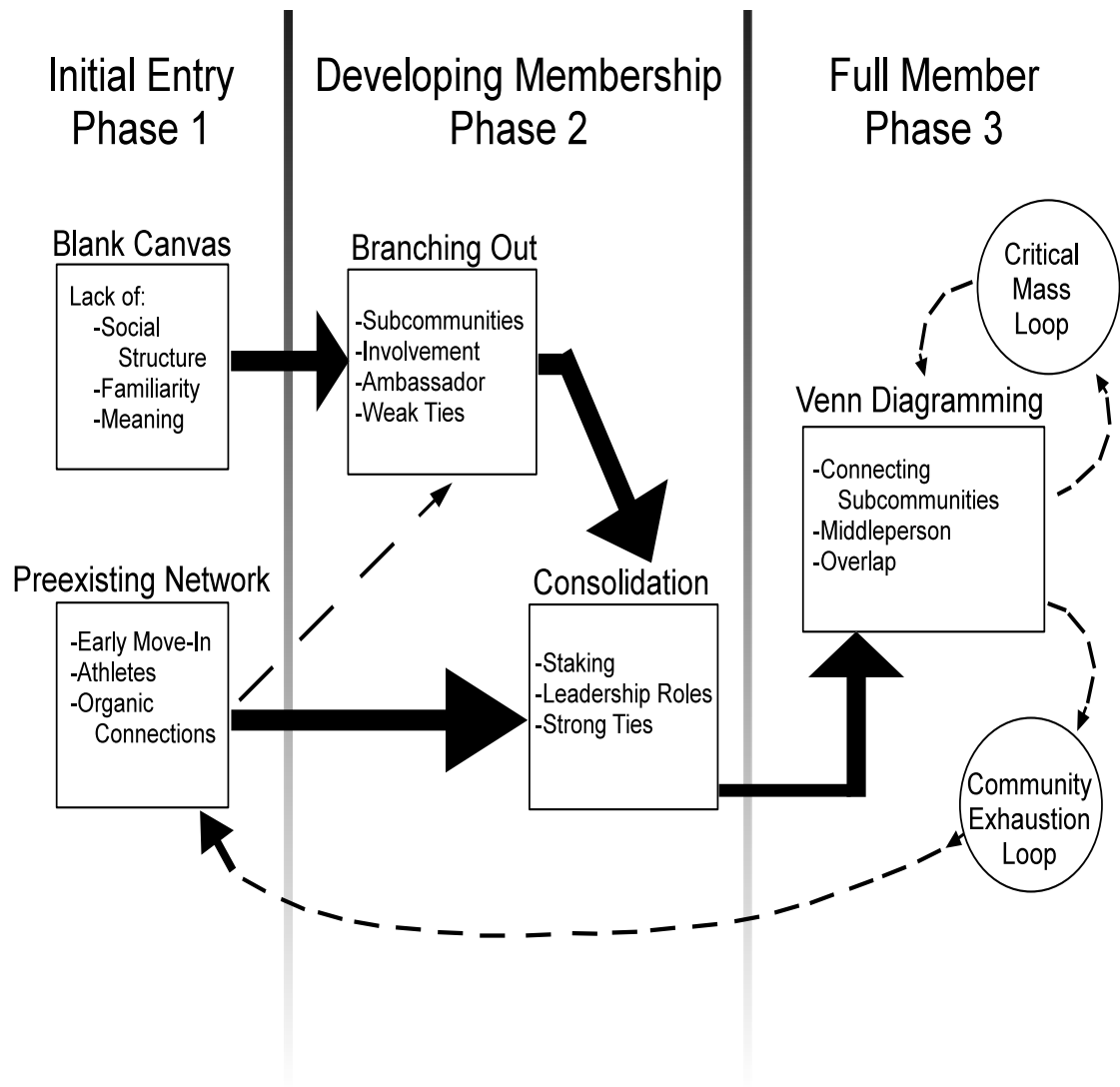
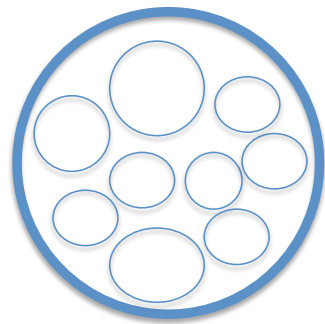
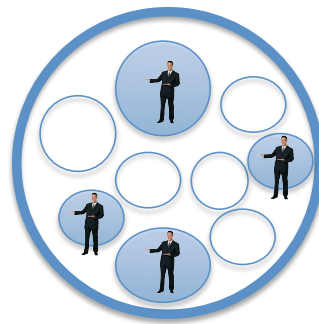


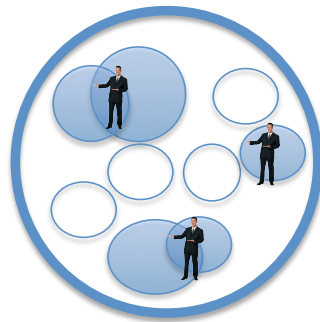
Figure 4.1: The Newcomer-to-Member Model



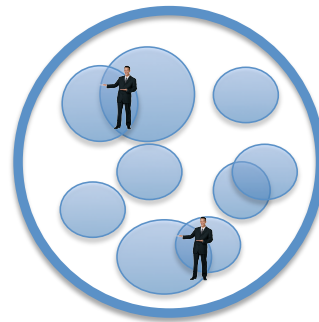
Phase I:  
Conceptualization of  
Subcommunities



Phase II:  
"Coloring-In"  
Subcommunities



Phase III:  
Venn Diagramming



Loop I:  
Critical Mass

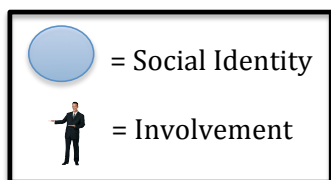


Figure 4.2: Subcommunal Involvement Diagram

### PHASE 1: THE INITIAL ENTRY PHASE

The first phase in the proposed Newcomer-to-Member model, the Initial Entry Phase, begins when the individual first arrives within the larger community. The majority of participants indicated that they first viewed themselves as a peripheral participant in

the community concurrent with their arrival on campus and move-in day. The participants largely defined the community as all those stakeholders who participated in daily life on campus, including fellow students, faculty, staff, and a small number of very active townspeople and alumni.

For these newcomers, the data indicate that two possible pathways existed which guided the transition from their initial entry into the community towards the next phase of the proposed model: 1) the Blank Canvas stage for those who arrived in the community without pre-existing networks; and 2) the Pre-Existing Network stage for those who arrived with social networks or support systems already in place (see Figure 4.1).

### **Blank Canvas Stage**

Those newcomers lacking any pre-existing networks began the Newcomer-to-Member process in the Blank Canvas stage. A pre-existing network refers to any individual connections between the newcomer and other individuals on campus, or a group of individual on campus, which were solidified prior to their initial arrival within the community. The Blank Canvas newcomers, by lacking such pre-existing networks, experienced a newcomer adjustment process marked by struggles. More specifically, these newcomers' initial experience was marked by a lack of social structure, lack of familiarity, and a lack of meaning associated with the larger community.

By arriving in the community with a Blank Canvas, the newcomer process was marked by a period of continuous challenge and struggle. Reflecting on his initial entry, Blank Canvas newcomer Patrick offered the following testimony:

It was a low point, definitely. Those three or four days being at a new school, surrounded by a lot of people I didn't really know well at all. I guess it was kind

of homesickness. Just missing those friends that you could talk to really comfortably without having to establish pretenses and that sort of thing.

As a Blank Canvas newcomer struggling through his transition into the community, Patrick's experience was strongly echoed by many of his peers. Reflecting back on her experiences while arriving in the community for the first time, Allison offered the following story:

I was so anxious coming to school for the first time. I told my mom as we were pulling in right by the dorm, I said, 'Mom turn around. We're leaving. I don't want to come here anymore.'

Allison's initial anxiousness continued for many of the Blank Canvas newcomers, extending beyond their initial move-in through the first weeks or months of the newcomer transition process. Often, the newcomer's struggles were exacerbated by a lack of establishing friendships and networks. As Samantha explained, the most salient factor in her difficult adjustment process was compensating for her lack of existing connections on campus:

It was really difficult at first, because you just have to meet the right people and have those people be willing to accept you and get to know you. I guess it was harder for me than for some people because I didn't have a friend group already in place. It just takes time. I would show up to events not knowing anyone and sometimes it would work out and I would make new friends but other times it would just be really awkward. But you slowly get to know more people.

The comments by Samantha illustrate the need for Blank Canvas newcomers to establish new connections and the difficulties many newcomers reported in doing so. For Alex, finding and making such new connections did not occur immediately, and he consequently struggled through his first semester on campus:

College was a new experience for me. It was pretty intimidating for me as a new freshman. I had gone to the same school for so long and college was just so different and I needed to time to figure things out. I just really needed to get my friend group together, to really find those new friends, which took until second semester of freshman year. It was pretty intimidating while I was figuring all that out.

Collectively, these statements indicate that Blank Canvas newcomers were aware they needed to create new friendships and establish new networks, yet still struggled to accomplish this often-daunting task. The results of these struggles included not only feelings of homesickness, but questions of whether the newcomer truly belonged in the community at all. As Allison's comments indicate, she immediately questioned whether or not she should leave the community early in her newcomer adjustment process. It was not until new friendships and friendship networks were developed that the Blank Canvas newcomer began to feel more comfortable in their surroundings and begin their transition into the next stages of the Newcomer-to-Member model.

One of the important psychological outcomes during this stage was the realization by Blank Canvas newcomers that one's connection with the larger community itself was not powerful enough to develop meaningful relationships with other community members. Newcomers spoke of lacking some commonality or connection through which to initiate a new connection with their peers, since simply belonging to the community proved insufficient to initially anchor such new relationships. When Patricia was asked whether belonging to the community was strong enough to assist in creating new relationships, she offered the following response:



No, I don't think so. You go to the same school and share in the same environment, but there has to be something else. There has to be something more meaningful.

Another Blank Canvas newcomer, Julie, expressed a similar belief that involvement with the community alone was too abstract to help develop new relationships among newcomers:

You see someone new, and you know that you both go to Central. But unless you know how your lives are going to impact each other, or there's some other connection besides just going to Central, then you don't automatically care about that person.

Allison, reflecting back on her difficulties initially connecting with her fellow newcomers, spoke of how she needed something less abstract to develop relationships with those around her:

Eventually I started going places, like going to club meetings, where you finally meet new people that are interested in what you're interested in and therefore you form a bond on commonality. It's a lot more so than just saying, 'oh I go to Central.' It's a little bit more meaningful and powerful.

Though Blank Canvas newcomers indicated that sharing a connection with the community was too abstract for creating new relationships, this was not necessarily due to lack of attachment with the university; newcomer spoke proudly of their affinity to their new school. Rather, the difficulty in finding an anchor for new relationships was a matter of needing to distinguish one's relationship with others within a community of individuals who all care about the university. The following explanation by Patricia illustrates this need for differentiation:

Maybe if I were in a different city and saw someone with a Central sweatshirt, I would immediately say 'hey!' But not now, not here, since we're all obviously connected with Central as students...but if I were away from campus, then I would be in a different environment and everything is different. And outside of campus when I'm looking for commonality, someone wearing a Central sweatshirt would be enough.

Since the newcomer's psychological or emotional attachment with the university was unable to support relationships between different individuals, newcomers were often left struggling to find alternative ways to connect with the unfamiliar individuals around them. As a result, many of the Blank Canvas newcomers experienced an initial lack of belonging and connectedness with the community.

Struggling to establish connections with other members of the community, Blank Canvas newcomers spoke of feeling as if they belonged only on the periphery of the group, implying they were not truly members. Catherine, for instance, stated the following in her first few weeks on campus:

I don't know if I'm united as a cohesive whole with others here. I don't find myself simply united to everyone else here.

Consequently, the behavioral comments popular among Blank Canvas newcomers described the struggles they faced when trying to find social structures on campus to join. Reflecting back on her newcomer adjustment process, Morgan described her experiences in mostly negative terms:

I think what was hard about the first year was feeling very lost and having to create things from scratch. It was such a different environment, without any people that I really knew.

Without connections in place and networks with which to attach, the Blank Canvas newcomers expressed difficulty in their quest for joining social structures and groups on campus. Interestingly, this struggle was described as both due to a lack of options as well as a feeling of frustration by being overwhelmed by the multitude of groups and clubs to join. These opposing and contradictory experiences indicate that Blank Canvas newcomers simply struggled to connect. They often recognized that social structures existed within the community but remained irritated and disappointed by their inability to connect with them.

Overall, the experience of Blank Canvas newcomers was marked by unfamiliarity with how to find social structures to join and an inability of one's relationship with the community or university itself to provide connections with others. Consequently, Blank canvas newcomers described their initial entrance into the community as one marked by a period of struggle and stress, with little confidence or comfort. Other newcomers, however, were able to bypass many of the struggles of this stage altogether by entering the initial phase of the Newcomer-to-Member model not as a Blank Canvas newcomer, but as a Pre-Existing Network newcomer.

### **Pre-Existing Network Stage**

Unlike their Blank Canvas peers, Pre-Existing Network newcomers arrived in the community with some type of support system of social network already developed and established. The most common example among the participations of a Pre-Existing Network newcomer was student-athletes, who typically entered the community alongside their fellow teammates earlier than other newcomers. For some, this early move-in was a few days prior and for other a full week. Leah, a cross-country athlete, believed she

escaped many of the struggles typical of the newcomer experience and had an advantage adjusting to her new community because of her early entry:

I did have a step up because I had cross-country. So I had already met these people...so the first week it's a given that we'd become a group of friends.

More than merely entering the community, Leah's experience speaks to the importance of the activities shared with her pre-existing support structure. They practiced together, ate together, and were placed within a social structure where all individuals shared a superordinate identity as cross-country athletes. Interestingly, Leah had little communication with her teammates prior to her early arrival in the community, yet their common interest in the sport and their early activities together created an immediate sense of belonging for Leah.

Similar to Leah, Patrick was also a cross-country runner who commented on the advantages of his early move-in and shared activities with his new teammates. When asked how his adjustment process was, Patrick provided this response:

It was fairly easy, actually. Especially being on the cross-country team, because you spend so much time with your teammates and those are people that I can't really help but be friends with. Outside of the team, it was also fairly easy. You just meet people who are friends with my teammates, and everyone seems pretty social and gets along pretty easily.

Patrick continued by explaining how his initial group of cross-country teammates quickly expanded into a larger network of early acquaintances:

The best way I could describe our group is there's a central group of my friends, which are mostly the cross-country team. And then there are the other people that are on the track team now. And then there are the friends of people on either one of those teams. And then there are the friends of those friends. So it's kind of like

this ever-expanding network of people. So it's just like a big network of people that I quickly met.

As Patrick's statements indicate, the shared interest in their sport and early experiences together quickly developed a strong group of friends among the teammates. As each of those teammates continued to make other friends outside the team, Patrick immediately developed a membership into a substantial network of friends early in his newcomer adjustment process.

Non-athletes equally noticed the early development of these student-athlete networks as well. Consider the following observation by Christine during her first few weeks on campus when asked about her social experiences thus far:

I'm sensing that campus is sort of a clump of a lot of really unique individuals. Everybody is really a character here. But right now, socially it's really sliced up into groups based on athletics. Because all the athletes got here earlier and had their bonding time, there are already groups of football players and baseball players established. And then there are the volleyball girls, basketball girls, and stuff. And everybody else is there too, but the non-athletes are still in a giant mix of people.

Interestingly, Christine's comments emphasized not only the importance of student-athletes moving-in earlier than typical students but also the role their "bonding time" played in developing the groups of friends. This was an important distinction between the success of pre-existing network groups and the mentor groups that each newcomer was placed into. Even though each newcomer was placed into a type of pre-existing network with their roommates, suitemates, and other mentor group peers, these residence groups lacked the team of experiences associated with Christine's team and the other pre-existing network examples. In addition to the bonding activities, the difference between

the successes of Christine's pre-existing network was not merely that student-athletes arrived in the community early; more important was their immediate grouping with like-minded and similar individuals who shared a common interest in addition to the bonding activities experienced together. Successful pre-existing networks contained elements of both common interest and meaningful group experiences.

Although student-athletes were the most popular examples of Pre-Existing Network newcomers, several non-student athletes described a similar newcomer transition experience as a result of their immediate involvement with extracurricular groups who also entered the community as an established group. Meredith, for instance, spoke of the impact her involvement with a religious group that moved-in early and offered an established network of individuals:

I think I had a different view on the first few days of the semester than most people because I had people I already knew from the retreat. So the majority of the time I spent during orientation and those early days was not meeting lots of new people...I feel like it could have been a lot more awkward had I not come to campus early.

But the impact of Meredith's involvement in this retreat was less about arriving in the community early and more about the activities that Meredith immediately participated in with individuals sharing an important common identity. During her second-year, Meredith recounted her early experiences with the retreat and noted how the relationship she developed during the retreat remained important to her social life nearly a year later:

Half of us stayed at this church and the other half stayed at the hostel. It was mission work and worship during the days, and then we just got to play in the evenings getting to know each other. So I got to know a really awesome group of

people though the retreat and we've maintained those friendships. I still see a lot of them around...I would say most of my friends now are from the retreat.

For Meredith, the activities and experiences she underwent with her peers during the retreat that led to long-term and important relationships, not merely that she entered the university community a few days earlier than many of her peers. For newcomer Samantha, her pre-existing connections were not the result of some bonding activity together but rather of a common experience prior to arriving in the community. An important part of Samantha's identity was that she attended high school in several countries outside the United States. This relatively unique experience was important to her, and thus powerful enough to provide Samantha pre-existing connections with similar newcomers:

Having gone to high school abroad is a huge connection for me. I have a few friends here, people that I met early, where my only connection to them is that we both went to high school abroad. We don't share any of the same friends or anything else, but we have that one huge thing connecting us.

The commonality of attending a high school abroad was powerful enough to serve as an anchor for Samantha and her new friends early in her newcomer adjustment process. In a similar example, Alysea arrived in the community a few days early as part of a program specifically for first-generation and under-represented students. For Alysea, the commonality with her fellow program attendees immediately developed a strong network of friends. Interestingly, Alysea believed that without her program she would have eventually met all the same individuals since they shared an important component of their identity; yet moving in early together saved her substantial time in finding and meeting these specific newcomers.

For other Pre-Existing Network newcomers, it was not arriving early with individuals sharing some part of their social identity that led to early network development, but arriving on campus with friends from their time in high school. In these cases, individuals they were already friendly with provided a pre-existing network. Just like Patrick's expanding network of friends from his cross-country team, Christine arrived with a few friends from high school who provided a similarly expansive early network of connections:

I've met some new people at parties so far, but I've also met people through these couple of girls here who are from my high school. So I've met the friends that they've already made, I guess through interconnection. That's how I've made a lot of friends so far, just friends of friends.

Christine's transition as a Pre-Existing Network newcomer was not about the activities and experiences shared with her early pre-established connections like the examples of the student-athletes or religious retreat newcomers. In Christine's case, it was simply a matter of arriving in the community alongside existing friends from her life prior to entering the community.

The presented examples of Pre-Existing Network newcomers demonstrate the influence that finding early networks and structures has on the newcomer experience. Many of the newcomers, however, recognized that not all attempts by the university at establishing pre-existing social structures were equally successful. For example, the university placed all newcomers into Mentor Groups who shared a common Resident Mentor, lived in the same hallway, and participated in certain activities together as a group. All newcomers were also involved in an extensive orientation organized by the university to ease their newcomer transition as well. Yet for many newcomers, these efforts by the university did not result in the same benefits received by many of the Pre-



Existing Network newcomers. Mary, for instance, stated the following when asked about orientation activities:

They all seemed kind of counterintuitive, or maybe counterproductive...I didn't really like it. It was weird. I learned someone's name two minutes ago but I'm not going to remember it, I'm not going to see her around later and remember that we met earlier. I just didn't really like it.

Similarly, Sean remembered many of the early orientation activities in the same way as Mary did:

At the beginning of our first-year, the staff just told us, 'your freshman so do all these weird activities together.' Whereas this year, the staff knew that we knew what was going and they left us alone. The social dynamic was a little more condensed; we had more freedom to do what we wanted.

Michael also commented on the increased independence awarded to community members during their second year by the university staff members, which he believed to be more beneficial:

They don't mess with as much as this year. They're not planning as many events and tell us where and when we have to be somewhere. Last year, there was a lot of forced integration happening with school events that really didn't work. Now it's much more relaxed and they tend to leave us alone.

The comments by Michael and Sean indicate the importance of a pre-existing network involving some elements of agency on the part of the individual; newcomers seemed to only benefit from the pre-existing structures when they actively chose to participate and enter into the group. Aside from the importance of agency on the part of the newcomer, the data on pre-existing networks also suggest that social structures are effective when they involve some element of common identity among the newcomers. Many of the

organizational attempts at early social structures, like Mentor Groups, often lacked any element of commonality. Consequently, such organizational attempts were far less effective than example of pre-existing networks that involved individual agency, a common identity, or some combination of both.

## **PHASE 2: THE DEVELOPING MEMBERSHIP PHASE**

After experiencing the Initial Entry Phase, newcomers transition into the second phase of the Newcomer-to-Member framework: the Developing Membership Phase. This phase consists of two distinct phases: 1) Branching out and 2) Consolidation. The amount of time it took newcomers to advance into the second phase varied from individual to individual. A newcomer's entrance into this phase was marked by the awareness that transitioning from the periphery of the community into a more centralized communal location was determined by involvement in the community. Once this realization was implicitly understood and recognized by the newcomer, they moved into the Developing Membership Phase. Some of the newcomers who entered the community through the Pre-Existing Network stage skipped the Branching Out stage altogether and transitioned from the Pre-Existing Network stage directly to Consolidation.

### **Branching Out: Seeking Involvement**

The transition from the Initial Entry Phase into the Developing Phase was marked by the newcomers' awareness that the difficulties associated with their adjustment process were best solved through increased involvement in the community. Thus, the next step in the newcomer process became a matter of "branching out" into the community, a phrase used independently by four different research participants. Christine, who joined a sorority early in her first-year, described branching out as finding additional means of finding involvement on campus:

I made a lot of good friends in the sorority, and I think that's pretty much the extent of how I got involved on campus, through joining that club. I did classwork and worked in the theatre department and was in the choir, but through the sorority was how I felt most active on campus. But this year, I'm really trying to branch out more and get involved with the literary magazine and theatre troupe here and hopefully some other stuff also.

Likewise, Alex used the term branching out several times to describe his goals during his second year on campus:

I think I need to meet new people. It's nice to have those small groups of friends, but eventually they get old after a while. So I want to sort of branch out a little bit. I went to such a small private high school, so I don't branch out that much. I don't try too hard to make new friends; I tend to let it happen on its own. But now that I'm in college, I need to branch out a little bit to find some new connections, find some opportunities. I feel like it is time to start moving forward.

In addition to Christine and Alex, newcomer Leah stated that branching out allowed her to make connections beyond her cross-country team friends:

It was kind of hard to move beyond the team. I found some people on the team annoying after a while, so I had to branch out. I'm not typically the type of person who just walks into somebody's room and says 'let's hang out,' but I had to do it. And people just left their doors open, and my hall mates were really nice and so they became my main group of other friends. And I met some people through classes and stuff. So I got a couple different branchings now. That was bad grammar, but that's what happened.

Finally, Lauren also introduced the term branching out in her discussion of how the social structures formed during her first-year on campus.

The way I picture it in my head, is that everyone in the Central community has their own little dot, their own place. And then that dot branches out. My little dot was here, and then it connected because I had the volleyball girls. And then when I joined the sorority, but dot branched into that group as well. And then all those dots are all part of the one big Central community.

Since four different research participants independently used the phrase “branching out” while explaining their experiences, this study refers to the first stage in the Developing Membership Phase as the Branching Out stage.

During the initial entrance into the community, one’s relationship with the university itself lacked the concrete meaning and ability to serve as a point of connection between newcomers. Consequently, newcomers increasingly realized they needed to find some additional anchor, either an activity or some social structure, through which to connect with others in the community. This marked a pivotal point in the Newcomer-to-Member model as the newcomers began to transition from an outsider to an insider. Additionally, newcomer progressively understood that the larger community was not some single coherent whole; rather, it was an aggregation of smaller groups that together created the larger community (Figure 4.3). The reconceptualization of the community structure was an important psychological change in the newcomer adjustment process.

The individual newcomers offered different language to describe the presence of these smaller groups within the larger community, yet their explanation of the existence of these smaller groups within the larger community was highly consistent. Lauren, for example, spoke of different spheres within the larger community:

There will be one person and the other people she knows, and that’s a sphere. And then there are different spheres that you categorize people into. So volleyball players are one sphere, sororities are another sphere, and the hallway is another

sphere. So all the athletes, any given fraternity, all the theatre kids, anyone that does choir, all the people who are in the art building drawing together. Any larger, established group of people, we'll call them cliques. And within each of those cliques you might even smaller cliques. So within the athlete clique you have individual friends from the football team in a smaller clique. And all those cliques together form the larger campus community.

## Central Community

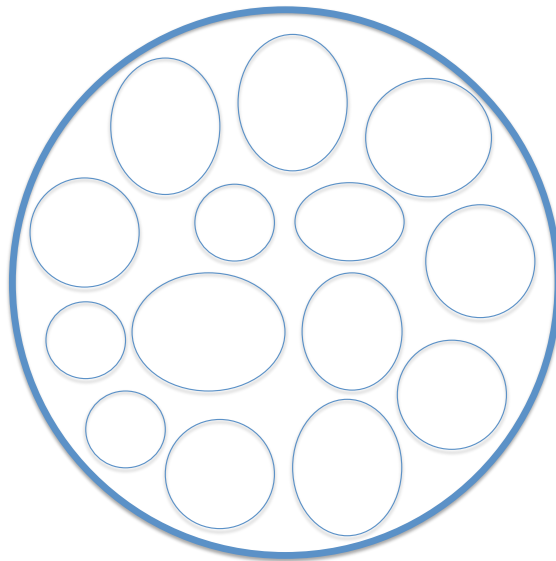


Figure 4.3: Phase I: Conceptualization of Subcommunities

Expressing a similar sentiment, Leah used the metaphor of individual puzzle pieces together composing the larger community:

Different people get involved in different things. For some people their role is to join a sorority, help plan things for the sorority and that's how they impact Central as a whole. It's a matter of involvement, but just being a piece of the puzzle. The Central community needs all those people who sit in the study lounges and don't move. For whatever reason, we need them. They're like the awkward puzzle pieces with the edge that you can't really fit. So it's a matter of your impact of other puzzle pieces. Are you a corner piece? Do you impact the way the whole community is set up? Do you need to be there? Is your presence worth it? I don't think it's what you want to get out of the puzzle; it's more about what you're going to put into it.

Yet the most popular language used to describe these smaller groups within the larger community was the term "subcommunity." Both Patrick and Christine explained the presence of subcommunity on campus, which is the term used in the Newcomer-to-Member model. Christine offered the following statement about subcommunities:

I think there are a lot of subcommunities at Central. You can get these really little groups, like the basketball subcommunity within the athletics subcommunity and groups like that. And those are the things that you need to show up for and be active or participation in to actually earn a role and find a place in the larger community.

Newcomers learned to view the larger community as a collection of many subcommunities. Transitioning from periphery of the community towards the center of the community was viewed as a matter of joining these subcommunities. The newcomers viewed the process of earning membership in the community as a bottom-up approach; it began by connecting directly with these smaller subcommunities rather than the community as a whole.

For some newcomers, the realization that joining subcommunities constituted the transition from outsider to insider represented a reprioritization of their tasks and responsibilities. Many identified finding involvement in these groups in addition to their academic responsibilities as their most important tasks. Their goal was to coordinate and experience a successful Branching Out process. In order to transition from the periphery of the community into the center, where the resources of communal involvement are most readily available, the newcomers recognized they needed to actively find involvement. Without involvement, the newcomers were unable to develop a stronger attachment with the community as a whole, as the following conversation with Julie demonstrates:

*Interviewer: What matters most to you on campus?*

Julie: I don't know, nothing really. I'm not very involved yet, so nothing really. While Julie's statement indicates the need to find involvement, Allison described how finding involvement was the key to feeling like a full-member of the community. When asked if she felt like a full-member of the community upon her initial arrival in the community, Allison made the following comments:

No. I say that from personal experience because I didn't really start feeling like I was part of the Central community until I started doing those extracurricular activities or the clubs outside of the academic life. I think you really have to put a little bit of effort to really be a part of the Central community.

In a similar testament to the importance of Branching Out and finding involvement, Mary offered the following answer after being asked when she first felt like a part of the Central community:

I guess it was when I first decided that I was going to try this club or see what this group is about. There are so many clubs for all these weird and interesting reasons. Did you know there's a dinosaur club where all you do is talk about

dinosaurs? You just make connection by going to these particular clubs and meeting the people. And for me, that was when it started to hit me that I'm a part of this, I'm really a part of Central.

As these several comments indicate, newcomers developed a conscious commitment to finding involvement and actively branching out into different components of the larger community. In order to view oneself as a full-member, to feel comfortable in the community and feel a part of the community, newcomers began by searching for involvement in individual subcommunities to first find an anchor within the larger community itself.

Once the Branching Out stage was underway, newcomers recognized that new social relationships and social relationships were readily available for them. These new relationships were an important component of the Developing Membership phase because newcomers then had a readily available tool for creating meaningful connections, something they lacked during the Initial Entry phase. The impact of such new connections was evident to the newcomers, as many of the newcomers used powerful language to discuss the changes brought forward by increased involvement. Stacy for instance, spoke of her involvement having the following effect on her:

I feel like I can fit more work under my belt, that I'm learning a lot more, which is great, and just doing a lot more. I feel more involved with campus and the people around me. I'm more comfortable now. And I know how to take advantage of the resources available for me now.

Similar to Stacy, Melissa discussed her initial entrance into the community as one of struggles until she found involvement:

It's been a tough transition period, making new friends, because I didn't know anyone coming here. But it's definitely getting easier now. Getting involved has



really helped me to build a sense of community. It's definitely increased since I stepped foot on campus last semester, that's for sure. Things have just gotten easier as I've joined organizations. I've had conversations with people, really put myself out there. Because otherwise, without those groups, I think I would just be standing in a corner alone somewhere.

When Rachel explained how much easier and more enjoyable her second semester was than her first, she explained why she struggled in her initial entry process but quickly improved her situation:

For a while I had a hard time getting out of my shell. I was like a little turtle. I really didn't do any clubs or social activities. My life was class, room, study, and eat, everyday. And then I started getting into more clubs and organizations and that really helped. Honestly, I joined some clubs and that helped me make some friends. That really helped my sense of belonging.

The newcomers explained that the benefits of the Branching Out process included an increased sense of belonging, sense of community, self-confidence, individual learning, and overall life satisfaction. Once these benefits were realized, the newcomer's mindset transformed from finding single points of connection within the larger community to maximizing the number of subcommunities with which they participated. It was very much a process of Branching Out into as many subcommunities as the newcomer could manage given limited time and resources.

As the newcomers became more experienced with finding opportunities for involvement, the Branching Out process became a matter of developing as many connections, both with subcommunities and individual community members, as possible. Katie provided this explanation of trying to maximize the Branching Out process:

That was my technique. Sophomore year, to be more involved and be more active with clubs, with the university, and my studies. So while my free time is really diminished, I have all these friends now that I'm a lot closer with.

For Melissa, the Branching Out process similarly was about trying a wide variety of the different clubs and groups available to her:

You realize that there's lots of clubs you can get involved in. And there are lots of people you can meet through these clubs. They had a huge thing during orientation where you can go and look at the different clubs and the different groups you can do, like Study Abroad and things of that sort. So I think, they wanted us to get involved in those things early. But it took some time for me, time for me to decide. But then I just chose to try a couple of different things to get involved in, and now I feel like I'm always looking for me.

While Katie and Melissa spoke of the Branching Out process in terms of searching for subcommunal involvement, Tommy described the process more in terms of creating new individual connections:

At first, we all have no idea who each other are, that kind of thing. We're just trying to meet as many new people as possible. Trying to find that right group to which you can really belong.

Branching Out involved meeting new people and forming new relationship in addition to finding existing social structures to join. Newcomers described this stage of their adjustment process in terms developing involvement with as many individual and subcommunities as possible. Once a newcomer joined a subcommunity, their allegiance and attachment towards that subcommunity increased. As Figure 4.4 illustrates, several of the newcomers used the metaphor of "coloring-in" all the little circles inside the Trinity community. Michael, for example, provided this interpretation of the coloring-in process:

So you have the Central community, which is the large outer circle. And then inside that large circle, you have all these smaller circles, a crazy amount of small circles. And once you connect with those circles, either with the whole group or with a new friend, it's almost like you color-in that circle. And the more circles you color-in, the more you find yourself a part of the larger circle. So for me, it was a matter of just coloring-in as many of these circles as I could.

Morgan offered a similar explanation of the coloring-in phenomenon, though she did not use the specific language like Michael did:

I feel like there's different levels of community within the community for people. There are people who are just really involved with the community. They're connected to all the little groups and sects in the larger community. Then there are some people who aren't really involved. Those are the people who would probably rather not be here at all. But those really involved people; those are the people who really love it here.

The process of Branching Out was a matter of maximizing the colored-in circles within the larger community. The newcomers believed that the more subcommunities one colored-in, the more groups they developed an attachment with, the stronger their psychological and emotional connection with the larger community became.

The important realization for newcomers during the Branching Out process was that individuals had to actively search for some anchor within the community. Since one's connection with the university itself was too abstract to create new relationships, newcomers found other means to fulfill their need to belong. The shape, size, or scope of these various anchors varied dramatically amongst the research participants. Some joined a dozen groups on campus; other found involvement in a single subcommunity sufficient for the Branching Out process. Nonetheless, the newcomers agreed that this stage was a

matter of trying and testing relationships with new individuals and new subcommunities in an attempt to establish a network of individual friends or groups to help ease the challenges experienced during the Initial Entry Phase.

## Central Community

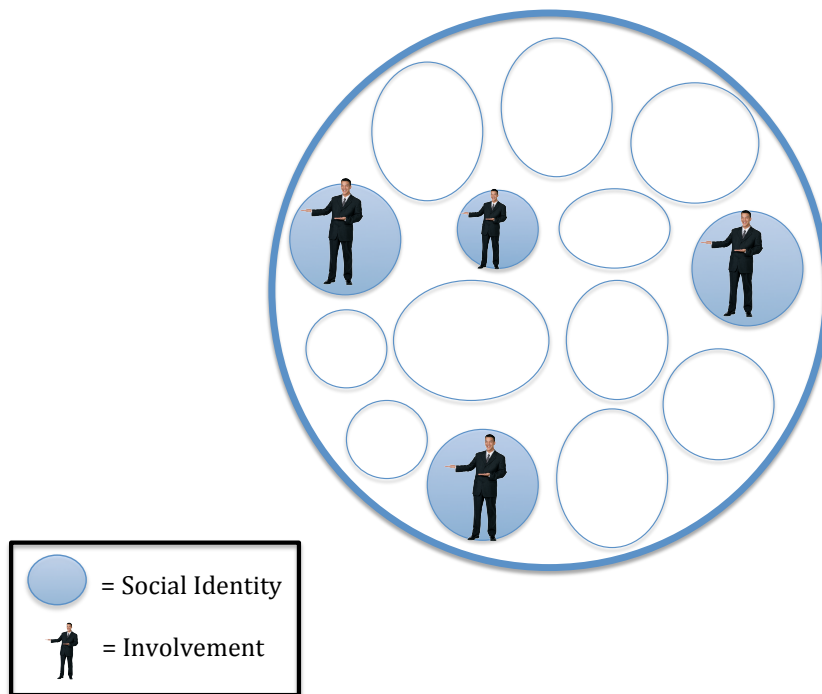


Figure 4.4: Phase II: “Coloring-In” Subcommunities

### **Consolidation: Staking and Deciding**

Once the Branching out process was complete newcomers transitioned into the Consolidation stage. At this point in the Newcomer-to-Member process, newcomers realized their involvement needed to increase in focus in order to improve their status and place within both individual subcommunities and the larger subcommunity. For many,

time was cited as the immediate cause for the need for Consolidation. Leah, for example, offered the following explanation of her decision to consolidate her involvement:

I mean you try to do everything. And it's exhausting. And you can't do it. So it's nice to choose and know where you're going.

Likewise, Samantha stated that time limitations led her towards the Consolidation process:

You need to figure out what you wanted to do, because you have so many options. You're presented with so much stuff, you meet so many people who are involved, and you see posters and advertisements everywhere. You're so excited because you have all this stuff you could do, but soon you realize that you have to decide what will be the best use of your time, what's going to look the best on your resume, what is the best organization for you to join. You'd like to do them all, but you really have to choose which is best for you.

Russ also noted the role that time limitations played in leading him towards the Consolidation stage during his second-year on campus:

I think just the sheer amount of time it takes to be friends with everyone and to keep making friends. Just the sheer amount of time really, you figure out that you might not like someone as much so you stop hanging out with them. And on the academic side, you've got finals and midterms and classes start getting harder, with all this stuff happening I just didn't have as much time. So it's the combination of figuring out what's best for you, what you're really doing here at college, and the amount of time it takes to keep up all those relationships. After a certain amount of time you reach a settling point.

Tommy spoke of consolidating his individual connections similarly to Russ, though his motivation was less about the time factor and more about stability:

I would definitely say the first semester, and I think this would be pretty much the same for most people, is about trying to meet as many people as possible. And then at the end of the semester it becomes about having a more settled group, and then that group gets fine-tuned over the next semester.

While Russ and Leah mentioned time as a specific motivation for Consolidation and Tommy the importance of stability, rarely were these factors alone a sufficient cause to consolidate one's involvement in subcommunities. Rather, newcomers more often cited the desire to increase one's standing and place in a specific subcommunity, to trade-off between weaker involvements in a number of subcommunities for increased involvement in particular groups. During her second-year, Katie discussed this decision in terms of weak and thick relationships:

I guess freshman year my goal was to meet new people, to have more resources for myself. This year, I'm realizing I can find those resources anywhere. I realized now that I'd rather have thick lines than weak lines. I'd rather be committed to one thing, to lead, and to matter. Right now, for instance, I'm an officer for two clubs but I want to quit one so I could be the president of one. I'd rather be committed solely to one thing than weakly to a whole bunch of things. I don't necessarily want to lose friendships in those other groups, but I do want to make my involvement stronger in one group.

Katie was the only participant who explicitly used the terms "thick" versus "thin" involvement, but many others echoed a similar sentiment. Moreover, Katie's desire to increase her leadership role in a specific subcommunity was a motivating factor for many of her peers as well. Samantha echoed such a desire to achieve a position of leadership and decision-making within a particular subcommunity, offering this explanation of her decision to consolidate her involvement:

I dropped some others [subcommunities] because I advanced quickly in terms of leadership positions...I saw the opportunity to advance quickly in this organization and I wanted to grow in terms of leadership. So I took on a lot in this group because I liked it and thought it would be good for me. So that's kind of all I have time for now.

Involvement with a smaller number of subcommunities highlighted the Consolidation Stage, and consequently newcomers began developing strong identities with those specific subcommunities. Some participants commented on being identified for the first time as members of particular subcommunities by their peers as an important outcome of this stage of their transition. Others recognized that increasing one's standing in a particular subcommunity actually led to increased standing in the larger community as well. This was an important outcome for many of the newcomers; by increasing their leadership roles, standing, and thus identification with a particular subcommunity newcomers were able to increase their place in the larger community as well.

According to the participants, there was no competition or conflict between the subcommunities and the larger community. Because the subcommunities were inherently a component of the larger community, there was not distinction between standing in a subcommunity and standing in the larger community. Billy offered this comment regarding the mutuality between the subcommunities and the larger community:

You hear about all these clubs, you see all these emails – we really get a million emails every morning saying all the things that are going on. People always joke saying people don't go to them, but you'll go and see those events when there are 30 people out there. But everybody finds a little niche here. And honestly, that's what keeps the whole community together. Because there's something for

everyone, we all have our own little place that together makes the whole community work.

Lauren offered a similar perspective as that of Billy, but provided a simple metaphor for explaining the interrelationships between the subcommunity and the larger campus community:

It's like if the community is a machine. You have all these little gears. And all the little gears just do their own thing, but they all work together to make the big machine work. One gear over here might not necessarily turn with a gear over there, but they're still doing their part, making sure the whole machine works.

Consequently, the newcomers viewed the roles in various subcommunities as intrinsically related to their roles in the larger community. So as one's importance and standing in a subcommunity increased, so did one's role in the larger campus community.

As newcomers increased their standing in the community, the participants offered a variety of powerful imagery to describe the impact of the heightened roles and developed relationships. Margaret referred to increase her leadership role in one subcommunity as "beefing up her role" in the larger community as well. Melissa stated that her increased standing in a group led to a "feeling of being accepted by peers, feeling like I have a place within that group now." After consolidating her involvement into a specific group of friends, Patricia spoke of the impact of focusing her energy and time in a specific subcommunity:

I now have these friends who I'm so close with. And I feel very secure in this particular friend group. And now I also feel like I have more of an idea where I'm going, what I'm doing with my schooling, what I want to do in the future, and what I want to accomplish. And, I don't know how else to say this, but I just feel more secure now than before.



The research participants recognized that following a successful Branching Out period, many newcomers stopped searching for new connections and focused more on developing “thick” connections instead. When new connections were formed, which was increasingly rare, it was often the result of a current connection introducing the newcomer to a tangential group of friends. Many of the participants defended this lack of actively searching for new connection since they had already developed sufficient connections. Nicholas offered his perspective on this phenomenon:

We all sort of have our established groups of people that we hang out with. We’ve already established a comfort zone and gotten used to the routines of college life. And so there’s less need for us to go out and send feelers for new people. It still happens sometimes, but there’s not really an effort made by us for that happen anymore.

As the Consolidation process neared its conclusion, the data strongly indicated that newcomers had reached a level of belonging and acceptance such that they no longer needed to actively search for new means of involvement or new anchors within the community.

Similar to the Consolidation outcome of increasing one’s standing in a subcommunity, the Consolidation stage involved increasing the density of one’s own networks. No participants explicitly used the term density in their discussion of this phenomenon, but their experiences indicate an increased density amongst their personal networks within the campus community. Consolidating one’s friendship groups led to increased feelings of security and comfort for many newcomers. While Branching Out introduced newcomers to new people and new subcommunities, Consolidation often resulted in the increased sense of security and comfort following the formation of stronger, denser, and more meaningful relationships.

A final salient theme from the Consolidation stage is that for many of the Pre-Existing Network newcomers, Consolidation was the only stage in the Developing Membership Phase. As Figure 4.1 indicates, some Pre-Existing Network newcomers skipped the Branching Out process altogether and transitioned from Initial Entry directly to Consolidation. Ricky, a student-athlete, never extended his network or involvement beyond his immediate team. His first attachment upon entering the community was his team subcommunity, and he never partook in the process of Branching Out, and thus never extended his involvement beyond the team. Rather, his transition process was about developing stronger relationships with his teammates and increasing his role within that particular subcommunity. For those like Ricky, entering as a Pre-Existing Newcomer allowed him to avoid any attempt at Branching Out and remain content and satisfied with their initiation network and move directly into the Consolidation process.

This was not the case for all Pre-Existing Network newcomers. Leah, who arrived as Pre-Existing Network newcomer due to her involvement with cross-country, spoke openly about her desire to extend her network beyond her initial teammates and find involvement in other places. Unlike Ricky, Leah actively sought involvement outside the network that her team provided:

I've definitely gotten closer with some of the people I've met in class in the second semester. In the first semester I relied so much on my cross-country group. And that was something I had to actively make myself avoid, not hanging out only with cross-country kids because it was such an easy fallback. But there are kids on the cross-country that I wouldn't want to hang out with all the time. And as the semester moved on, I've found other friends too.

Interestingly, Leah also commented on Ricky's decision to remain involved only with the cross-country teammates. She said this of Ricky's decision to disregard the Branching Out process:

He does not go anywhere unless it's with somebody from the team. So I live close to him and sometime he'll see me walk by and ask 'where are you going?' I tell him 'I'm going out, come on let's go.' So I feel like he would not know anybody if I didn't do that. If he didn't have me to bring him along, he wouldn't know a single person not on the team. It's interesting; some of the upperclassmen are like that too. But I couldn't do that. Seems dumb to me.

The discrepancy between Leah and Ricky demonstrate that Pre-Existing Network newcomers could transition through the Newcomer-to-Member model in two different paths. Those like Leah transitioned from the Initial Entry Phase into the Branching Out stage, like their Blank Canvas peers. Contrarily, Pre-Existing Network newcomers like Ricky progressed from their Initial Entry directly towards the Consolidation stage. Either pathway provided the newcomers with a solidified support network and a meaningful anchor within the community, but it is important to note the different routes available for Pre-Existing Network newcomers.

### **PHASE 3: THE ACHIEVING FULL-MEMBERSHIP PHASE**

Once Consolidation was complete, newcomers were capable of achieving full-membership status within the larger community. One of the most integral components of the entire Newcomer-to-Member framework marks the transition from peripheral member into full-membership, a process presented here as Venn Diagramming. The Venn Diagramming stage represents the final step in the main flow of the Newcomer-to-Member process. Once Venn Diagramming was complete, newcomers entered into one

of two possible dynamic loop: 1) Achieving Critical Mass Loop; or 2) Community Exhaustion Loop (Figure 4.1). Depending on which loop the newcomer proceeded towards, the entire Newcomer-to-Member process was either completed or was restarted by the newcomer.

### **Venn Diagramming Stage: Serving as Connector**

At this point in the Newcomer-to-Member process, the newcomers conceptualized a fully integrated community member of the community as one who served as a connector for other community members. Building on the notion that communities are composed of numerous subcommunities, the final step in the process involved successfully serving as a connection amongst multiple subcommunities. Newcomers recognized that each of the individual subcommunities was independent of the other subcommunities; they were all part of the larger campus communities but were nonetheless separate social structures. Lauren, for example, explained the separation of the “spheres” in the community:

There are all these different spheres, tons of them. But the spheres wouldn't naturally touch at all. So one person is in one particular sphere, and they may know a few of the people who are in a different sphere, but there's nothing that connects the two spheres together. And so you have all these little spheres for everyone that's on campus, and they're all not touching.

As Lauren's statement indicates, while the different subcommunities are all part of the larger community, they lay only tangentially near the other spheres with the slightest separation between them. Lauren noted that they “naturally” do not touch; that it takes the action of a community member to cause the different subcommunities to connect and create overlap between subcommunities.

Following the Branching Out and Consolidation processes, the newcomers had already established belonging, membership, and for many leadership roles in a multitude of subcommunities. While these important developments signal an increased standing in the larger community, the research participants believed that full-membership in the community was achieved only once the individual community member successfully connected multiple subcommunities. Julie, for example, gave the following explanation:

When people first used me as a connection, that's when I really felt like I belonged here. So when a friend used me as a connection to something; when I was the connection between different people, different groups, I was the way people connected with others.

Through their involvement with various subcommunities, newcomers recognized that they were capable of closing the gaps between different subcommunities and creating overlaps between the groups. In describing this process, several of the newcomers used specific imagery to explain the details of the connecting subcommunity phenomenon, namely through the metaphor of a Venn diagram. Without any mentioning of that term by the researcher, three different research participants independently mentioned Venn diagrams in their explanation of connecting subcommunities. In each case, the participant introduced the idea of the Venn diagram metaphor, explained how it fit their experiences, and suggested that represented how they viewed the process. Lauren, for instance, offered this explanation of the Venn diagram metaphor for the different spheres on campus:

So it's like there are certain spheres, that because of the people in them they kind of overlap. It just takes a couple of people to start overlapping the spheres Venn diagram style.

After listing all the different cliques on campus, Tommy gave a more detailed explanation of the Venn Diagramming process:

You have all these different cliques, all these different bubbles of people. And eventually all of these bubbles cross. Some of them wider than others, crossing with more other cliques and groups because there are a bunch of people who are sororities, fraternities, do theatre, and play sports. Most of the athletes here are in a certain fraternity; so those people connect the Greek Life circle with the athletic circle. So they start building this gigantic Venn diagram that we have going here.

Tommy continued, explaining how he personally was a part of the Venn Diagramming process:

My roommate last year, he was an athlete. And we were friends. And he had his own little groups that he formed, with athletes and his fraternity friends. And then I had my groups, the theatre kids and choir kids mostly. And because I knew that one person, my roommate the athlete and Greek, all my choir friends ended up meeting all these other people. So you can have that one guy that's choir who ends up meeting all these other people in different circles. Then you get all these cross-connection of all these different groups. And it creates a very interesting dynamic. It really becomes this gigantic Venn diagram in a way.

Patricia was the third participant who suggested the metaphor of a Venn diagram:

There are different components, different parts of the Central community. You have your academic clubs, social clubs, Greek Life, sports teams, all those things. And it's just all parts of different sectors of the Central community. And there are different levels in the community, like a hierarchy. But I don't think the hierarchy is a pyramid, it's more like a circle. And the more circles you find yourself in the more you find yourself a part of the whole thing. And as you join more circles with more different people, it's like a really complicated Venn diagram. It's a

complicated item, with different planes and dimensions [laughter], a really complex Venn diagram.

Since three different research participants independently used the term Venn diagram to describe this process, the Newcomer-to-Member model refers to this stage of the newcomer process simply as Venn Diagramming (Figure 4.1). Venn Diagramming is the process of connecting the once separated subcommunities thereby creating overlap between the individual members of the subcommunities (Figure 4.5).

## Central Community

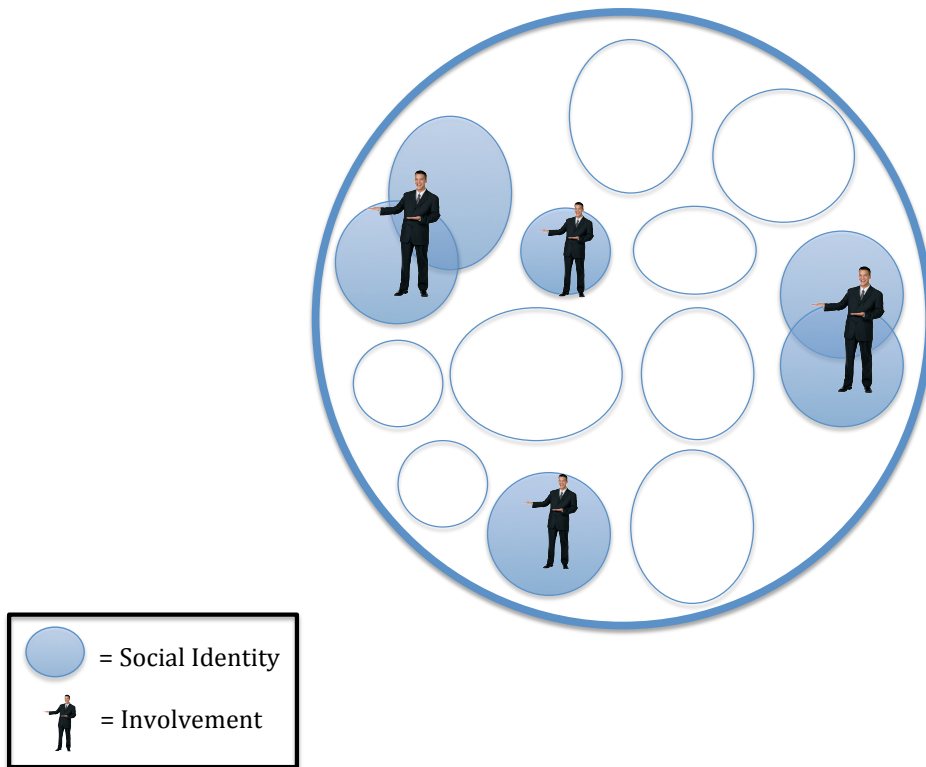


Figure 4.5: Phase III: Venn Diagramming

As subcommunities connected via the Venn Diagramming process, the overlap between the once independent subcommunities increased in scope and the individual responsible for connecting the groups saw their perceived standing in the larger community become more profound as fellow community members sought them out for connections and information. As Samantha explained:

Everyone is involved in more than one thing. Well at least most people, I guess not everyone. And that involvement overlaps to where you know a person who knows a person so you're never more than one person away from a connection. So if I wanted to know something about the football team, one person I know probably knows somebody on the football team. For me, as my involvement in Group increased, I became a resource for people looking for information about Group. Whenever someone needed a connection to Group, or was interested in Group, I became known around campus as the connection for that. So I became one degree away from so many people once they know I was the connection for Group, I was always one degree away. That's when you realize you're more than just someone at the school; you're a connection.

As individuals became connected through the overlapping of subcommunities, the spread of information within the larger community increased as well consequently increasing the newcomers' sense of belonging and importance as well. As Samantha's statement demonstrated, being viewed as a conduit of information was an indicator of importance and status within the community.

The newcomers often conceptualized this increased status through connecting subcommunities as the role of "middleman." Both Sean and Tommy used the term "middleman" to describe their roles in the Venn Diagramming process. Interestingly, Sean and Tommy viewed their role as middleman not as connecting subcommunities, but



of connecting the individuals within the groups. By the time newcomers entered the Venn Diagramming stage, they were no longer a part of the Branching Out process and consequently less inclined to spark new relationships. Rather, newcomers during the Venn Diagramming stage required the role of a middleman to meet new people or unite two existing networks of friends. Consider the example of Sean, who explained how he continued to make new friends during this stage:

Let's say your suitemate becomes friends with some guy. That guy comes up to our room to study with the suitemate, but I end up meeting him also. So there's still new people being added to our group, but there's almost always someone in the middle. It's not like during the first few weeks of school where we all were like 'Hi my name is blank, what do you like to do?' to everyone we met. It's a much slower process. There's still integration of people and groups, but it's at a much slower rate. And there's always usually a middleman, someone who knows the new person and the rest of the group.

Tommy offered a similar statement regarding the importance of middlemen:

I think it's typical that most people are pretty much sticking with the people they met last year. But they're still meeting new people, but now they meet new people through current friends and it's much less stranger-to-stranger interaction that there was last year. There's usually, and this point, a middleman. One of your friends know this guy who lives on a different floor, and then you get to know that guy, and then you get to know the guys he knows also.

Tommy continued his explanation of middlemen, explaining how middlemen ultimately connecting the entire campus together:

So what you get is Person X meets Person Y, and then Person Y starts meeting all of Person X's friends also. So those bubbles meet. And that essentially keeps

happening until, if you wanted to, you could String Theory your way through all of Central's campus where everyone knows everyone through one of these middlemen. And eventually everyone can become a middleman if they wanted.

Venn Diagramming was less about connecting two individual together and more a process of uniting two existing networks of individual together. It became increasingly rare for the participants to meet a single new friend; rather individuals relied on their existing relationships to develop connections with entire subcommunities.

Many newcomers viewed themselves as fully integrated members of the community once they served as a connection between multiple subcommunities. In many ways, the middleman became a broker for the development of new, larger networks of multiple subcommunities that embodied the shapes of Venn diagrams (Figure 4.5). Katie, for instance, explained how she served as the broker between multiple subcommunities:

There were football boys that lived in my hall. And they are a little bit outgoing, but not overly outgoing like me. And because I was a connector, I spoke with them and they spoke with me. They didn't speak with many others on my hallway initially. But because I spoke with them and spent time with, I connected everyone in my other groups of friends to the football group. And that's how we're all friends now. Now we're all one big group of friends.

The newcomers noted that the connecting of these groups increased their sense of belonging in the community but also made the community as a whole more dense, resulting in an increased flow of information and made resources easier to recognize. After Patricia explained her interpretation of Venn Diagramming she explained how this process was beneficial for individuals and the community as a whole:

It kind of helps enrich people's lives. A more connected community helps create something better. It's like an old African proverb I know, 'if you want to

somewhere fast, you should go alone. But if you want to far, you should go together.’ It’s kind of the same thing where the community helps you do bigger things. There are a lot of resources you can tap into if there are things you want to. A more connected community, especially on a smaller campus like Central, is necessary.

Mary similarly spoke of the benefits of a better-connected community. Though unlike some of the earlier comments where newcomers spoke of their active role in the Venn Diagramming process, Mary spoke of benefiting from the outcomes of Venn Diagramming despite not being overly involved in any subcommunities:

I don’t always have to be doing something in a club, or even for the larger community. I can just be doing something where it’s just me interacting with people who are also students in a more personalized way, like going out to eat off campus with a friend and we just talk about things like academics and anything else. Even through those conversations the community is becoming tighter and stronger. It’s about being part of the larger community and it gives a connection between people, even when you’re not so involved

The level of involvement that coincided with successfully Venn Diagramming was unclear; some newcomers started the most heavily involved community members were the most effective middlemen. Others, however, believed that even those without heavy involvement still possessed the means and ability to successfully connect individuals and thus complete the Venn Diagramming process. Nonetheless, the research participants consistently believed that the Venn Diagramming process benefited all individuals within the larger community.

While the newcomers often spoke of lacking belonging or purpose during the Initial Entry Phase and the Developing Membership Phase, the newcomers strongly

believed once they had completed the Venn Diagramming stage they had reached an increased level of commitment and attachment to the larger community. In many ways, the completion of Venn Diagramming marked the end of the Newcomer-to-Member model. Newcomers considered themselves fully integrated members of the community with access to all community resources along with a heightened sense of belonging. Yet some of the newcomers noted their experiences extended beyond the Venn Diagramming stage. Based on their experiences, the data support the existence of two possible loops following Venn Diagramming: 1) the Critical Mass Loop; and 2) the Community Exhaustion Loop (Figure 4.1).

### **Critical Mass Loop**

Following the Venn Diagramming stage, many newcomers were still connected to only a small fragment of the subcommunities and networks of subcommunities in the larger community. Considering the participants consistently noted larger numbers of subcommunities in the Central community, even an extensive Venn Diagramming experience left a newcomer directly connected to only a fraction of the entire community. For some newcomers, one's attachment and relationship with the university and the campus community never extended beyond those subcommunities they were directly attached with. Tommy, for example, gave the following statement:

Do I care for every group in the community? Probably not. On a broad scale, I care for the entire community. But on a smaller scale, I would say that since I'm not involved in Group X, its fate doesn't really affect me. But I don't know, that may change in the future; I'm not sure who I'll care about in the future.

For those like Tommy, their transition through the Newcomer-to-Member model became stationary in the Venn Diagramming phase. Presumably, Tommy and those like him

continued to connect with different subcommunities, increasing his commitment to the larger community by finding attachment with additional subcommunities. For others, their transition continued beyond the Venn Diagramming stage into the Critical Mass Loop.

Once an individual successfully served as a middleperson during Venn Diagramming, the participant reached a level whereby they automatically developed an attachment towards all subcommunities within the larger community. Though no newcomer explicitly used the term critical mass, the descriptions of the events exemplified the notion of a critical mass or tipping point. Certain participants reached a point whereby they automatically colored-in all the subcommunities and Venn diagrams in the larger community (Figure 4.6). Stacy, for instance, spoke of the critical mass experience as follows:

It means that you can't write off certain parts of the community purely because you're not a part of them. You can't ignore them because you're not specifically involved with them. Because it's all a part of the greater community, so it all matters to you.

Stacy's statement is especially striking in comparison to Tommy's previous comment where he explicitly stated not caring about those groups that he has no part in. For Stacy, the increased commitment to all groups in the community is representative of transitioning into the Critical Mass Loop. Patrick similarly believed that connected with individual subcommunities ultimately led to an increased connection to the larger community as a whole:

I think it's a matter of how deeply you're invested with all those subcommunities. The more invested you are with those subcommunities; the more strongly you're

going to associate with the university. And once you associate strongly with the university that really includes all the other subcommunities also.

## Central Community

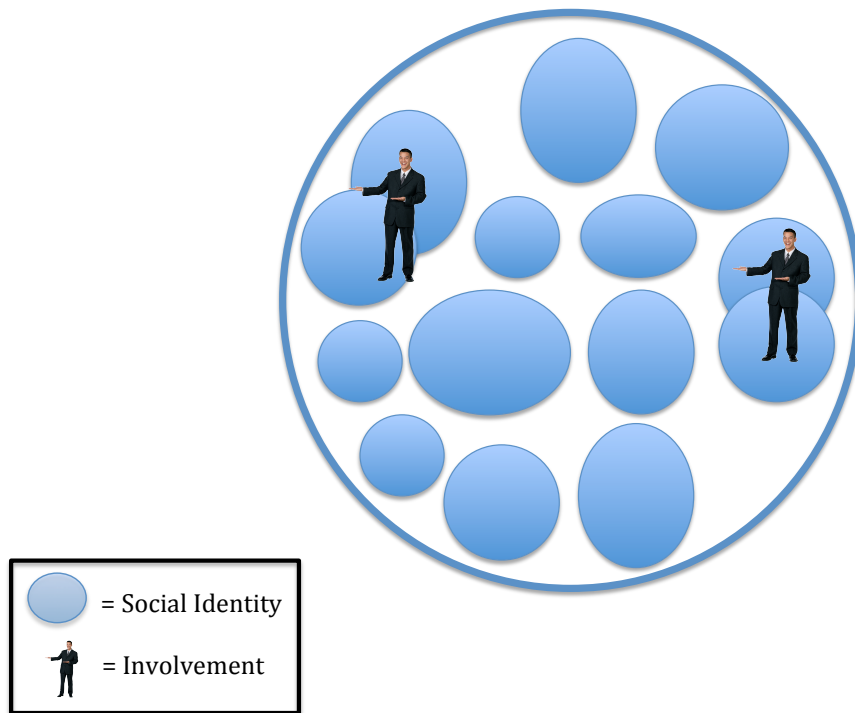


Figure 4.6: Loop I: Critical Mass Loop

The notion of caring about all subcommunities simply did not exist for newcomers earlier in the Newcomer-to-Member process. Rather, newcomers spoke candidly about lacking connections and missing anchors connecting the newcomer with the other groups on campus and thus the newcomer only developed a direct attachment to those individuals or group in which they had a direct involvement. Transitioning through the Critical Mass Loop had important implications for the way newcomers viewed their responsibilities and relationships with the other components of the campus community. Only in this stage of

the Newcomer-to-Member process did individuals develop the strong relationships with all fellow community members, regardless of whether they had met them or not, that is so powerful in terms of promoting belonging and sense of community.

It is important to note that many of the participants did not believe they had reached the Critical Mass Loop, yet they believed it was possible in the future. Russ, for instance, indicated that he had not reached a level of Critical Mass. Yet afterward he offered the following statement about potentially reaching such a point in the future:

Do I think I'll ever reach that point? Yes, I think so. Because the higher up you get in terms of being here, the more people you know that are actually a part of all those groups and clubs. Again, that makes it personal. So it becomes about supporting those friends and you take more of an interest in. Once I know more people, once I've been here longer, yes I could see myself reaching that point.

The comment by Russ is indicative of the most popular response by the newcomers; the Critical Mass Loop was not something they had personally experienced in their first two years on campus, but most recognized such was a realistic possibility in the future.

Even without reaching the Critical Mass Loop, once the Venn Diagramming stage was complete the networks viewed themselves as full-members of the community and continued to assist in merging and combining more of the subcommunities in hopes of creating a more cohesive overall community. Most likely, the typical newcomer remains in the Venn Diagramming stage for a substantial amount of time; theoretically transitioning through this stage takes longer than completing any of the other stages. For many, the amount of colored-in subcommunities needed to reach a point of critical mass was a substantial amount; yet most newcomers continued to complete the Venn Diagramming process. For others, however, the Critical Mass Loop never became a

reality and they chose not to remain in the Venn Diagramming stage, but rather enter the second possible loop of the Newcomer-to-Member process.

### **Community Exhaustion Loop**

All communities run the risk of having individual members choose to leave the community altogether. In this particular research setting, there were three newcomers who chose to end their involvement in the community for different reasons. Billy and Tyler both decided to dropout of the community for reasons outside the control of the university itself. Both Billy and Tyler cited family issues and financial reasons as the primary drivers of their decisions to leave the university. Though newcomers dropping out of school are an important concern for universities, the Newcomer-to-Member model cannot control all variables in an individual's life. The financial difficulties of both Billy and Tyler faced and their subsequent removal from the community offer little insight into the working of the newcomer adjustment process, yet their experiences provide a reminder that no matter how successful a newcomer adjustment process or how strong a sense of belonging a newcomer develops, there are other issues which affect one's decision to leave a community. But the third participant who cut their involvement with the community did not actually drop the university altogether; rather she actively chose to cease her involvement in the Central community and become involved in neighboring communal structures while maintaining a student in the school. Thus, the case of Katie provides an important case study in understanding the Community Exhaustion Loop of the Newcomer-to-Member model.

Katie was one of the earliest newcomers to find involvement and progressed through the newcomer adjustment process quicker than most of her peers. Katie described herself early as a connector, understood the importance of subcommunities,



and described her experiences at Central as one of intense involvement and dedication to her subcommunal involvement and the larger campus community. Yet during her second year Katie transferred all her involvement exclusively to activities that took place beyond the borders of campus and without any connection to the campus community. When asked of her decision to essentially remove herself from the community, Katie offered this response:

I felt like I was ready to go. I didn't have to go, but I felt like I was ready to move on. I could have stayed here on campus, but I feel like that was limiting my options. There's so much more available to me outside the campus community. Like the City itself has a lot more resources than Central does. And if I don't grasp them now, when will I ever? If I don't take the opportunities now, then I don't do it in the future. I'm too scared of missing the opportunity, so I'm trying to step out of my circle and take advantage of those City resources.

Katie continued to explain how in her opinion she had achieved everything possible for her within the campus community. She indicated she felt "burnt out" from so much involvement in the community during her first year on campus, and felt she had experienced all that campus had to offer. Moreover, as she realized the potential resources and opportunities available to her outside the campus community, the opportunity cost in terms of on-campus involvement began to increase:

I still want to be as involved on-campus as I was last year, but actually I'm not. I'm realizing there's too much on my plate now. And if I'm going to give up one thing, it's going to be social stuff on campus. I'm still trying to hold on to the Central community, but I'm ready to balance out the Central community with the City community.

When asked if she felt her future involvement might be within or outside the campus community, Katie explained that her future involvement seemed destined to remove her even further from the campus community:

I don't know, I obviously can't tell the future. But as far it seems now, if everything keeps going well for me outside the university, it could grow bigger. My experiences outside of campus could increase, become more important. But depending on the relationships I build with the people outside of the university, that determines whether I'm more involved with campus or not in the future. Hopefully everything outside of campus stays positive and growing for me.

Finally, when asked what impact her involvement moving away from campus had on her feelings and attitude towards the campus community, Katie answered as such:

I still care about the community. I still have the same feelings, but they're just not as strong and not as constant as they used to be. I just don't feel like the community here is my main focus all the time anymore.

As Katie's comments demonstrate, though she successfully transitioned through the Newcomer-to-Member model, the end result of her transition was actually a decrease in attachment towards the larger community. Though Katie's transition process was unique among the research participants, her comments and experience warrant the addition of a second possible loop in the Newcomer-to-Member model.

Based on Katie's experience, the second loop available to newcomers is the Community Exhaustion Loop. Katie had exhausted all the potential resources within the Central community; in her opinion, there was simply nothing left for her to accomplish in the community. Consequently, she chose to look beyond the campus community to reenter the Branching Out stage and find new means of involvement. The Community Exhaustion Loop need not be viewed solely in a negative way. While the Central

community is hypothetically weakened by the removal of Katie due to her status as a connector and her role in the Venn Diagramming process, few communities are designed to retain membership forever. Presumably, Katie's experiences in the Central community helped her develop skills and relationships that will help her in the transition into the larger City community, where she reentered the Newcomer-to-Member model as a Pre-Existing Network newcomer due to the strong network she developed during her time at Central.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of the Newcomer-to-Member Model**

While Chapter 4 presented the data from which the Newcomer-to-Member Model was developed, the purpose of this chapter is to offer a thorough discussion of the important findings from the proposed model. Namely, the specifics of the model will be discussed as they relate to previous findings in the Student Development, Organizational Socialization, and Community literatures. Previous works in these literatures support much of the proposed model, yet there are several findings that extend what has previously been presented. Moreover, the Newcomer-to-Member model offers a number of nuances that increase our understanding of the newcomer adjustment process within higher education. Each of these nuances will be presented individually following a discussion of the most important contributions of the proposed model to our understanding of how newcomers join communities.

The most noteworthy result from the Newcomer-to-Member relates to the importance of subcommunities. The newcomers in this study conceptualized their community not as some coherent whole, but rather as the aggregation of a multitude of smaller subcommunities. The community literature, however, typically portrays the community as some singular entity and makes little reference to the presence or role of smaller subcommunities within the larger whole. The results and data from this reason, however, indicate that communities need to be analyzed and ultimately discussed on a smaller level of analysis in order to be more consistent with the experience of individuals joining the community. The newcomers in this study were unable to connect directly with the larger community and failed to find meaning through their relationship with the larger community; rather they needed something smaller and concrete with which to initially

attach. Even at a small college, newcomers were unable to conceptualize the community as a single entity.

The notion of subcommunal importance is strongly supported by evidence from a variety of literatures. Dunbar (1992), for instance, measured the relationship between neocortical volume and typical group size in a number of primates and human beings, finding that the size of the human brain represents a biological constraint on the number of interpersonal relationships the average human can maintain. The aptly named “Dunbar’s number” states humans can only have between 100 and 200 individual relationships that actually provide meaning for the individual. In other words, even at a small college like this particular research study, individuals simply cannot connect with 2,000 individuals in any meaningful way. Consequently, the fact that newcomers viewed the community not as a collection of thousands in a single group, but rather as many distinct groups containing a much smaller number of individuals is consistent with human biology (Hill & Dunbar, 2003). Moreover, there is consistent evidence from the belongingness research that similarly emphasizes individuals thinking and acting in terms of small groups. Baumeister and Leary (1995) found strong evidence that individuals seek a limited number of interpersonal relationships, and once a few close social bonds are solidified, additional connections furnish lesser benefits. The need to belong is subject to satiation and diminishing returns – once individuals satisfy their inherent need to belong they dedicate far less resources and energy to search for additional connections. Expecting any community member, let alone a newcomer, to develop relationships with entire communities is simply unrealistic.

The importance of small groups and subcommunities indicates that newcomers develop their attachment with the larger community as the result of a bottom-up approach. It is not some overarching connection with the organization or brand that

dictates a newcomer's membership or standing in the community; rather, newcomers build their role in the community through finding and joining specific subcommunities one-by-one. Katz and Heere's (2013) work with new sport fans found a similar result, as their new fans did not immediately find an attachment with the entire team or university community. Instead, individual fans first developed a strong attachment with their particular subcommunity, in their case tailgating groups, before slowly developing a larger connection with the entire community. Through the process of Branching Out, community members create attachments with multiple subcommunities; yet different newcomers may find connections with different combinations of subcommunities and at different speeds. Consequently, new community members are not a cohesive group experiencing the same adjustment process, but in reality are more disjointed and fragmented. Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) described brand community members as a heterogeneous group, differentiating community members between such groups as "enthusiasts" and "users." To understand the newcomer adjustment process is to recognize that newcomers achieve varying levels of commitment to both individual subcommunities and the larger community itself at different speeds and through different combinations of subcommunal involvement.

Also related to the bottom-up approach of joining communities is the notion of the Critical Mass Loop. Rather than initially identifying with the larger community, those participants who eventually entered the Critical Mass Loop did so by connecting with individual subcommunities one at a time. The Critical Mass Loop was thus an ultimate destination for newcomers – an outcome that required time and persistence. Since the Critical Mass Loop was indicative of a strong attachment with all subcommunities, it represents the pinnacle of satisfaction and commitment with the larger community. The ideal goal of socializing newcomers is to promote long-term membership and

participation, and there is strong recent evidence in the retention literature that satisfaction is a powerful predictor of persistence behavior. Schreiner and Nelson (2013) found strong support for the importance of satisfaction in persistence behavior, concluding satisfaction scores were more strongly related to persistence decisions than demographic or institutional characteristics. For newcomers specifically, satisfaction was similarly a significant indicator of likelihood to persist (Fischer, 2007) and positively related to institutional commitment (McEwan, 2013). Increasing a member's satisfaction with the larger community appears to be a function of an individual's involvement in additional subcommunities. While the Critical Mass Loop demonstrates one's strong attachment towards the entire community, the method for helping newcomers achieve this state of commitment is a matter of building commitment one subcommunity at a time either through individual participation in the subcommunity or connecting through an existing relationship and initiating the Venn Diagramming process.

While the importance of subcommunities was strongly supported by previous findings in several literatures, the specific process of Venn Diagramming is a new addition. The community literature rarely offers any discussion of what constitutes a "full-member" or what differentiates full-members from those on the periphery. Though one of the explicit goals of organizational socialization is to help new members transition from outsiders to insiders, seldom do researchers offer an explicit explanation of what marks a community insider. The notion of Venn Diagramming proposes a benchmark for understanding and interpreting individual participation within a community. Once a newcomer has successfully connected multiple subcommunities, their transition into the center of the community is complete. Consequently, their chances of leaving the community are diminished and their attachment towards the community itself appears to substantially increase. There is some tangential support for the notion of interpreting

Venn Diagramming as full-membership from the work of Feldman (1981) and Ashforth, Sluss, and Harrison (2007) in organizational socialization. In their proposed sequential models of socialization, the final stage of the socialization process is the period of stabilization, whereby newcomers become full-blown insiders of the community due to being fully integrated into their jobs and organizations. The connecting of multiple subcommunities in many ways is a means to accomplish stabilizing a newcomers' place in the larger community. Subcommunities, based on their smaller size and fluidity of membership, appear to be malleable and fundamentally unstable. The connecting of multiple subcommunities may result in stabilization for newcomers within the larger community.

Interpreting full-membership as the act of connecting subcommunities is related to Burt's (1992) concept of structural holes. Burt (1992) found that individuals located near structural holes in a network have access to information and benefits that other members simply do not have. Burt (1992) called these members brokers, individuals who can bridge the structural holes and connect multiple clusters of individuals. Since Burt's (1992) work was concerned with power and positioning, he stated that brokers have a competitive advantage by accessing information other network members cannot. While Burt's (1992) work viewed networks as a zero-sum game, Venn Diagramming is theoretically a process that numerous newcomers can experience and not necessarily a matter of competition or power. Nonetheless, the benefits that newcomer can achieve through serving as a broker, a consequence of Venn Diagramming, emphasizes the importance of locating oneself at the interconnection of multiple subcommunities. Granovetter (1985) similarly wrote that network location could have a powerful impact on economic relations and competitive advantages in his work on embeddedness. According to Granovetter (1985), decisions made by firms or individual actors must be



interpreted within their larger social context and network positioning; economic exchanges and decision making is inherently dependent on one's social ties and network positioning. If successful, Venn Diagramming places an individual in a structurally advantageous network position and Granovetter's work (1985) supports the importance of recognizing the relationship between Venn Diagramming and embeddedness.

The importance of Venn Diagramming also implies that newcomers interpret full-membership as a status that needs to be earned. Earning a place in the center of a community requires action and agency on the part of the newcomers. Venn Diagramming cannot occur solely as the result of organizational intervention, rather it requires action and agency on the part of the newcomer. The benefits of communal participation, including satisfying one's need to belong, are not automatically granted to all newcomers but are more indicative of an outcome only obtained through specific actions on the part of the individual.

There is a strong connection between the process of Venn Diagramming and research into the role of networks in newcomer adjustment. Through the connecting of multiple subcommunities, individuals can actively increase their centrality in the larger networks. Centrality typically refers to an individual's location within a network and is a measure of their involvement in the network (Prell, 2012). Centrality measures have been significantly linked with outcomes like satisfaction and promotion (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993) but centrality is also a de facto measure of integration within a community. Those individuals with higher levels of centrality are inherently more integrated and involved in the larger community, an important component of both student development and retention (Astin, 1985). While the role of involvement is well established in the literature, the present research extends the discussion of networks and newcomer adjustment by

implying that through Venn Diagramming newcomers can actively shape their own networks within the larger community.

The processes of Branching Out and Consolidation allowed newcomers to choose what subcommunities to become involved with, but it was Venn Diagramming that truly provided newcomers with a sense of control and agency over their network structures. By connecting specific subcommunities and serving as a middleperson for various groups or persons, newcomers were very much capable of creating and shaping their own networks, which has important implications. Thomas (2000), for example, showed that an individual's network location affects important outcomes like satisfaction, performance, and retention. McEwan (2013), likewise, wrote that a newcomer's perception of their own social network status has a significant effect on retention outcomes. Venn Diagramming, then, is the process through which newcomers can actively shape their own networks and consequently realize the benefits discussed by Thomas (2000) and McEwan (2013).

Venn Diagramming also appears to be related to Schau et al.'s (2009) brand community practice of staking. Staking refers to the process of recognizing variance within community membership and the process through which individuals differentiate themselves from other members. In the current study, newcomers created their own spaces by the joining and connecting of multiple subcommunities. Since almost all newcomers found involvement in some subcommunity, newcomers needed to forge individual identities for themselves by carving out a unique location between multiple subcommunities. When an individual connected multiple subcommunities (when they were located within the overlap of the Venn diagram), they were staking a specific role in the community. In a sense, staking within subcommunities was accomplished through Venn Diagramming.

Before individuals could experience Venn Diagramming, they first had to successfully transition through the Branching Out and Consolidation process. The most salient finding from these processes is the importance of finding involvement in the newcomer adjustment process, which is strongly supported by decades worth of student development literature. Astin's (1985) seminal Theory of Involvement stated that students learn by becoming involved and that involvement was related to persistence behaviors of students. Similarly, Tinto's (1975) model of student departure theorized that student integration into the academic and social structures of a university strengthens their commitment to the universities and reduced their chance of dropping out. Tinto's (1975) integration is ultimately similar to Astin's (1985) involvement and also Pace's (1988) quality of effort. In an aggregate sense, the importance of actively seeking and finding a means through which to participate in the larger community has long been a salient component in the student development literature.

Another important finding from the Newcomer-to-Member model was that newcomers could not transition from the Initial Entry Phase to the Developing Membership Phase until they realized they needed to find involvement and began seeking ways to become involved. Involvement was not only a method for improving retention but a fundamental realization early in the newcomer process. There is some existing evidence that supports the heightened importance of involvement early in the newcomer experience. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) found that the earlier students become involved in the social structure of a campus the more salient the positive outcomes of involvement become. Likewise, Berger and Milem (1999) found that early involvement is particularly important for minority and underrepresented students. Yet the specifics of the Branching Out and Consolidation process provide an additional layer of detail to the previously proposed models. Tinto (1975), for example, offers little insight into how

newcomers find involvement or how involvement evolves throughout the newcomer adjustment period. The increased detail to the newcomer process presented in the Newcomer-to-Member model enhances our understanding of how, why, and through what mechanisms newcomers seek, find, and develop their individual involvement.

One of the important findings of the Developing Membership Phase is the delicate balance of involvement that newcomers need to find, and organizations need to offer, to best assist in the newcomer adjustment process. Based on the need for newcomers to experiment with a wide variety of subcommunities, organizations need to offer a plethora of opportunities for newcomers to find; yet if too many opportunities exist it may be difficult for newcomers to transition from Branching Out to Consolidation. Organizations need to carefully consider the balance of involvement opportunities, especially those in higher education. There is some evidence that too much involvement in social integration can have negative consequences on academic achievement (Thomas, 2000), including intercollegiate athletic programs (Mangold, Bean, & Adams, 2003). When students dedicate too much time to their social involvement, their academic involvement suffers which lowers their chances of persistence and ultimately graduation. Furthermore, while evidence shows that academic involvement leads to increased social integration, the inverse is not necessarily true (Tinto, 1997).

One of the reasons why Branching Out ensued for Blank Canvas newcomers was because of the limitations of hallways and mentor groups in acting as existing networks for the newcomers. The university placed each newcomer into a mentor group; thus, each newcomer did have a type of pre-existing network waiting for them upon their arrival. Yet the experiences of the participants indicated that mentor groups were unable to provide the same sort of belonging associated with other pre-existing networks because mentor groups lacked a common interest strong enough to create meaningful

interpersonal connections and mentor groups lacked the type of group experiences associated with sport teams and other services groups that acted as pre-existing network. Warner and Dixon (2013) similarly identified common interest as one of the key factors that allow sport to create an environment where participants experience a sense of community. Though their work dealt with club and varsity sport athletes, there is strong evidence from the current research that sport fanship requires the same theme of common interest to promote belongingness and meaningful interpersonal connections. Similarly, Underwood et al. (2000) identified group experiences as an important marker of consumer communities, a theme prominent throughout most of the community literature. The group experiences developed through athletic practices, service organizations, or religious groups were more powerful in promoting interpersonal connections than the experiences newcomers received through their orientation groups. When combined with a common identity, the experiences Pre-Existing newcomers attained through pre-existing networks led to a great sense of belongingness than what Blank Canvas newcomers felt with their hallway or mentor group.

Branching Out, through either social or academic involvement, adds an important layer to the study of sense of belonging on college campuses as well. As Strayhorn (2012) showed, few concepts have as great an impact on the experience of college students than one's sense of belonging on campus. Yet Strayhorn (2012) emphasized viewing sense of belonging not only from the perspective of individual students, but from the institutional role as well since belonging is also a function of the ethos that pervades the life of community members. If the Newcomer-to-Member process is a matter of searching for involvement and ultimately consolidating one's involvement, enhancing sense of belonging in a community is intrinsically related to properly organizing and complementing subcommunities in a manner that meets organizational goals. Since most

subcommunities have only a small reach in a larger community, it is an organizational imperative to either connect the various subcommunities or create an environment where participation in certain subcommunities is complementary to participation in others as well. In other words, participation in multiple subcommunities needs to be available to all organizational newcomers in order for newcomer to transition into full-members of the community with a strong sense of belonging and purpose.

Connecting the importance of Branching Out with the organizational socialization literature, the process of seeking involvement is related to the important socialization antecedent of information seeking. Information seeking is among the oldest topics in organizational socialization, since Van Maanen and Schein (1979) assumed that the first goal of newcomers is to reduce uncertainty through searching for additional information to help a newcomer in their new task. Information seeking has remained an important area of research in organizational socialization, and was included by Bauer et al. (2007) as one of the two important antecedents to the newcomer adjustment process. For the newcomers in the present study, the willingness and desire to Branch Out was their specific method of seeking information. Branching Out allowed newcomers to not only find involvement and meet new people, but also accumulate information from community insiders about educational matters, social issues, and campus customs that newcomers were wholly unfamiliar with early in the tenure on campus. Just as information seeking is a significant antecedent to a successful adjustment process, Branching Out was a key component of a newcomer successfully transitioning through the Newcomer-to-Member model.

Primarily for Blank Canvas newcomers, Branching Out and then Consolidation are the mechanisms through which individual relationships are created and formalized. In other words, these are the processes that lead a newcomer towards the initial

interpersonal relationships that satisfy their need to belong. A newcomer's initial decision on where in the community to Branch Out has important long-term implications. Fang, Duffy, and Shaw (2010) found that a newcomer's ability to access social capital through their developing networks is significantly related to newcomer learning and integration into the larger community. Likewise, Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) stated the initial relationships that newcomers form with peers in the developing networks are fundamental to learning about their role in the larger organization and organizational rules and customs. Deciding which communities to Branch Out into has a lasting impact on an individual's learning process in the community and the likelihood they persist long-term. Newcomers often rely more on interpersonal sources like friends, peers, or mentors for learning about the organization more so than nonsocial sources like official organizational documents, seminars, or orientations (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). As a consequence, recognizing that subcommunal involvement determines which members influence a newcomer's learning may help organizations better socialize their new members.

Finally, the existence of two different starting points for newcomers in the Initial Entry Phase adds an important element to the discussion of newcomer adjustment and student development. Astin's (1970, 1991) well-known I-E-O model includes a number of inputs, such as demographic information, family background, and academic experiences, that impact how that students changes, learns, and develops during their time on campus. Yet, the Newcomer-to-Member model suggests that the presence or lack of an existing network of interpersonal relationships deserves recognition as one of the prominent factors affecting the initial stages of newcomer experience. Since Blank Canvas newcomers and Pre-Existing Network newcomers arrive with very different available resources, the experience of a newcomer is largely dependent on which specific

stage they enter the community through. Models predicting student development and the newcomer experience should include the existence of lack of pre-existing networks as an important input characteristic.

Models of newcomer adjustment in organizational socialization similarly lack explicit mentioning of the impact pre-existing networks play in the newcomer experience. Bauer et al. (2007) and Saks et al. (2007) provided the most comprehensive models of newcomer adjustment, and neither discusses the impact pre-existing networks might have on the newcomer experience. Interestingly, there is strong evidence that initial network structures have long-term impacts on new employees, supporting the notion of different experiences of Blank Canvas and Pre-Existing Network newcomers as stated in the Newcomer-to-Member model. Gibbons and Olk (2003), for example, found that newcomers are likely to become friends with other newcomers who similar starting network positions and Burt (2005) found that initial network structure significantly impacted how interpersonal ties form and dissolve over time. So while there is foundational knowledge that initial networks affect the newcomer experience and development of interpersonal relationships, the newcomer adjustment literature has largely failed to acknowledge that the presence or absence of an existing networks leads to very different newcomer adjustment experiences.

The benefit from the dichotomy between Blank Canvas and Pre-Existing Network newcomers is realizing that these two different types of newcomers exist and each group requires a different combination of socialization tactics or programmatic interventions to help them successfully transition into the community. There may be certain contexts where organizations might prefer one type of newcomer to the other, but such a distinction was beyond the scope of this research. Rather, the important finding from differentiating newcomers based pre-existing network is the realization that recognizing



that these differences exist and tailoring organizational strategies designed to help newcomers to fit both pathways of the newcomer experience.

The Newcomer-to-Member model was derived from the told experiences of the research participants throughout their first two years in the Central community. Much of the specific processes within the framework are supported by existing research in a number of fields, yet there are important nuances from the Newcomer-to-Model that augments how researchers view the community development process and specifically the process through which newcomers join communities as presented and discussed throughout this chapter. The preceding discussion of the Newcomer-to-Member model fulfills the first goal of this research – to develop a substantive theory explaining the underlying processes through which newcomers join existing communities. Consequently, the following chapters are designed to address the second research objective and explore the role that sport fanship plays in assisting newcomers through the Newcomer-to-Member model.

## **Chapter 6: Fans or Friends? Sport Fanship and the Newcomer Experience**

While the previous chapters discussed the general experience of newcomers joining communities and introduced the Newcomer-to-Member model, this chapter and the following chapter explicitly address the second stated research objective of this dissertation by exploring if sport fanship can assist in the newcomer adjustment process. Similar to the presentation of data in Chapter 4, this chapter is presented in accordance with grounded theory, using the experiences of the newcomers as sport fans (or non-fans) of the intercollegiate athletic teams at Central, nicknamed the Bulldogs to protect the anonymity of the research setting. Rather than a dynamic process with distinct stages and phases, the newcomers' experiences and accounts of their relationship and involvement with sport fanship are presented in four distinct themes. Each of these themes is strongly supported in the data as the ways in which sport fanship affected the newcomer adjustment period. The remainder of the chapter will present the data supporting each of the following four themes regarding the role of sport fanship for the newcomers (Figure 6.1): 1) Early Form of Involvement; 2) Meaningful Individual Connections; 3) Promotion of Ambassadors; and 4) Identity Negotiation. Each theme is discussed within the various phases and stages of the Newcomer-to-Member framework proposed in the previous chapter where the theme was most prevalent. Additionally, a more critical examination of the limitations of sport fanship will follow the presentation of the four themes. Chapter 7 contains a thorough discussion of themes and data presented in this chapter.

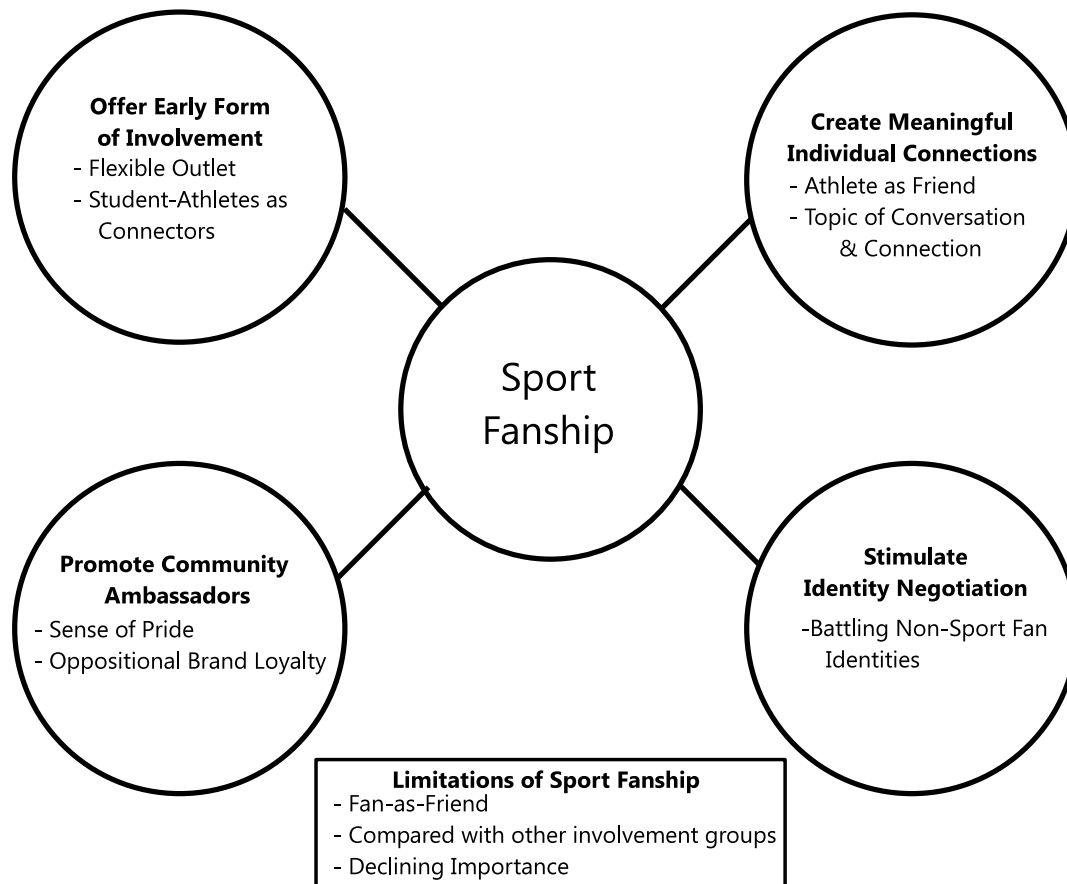


Figure 6.1: Sport Fanship and Newcomer Adjustment Model

### **SPORT FANSHIP AS AN EARLY FORM OF INVOLVEMENT**

When the research participants were asked about the role of sport fanship on campus or in their individual lives, the most prominent response involved the importance of fanship as early and flexible form of campus involvement for newcomers. Using the newcomers' reported difficulties becoming involved in the campus community discussed in the Newcomer-to-Member model, the most salient theme from the data suggests the ability of sport fanship to create easily visible subcommunities for the newcomers. Primarily, these early and visible subcommunities affected the newcomer experience in

two distinct ways: 1) by offering a flexible outlet for early involvement in the community; and 2) the early formation of student-athlete subcommunities.

### **Flexible Outlet for Early Involvement**

The most important and salient impact of sport fanship on the experiences of the research participants was the capacity of fanship to serve as an outlet for early and flexible involvement in the larger community. As Blank Canvas newcomers transitioned from the Initial Entry phase into the Developing Membership phase, the driving goal was to find a means of involvement within the larger community. For many, the initial process of finding this involvement was an overwhelming and stressful experience. Alex, for instance, explained that his struggle with finding involvement was sifting through the multitude of opportunities to find something tailored specifically for his wants and needs:

I didn't really like the fraternity scene. I went to Rush events and I did all of that. I just didn't really like the fraternities. I didn't really want to do one of those volunteer organizations. I hadn't pinpointed that I was going to be a business major, so I didn't know that the professor business fraternity seemed like a good decision. But you know what? There are lots of small clubs at Central. I'm looking for something that provides some opportunities for good things academically but more importantly lets you meet people as well. And I just didn't really find exactly what I was looking for.

Since Alex struggled to find exactly what he was looking for in terms of involvement, he was uneasy making the necessary time commitment expected of many social groups or clubs on campus. Alex spoke often about "convenience" issues making his Branching Out process more difficult in terms of initially finding involvement:

I've got other things going besides finding a club. If not's not convenient for me, than I'm not going to join. If I'm doing something else, I'm working on something else, or I'm hanging out with someone else, I'm not going to drop all of that and take time out of my day for some group that I wasn't all that sure about to begin with.

Alex's concern with convenience was intrinsically related to struggling with time management during his transition into college, and Alex was not alone in this struggle. One of the more common responses to the newcomers' struggles in college involved some aspect of time management. Matt, for instance, indicated that his second year in college was much easier than his initial few months of campus, providing this explanation:

I have a lot better sense of how to manage time and I understand how the everyday flow here goes. When I was a freshman, I had to make adjustments everyday and get used to things here and change how I did things everyday. Whereas now, this year, I know how thing are going to work. I get to my classes and know the general idea of how college is going to work. It took me probably a full semester to really figure out college. My whole freshman year was spent figuring out time management.

Matt's sentiment is representative of the experiences of many community newcomers. Many routinely cited time management as the single greatest challenge a newcomer faced in their early adjustment process and was thus became an important barrier preventing the newcomer from increasing their involvement in the community.

Sport fanship provided the newcomers with a form of communal involvement that required little time commitment and allowed the newcomers their desired flexibility. Several indicated that fanship became a means of involvement, affirming that it assisted

them in creating relationships and finding a direct connection towards the larger community. David, for instance, explained how fanship helped him meet new people early in his newcomer transition:

Just being out by the field watching, you're being with people you don't necessarily know well. You're with people that you haven't spent a ton of time with. Especially upperclassmen, we haven't spent a ton of time with them. But being together out by the field and finding ways to spend time together, having those conversations with people that you wouldn't be able to have otherwise. Being out there kind of forces you in a way to be together in a group and spend time together with people you otherwise wouldn't.

For many of the newcomers, sport fanship evolved from simply an activity to meet others and soon became a unique form of connecting with others. As a flexible outlet, it often allowed them the opportunities to work around busy schedules and their reluctance to undertake long-term time commitments with groups or clubs.

The notion of fanship as a distinct type of connecting was prevalent among the participants. In their discussion of fanship, several newcomers reiterated that fanship not only led to a deeper participation in the larger community but also was itself a type of involvement. Rachel offered the following explanation:

If someone's a fan of our athletics, she's probably going to attend the sports games, probably going to meet more people. And anytime she gets out into the community and does something active, I think it's going to improve her life and her experience. So by being a fan of athletics it means she's going to be more involved and that's going to have a positive impact on her life, on her experience here. People find involvement here in all sorts of different ways, being a fan of our sports teams is a pretty easy one.

Similarly, David spoke of sport fanship as a means for involvement as well:

For the people here who care about the sports teams, care about the players on the team, or just care about sports in general, being a fan is their way of feeling like they're a part of the Central community and their way of supporting the school and coming together. Supporting the teams, being a fan, that's their way and their preference of supporting and involving themselves in their community.

Finally, Christine expressed the same connection between sport fanship and community involvement when asked what she believed the purpose of having sport on campus was:

It's all about community involvement. The community, that's what it's supposed to improve on. That's the whole point, to try and get those uninvolved people to be a further part of the community.

As these three quotes indicate, sport fanship was viewed as a form of involvement. Yet merely attending sport matches and games did not lead directly this. Rather, newcomers found involvement through sport fanship by developing a connection with others through cheering together, caring about the teams together, and experiencing the games together.

An important component of the fanship as involvement theme was the difference between newcomers' "active" and "passive" sport fanship. This was an important distinction, as only "active" participation as a sport fan was viewed as a means for involvement in the campus community. Consider the following explanation by Stacy:

For some people, caring about the sport teams is only kind of a negligible responsibility. It's so small that it can be kind of ignored. It's something you can concern yourself with as a bystander, not having to be an active participant in it. But for others, they actively care about the teams by being involved in them, going to cheer, looking at the score, being aware of what's going on, seeking information and talking to people about the games.

Yet Stacy was not the only newcomer to differentiate between active and passive fans. Patrick also explained the difference between the two:

If you like the team but just have a general sense of benevolence towards the individual members of the team, that's good but it's not active. In my mind, that's different than being actually emotionally invested in each of the athletes individually and the team in general. So you can want a group of people to do well, but if you're not really invested and involved, you're not going to have any emotional investment into each of the athletes or the team. To me, those are very different things.

Finally, Farrin explained the difference between active and passive fans by comparing Central fans with those at State University:

At State U, they have a great athletic program, but as a fan I wouldn't be able to participate in it. There's so many people there, so many students and alumni and fans that it's just really big and I didn't want an experience like that. You just feel like everyone's a little ant in a giant anthill. It just feels scary. It's different here. When you go watch a game, you feel like you're actually a part of it, participating in it.

Contrasting fanship at Central with State U is explored more deeply later in this chapter, but Farrin's statement illustrates that many of the newcomers viewed fanship as an active phenomenon, one in which they were more than merely spectators.

In the Newcomer-to-Member model, finding involvement was a matter of Branching Out and sport fanship was an effective type of involvement for accomplishing this important newcomer task. Many of the newcomers indicated that sport fanship served as a bridge towards other subcommunities and individuals within the community. Leah spoke of developing relationships with other fans while cheering and supporting the



teams. When asked if she ever made new friends or connections through sport fanship, Leah offered this response:

Probably a surprising amount. I think that a lot of the meeting people come after the game, too. When the soccer players run to the sidelines for example, and your friend says 'good job' to one of the players. Afterwards, that player comes up to you and your friend says 'oh hey, this is Leah. She thought you played really well, too' or something like that. Whatever sport it may be, that types of things happen. I think that's gotten more prevalent as the semester has gone on, just because there have been more games and more opportunities.

While Leah spoke of meeting new individuals through sport fanship, others spoke of involvement through fanship connecting multiple subcommunities. After attending her first football game, Katie provided this commentary:

It was really interesting. Most of the friends of the athletes all sat together, on the right side of the bleachers. The band people were there, the frat people were there, and there was the one really quirky group that I didn't know. And then the 'cool' kids were up front. And there were random students, like students not involved in any of those groups, just sitting with them also. There were upper classmen, freshman, cool kids, all sitting together. It was funny. It was entertaining to me. You never see those groups together, never see them all interacting.

Katie's comments indicate that sport fanship was one of the mechanisms on campus through which the various subcommunities on campus connected. If only for a short period of time, Katie's surprise at seeing the assorted subcommunities in one place indicates how unusual of a situation that was to her.

The consequence of sport fanship was an increased sense of integration and community for the newcomers. Just as the Branching Out process in general led to

outcomes related to belonging, sport fanship was a particularly effective early form of involvement. Consider the following comment by Leah relating sport fanship to an increased belonging for the newcomers:

Some students just gradually go ‘wow – I really like this class. I feel really comfortable here.’ Others feel really comfortable as they start to see more people in the cafeteria that they know. You start to realize there’s a lot of people you know, and understand how people connect with everyone since it’s a very close community. For others, you go to a sports game and you see people cheering for Central and just start to feel like you belong there. You feel like a part of the community. Some people found a club, a fraternity, whatever. Others got really involved in cheering and supporting the sport teams.

Likewise, Melissa explained how fanship provided a mechanism for becoming immersed in the larger campus community:

It depends on the student, but I would say sports serve to bring people together here. They definitely call to the student body and the community as a whole, because there are so many people involved in them. And so many different people, who like sports and want to support the team, support the school, or both.

Sport fanship was an important part of the newcomer adjustment process. Many of the newcomers expressed difficulty in finding commonalities and connections between the multitude of interests, hobbies, and background among their fellow newcomers. Sport fanship provided an important bridge for the research participants and afforded a platform for the diverse newcomers to connect on some commonality stronger than simply attending the same institution. The participants consistently described fanship as a more complex entity, as it consisted of more than merely attending games. They conceptualized it as developing an attachment to the teams consistent with involvement

in other groups or subcommunities on campus. Fanship was described as an active phenomenon powerful enough to serve as a newcomers' initial involvement into the larger campus community.

### **Athlete Subcommunities: Student-Athletes as Connectors**

Though this research did not explicitly examine the experiences of student-athletes specifically, many of the research participants spoke in great detail of the role student-athlete subcommunities played in their experiences as newcomers. As discussed earlier, sport teams were the most popular example of pre-existing networks and subsequently had a profound effect on the newcomer experience of athlete and non-athletes alike. Early in their adjustment process, newcomers quickly recognized that student-athlete subcommunities impacted the larger campus community due to the mere size of the student-athlete population. Patrick, in a statement representative of several other participants, said the following:

Pretty early on I realize, 'okay, there's clearly a pretty good percentage of student-athletes.' I think someone told me it's like 30 percent, which strikes me as being enormous. So it's a big deal on campus simply because so many people are involved in it. And they all take it very seriously. So I think the campus as a whole takes athletics seriously because everyone's going to know at least one person who plays a sport. So it's not just something going on in the background. It's something that you know is going on.

Given that student-athletes comprised a substantial percentage of the campus community population, the fact that student-athletes often entered the community as Pre-Existing Network newcomers ensured that student-athlete subcommunities would influence the experiences of all community newcomers.

For newcomer David, finding a single connection within a particular student-athlete subcommunity greatly affected his initial experience in the community. When asked about his first weeks on campus, David explained with whom he spent most of his time:

Usually my suitemates and a lot of the soccer guys. I like hanging out with them actually. They even said I'm basically an honorary member of the soccer team because I hang out with them so much...They're really good kids, and it's really cool to hang out with them and listen to them go through their season. It's nice to part of a really good group of guys, go out with them, and eat with them, all of that stuff.

For David, the existence of the student-athlete subcommunity allowed him to find an early group of friendships and connections to help his transition into the larger community. In David's example, it was the student-athlete subcommunity that allowed the non-athlete to find a pre-existing network. More common, however, was the student-athlete serving as a connector between his pre-existing network subcommunity and another group of individuals in the community. Katie explained it as a transitive phenomenon, referring to these particular student-athletes as important "connectors" in the larger community:

Most of the student-athletes have other groups of friends as well, besides just their teammates. It's funny, because their groups mix together, the team plus the other friends. So they'll have three or four people from the team and then members of their groups of friends outside the team. So they'll have friends inside and outside of the team together in one group...but not all the student-athletes do this. Usually it's just the connectors in the athletic groups. You've got a few really nice connectors that have both their student-athlete friends and the other social groups

on their side, and they bring them together. You've got all these connectors that are in sync with the larger community, and they play a part.

These student-athlete connectors served important roles in both the Branching Out Process and ultimately the Venn Diagramming process as well. Often times, it was student-athletes who caused the merging of multiple subcommunities and thus initiated the Venn Diagramming process. Consider the following story by Tommy:

We have two guys, let's call them Zach and Erich. In a nutshell, you've got this giant group that gets created from everyone here, and that's the Central community. But at the same time, all these various groups remain very separate. So when Zach and Erich meet, you've got Zach's side of the court and all his various groups, and then all of Erich's various people. For categorizing sake, we'll call them football athletes versus theatre kids. And those groups only meet because Zach and Erich meet. Zach doesn't know anyone else in the theatre group except Erich; Erich doesn't know any athletes except Zach. Yet because they became friends, the entire theatre group and football athletes met and became connected.

Though Tommy's example describes the student-athlete connector identical to the theatre group connector, the size and scope of the student-athlete subcommunities enhances the important role they play in the development of the larger campus community. In this particular research setting, sport teams were instrumental in promoting Venn Diagramming. As Figure 6.2 shows, sport teams were often the central player in the Venn Diagramming process, providing a point of connection between previously disconnected subcommunal groups.

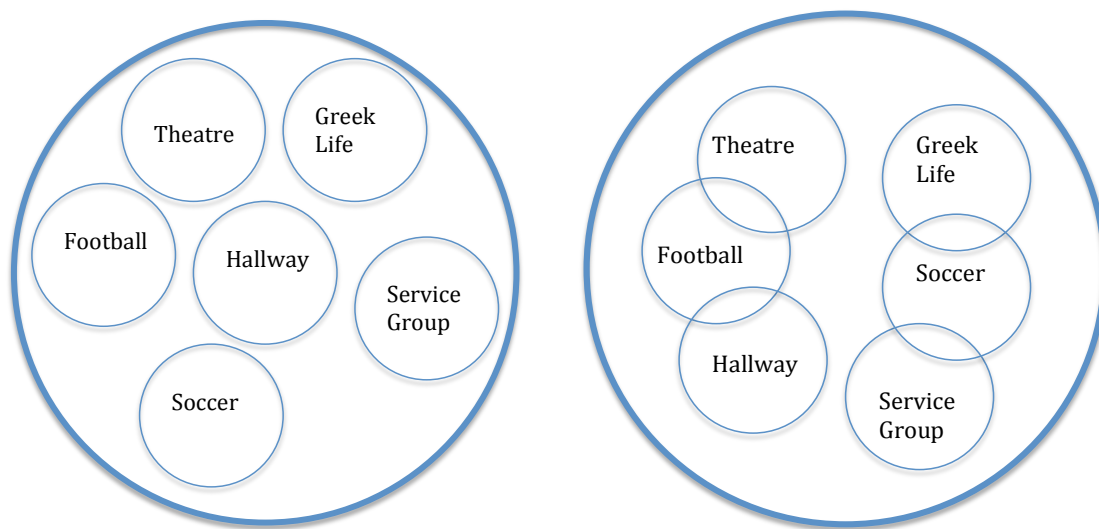


Figure 6.2: Sport and Venn Diagramming

Often times, student-athletes were able to fulfill the role of connector simply through participating in their sport. David, for instance, offered this story of how a single student-athlete’s participation in a sport connected a group of individuals:

My suitemate is a soccer player; he’s actually the only freshman starting on the team. We were going down to watch him play, and a lot of people went and got dinner before the game. It was funny because that was the first time I ate dinner with most of those people. I knew a lot of them, I had met them before; but because we all wanted to go watch my suitemate play, and he actually scored a goal in the game which was awesome, this whole big group ended up getting to know each other.

Sean told a similar story, one where friends of different student-athletes actually connected through the mutual support of their friend:

We went to watch our one friend play. It was our whole little group of friends. And we sat next to this other group there to support someone else on the team. By the middle of the game, we were both cheering for the other group's friend on the team, it was pretty cool. There was one person from our group who knew another person in the other group. And we connected from there. But that's as far as I got to see, because I only stood there and talked to the other group for a few minutes. But we were definitely all cheering together.

Student-athletes served as both active and passive connectors both. And because of the large number of student-athletes and the early formation of their networks, student-athlete subcommunities became important mechanisms in helping Blank Canvas newcomers find networks and relationships within the larger community. Attaching or joining a sport team subcommunity was often one of the early events in the transition from Blank Canvas to Branching Out. Additionally, the important role of student-athlete subcommunities remained into the Developing Membership Phase of the Newcomer-to-Member model, as student-athletes were often initiators of the Venn Diagramming process.

#### **FANSHIP AS A TOOL FOR MEANINGFUL INDIVIDUAL CONNECTIONS**

One of the most pressing tasks for newcomers was finding individuals with whom they could create friendships and relationships. Especially for Blank Canvas newcomers, the lack of existing connections often prevented the newcomers from satisfying their inherent need to belong. Thus the second significant role sport fanship played in the newcomer adjustment process was to provide newcomers a tool for the development of meaningful individual connections. In regards to the Newcomer-to-Member model, sport fanship promoted meaningful individual relationships most noticeably during the

transition from the Blank Canvas stage to the Branching Out stage. More specifically, sport fanship promoted meaningful individual connections in two distinct ways: 1) by providing a platform for student-athletes and non-athletes to enhance friendships; and 2) creating topics of conversation and connection for strangers to build new relationships.

### **Platform for Student-Athlete and Non-Athlete Friendships**

Perhaps the most salient theme throughout this research project was the notion that research participants did not differentiate between being fans of Central's sports team and being friends of the student-athletes. When the participants were asked about their relationship with the sport teams, the most prominent response conceptualized their relationship as one between the participant and their individual friends on the team. The anchor between the fan and the team was the individual student-athletes; the team itself was considered too abstract while the individual players were something more personal and concrete. Allison explained this differentiation between the team and her friends on the team:

To me, the team is kind of like an object. It's just kind of there. But it's filled with individuals, and I know those individuals. And I've gotten to know those individuals really well, so I care for the individual, not the team.

While Allison referred to the team as "object," Tyler spoke of finding a more immediate connection to the players rather than the team:

On a theoretical level, of course I want our teams to do well. It's my university and I want all the team to do well. But because I know someone on the team, it becomes a much more immediate thing. It's something I'm more familiar with, something more touchable and knowable I guess



For many newcomers, this was an important distinction between the players and the team. Sport fanship was often a way to support their friends playing on the team, rather than supporting the team or the university as some separate entity. When Mary was asked what the sport teams meant to her, she offered this explanation:

I'm not sure. That's a difficult question to answer because I don't think about the teams that much, so it's hard to say what the team means. I know some of the people in my dorm, in my hall, are on the football team, some of them are on the soccer team, some of them play volleyball, and a few do track. So for me, when you say Central sport teams, I think about those people playing. And those players bring meaning to it, because it's not just the Central track that I don't know anyone who is a part of it. Rather, I associate the team with the different people on it. I want to go out and support them, my friends, so in that regards the teams really mean the person that I'm supporting.

For Mary, fanship with a sport team was a means for supporting the individual players on the team. Accordingly, newcomers viewed fanship and often develop their fanship explicitly to enhance their relationships with student-athletes on the team.

Attendance, which newcomers felt was an important component of fanship, was often described as a vehicle for supporting their friends and enhancing those relationships. When asked about their motivations for attending games, the participants almost exclusively framed their responses in terms of supporting individual friends rather than supporting the team or university as some cohesive entity. Rachel, for instance, stated the following for why she attended certain sports and not others:

For me, if I have a good friend who plays a sport I will go and watch and support them. But if I don't know anyone on our volleyball team, I'm not going to just find out when the volleyball team is playing and go just for the sake of watching

volleyball. I would only go if I want to support people. I'm the type of person that would make signs, scream people's name obnoxiously, and let them know that I'm there to support them. But I only do that if I have friends on the team.

Rachel's statement that her attendance decisions were ultimately a function of her friendships with players on the team was echoed by many of her peers as well. Consider the following conversation with Morgan:

Interviewer: Have you attended any games this semester?

Morgan: Yes. I've got to one game.

Interviewer: What game did you go to?

Morgan: It was my roommates' game. It was just a volleyball game. Not sure who they played, not sure if they won. I just went to watch her.

Christine told a similar story of the one game she had attended so far that semester:

We actually have a girl in my pledge class and she's a cheerleader. And she cheers for the basketball team, so everybody went to go support her. We went to the basketball game, but ended up watching and cheering for her and the rest of the cheerleaders more.

The examples of Morgan and Christine are typical of what most of the participants expressed. For many, it was impossible to communicate a distinction between acting as a friend of the student-athletes and a fan of the team. Their role as a fan was intrinsically tied to their role as a friend to the student-athletes on the team.

Interestingly, even those newcomers who identified strongly as sport fans, played sports in high school, or even played sports at Central spoke similarly about fanship as a way to support friends. Patrick, a cross county runner, offered this explanation of cheering for friends versus the team as a whole:

In general, I think knowing people on the teams here just make you all the more interested in how they do because it's a much more personal thing. It becomes more about your friends doing well in addition to the team doing well, as opposed to just the team doing well. Really, you're there for your friends to do well.

In light of his own participation as a student-athlete, it is interesting that Patrick also connected fanship at Central to supporting individual friends. Similarly, after Meredith told of her life-long involvement in basketball and that she had attended several women's basketball games, she was asked if her former participation in the sport caused her to feel more connected to the women's basketball team:

Uhh no. I don't. I really loved basketball my freshman and sophomore year of high school, but my junior and senior year I played it and went to practices and worked hard but kind of fell out of love with the sport. So it's pretty much equal with any other sport. I have more ties to other sports here where I know someone on the team. So I am tied to the women's basketball team because my roommate is on that team and I want her to do well. She is going to start so I'm going to support her and support the team because of her.

And even David, who called himself a "huge" sports fan, felt more connected to the teams because of his friendships with players rather than his attachment to the sport or team itself:

I'm going to attend a lot of sporting games anyway just because I like watching sports, and I've always watched sporting events all my life. And just going to those games is something fun to do. But I think the fact that I know people on the teams will give me more incentive to go to more games – as many as I can. Knowing the people playing makes me feel that way. And also, part of going is to kind of let people know that we're going to their games to support them.

Even for newcomers with an attachment to the sports itself, the newcomers' relationship with the players on the team was the more prominent connection. In many ways, sport teams became symbolic not of the university or the larger community but rather a reflection of the individual student-athletes on the team. Consequently, one's attachment as a fan was a function of one's relationship with the specific student-athletes on the team.

When it came to discussing winning versus losing, the relationship between fan and friend remained prominent in the participants' responses. When Meredith was asked if she cared whether or not the Central teams won or lost, she gave this response comparing the team with her roommate on the team:

I guess I always will want the team do well, but there is an additional hope that she does well. Obviously being a player, so to her, it is more important that the team do well rather than the individual. But for me, for the roommates and friends, I am always going to hope that she has a good game. I care more about that than if the team wins.

Alex spoke of even more boldly of preferring his friends to do well rather the team itself succeeding:

I obviously want to see my one friend do well. So I want the teams that have my friends on them do better than the other teams here. But I don't know, for me it's more about the friends doing well. It's more about the people you know or the acquaintances you've made doing well rather than identifying with the school as much.

As a final example, Melissa gave the following explanation when asked if sport teams winning mattered to her:

If I were invested in the team, like when I know players on the team and have a person connection with them, I would want them to win. So that they would have moments to remember, which sounds incredibly silly, but I'd rather them have good memories versus bad memories. But if I had friends on the team, then I would feel a connection with them and think 'I hope they do well, you know, win the next game.'

Preferring that one's friends accomplish goals rather than the team itself is another example of how the newcomers viewed their relationship with teams more from the perspective of friend than fan. The outcome of the newcomer's role as friend and fan was increased friendships with the student-athletes on the team. It is important to note, the participants were very clear that there was nothing special or extraordinary about being friends with student-athletes. The participants did not view student-athletes any different from other community members; a friendship with a student-athlete was the same as a friendship with a non-athlete. Nonetheless, the newcomers' actions as friends and fans helped them develop friendships in the community at a time in the newcomer adjustment process when making new friends was often difficult.

As part of the fan-as-friend concept, newcomers often used fanship as a means for supporting their friends and ultimately developing stronger relationships. Patrick, a cross-country runner, was asked whether seeing his friends supporting him during competition had any impact on their relationship:

Yeah, I'd definitely say so. It strengthens my relationship with the person who came to see me run. Even the person who just asks me how I did, that strengthens my relationship with them also just because they're going out of their way to say something to me, to support me.

Nicholas, a non-athlete, offered his perspective on the idea of making a friend simply by watching them play and cheering for them:

I think it could happen. But they'd have to probably put in some work outside of just cheering for them. And it would probably have to continue afterwards, you know, just passing by the athlete and say something like 'I saw your game, you did really well.' And the athlete response with just a simple 'oh, thanks.' That kind of little thing can boost you from just kind of an acquaintanceship to an actual friendship.

As the comments by Nicholas and Patrick show, there were important outcomes for the newcomers achieved through the fanship. Student-athletes were a substantial part of the campus community, roughly 30% of the total campus population, so using fanship to develop relationships with individuals in the student-athlete subcommunities helped ease the newcomer struggle of difficulties finding and cultivating early relationships.

### **Topics of Conversation for Strangers to Build Relationships**

While the previous section detailed the theme that fanship enhanced relationships between student-athlete and non-athletes, fanship also offered newcomers a topic of conversation between multiple non-athletes as well. Newcomers, especially Blank Canvas newcomers, often lacked something larger or more powerful than merely their relationship with the school to serve as a connection between newcomers. Because attending the same educational institution was insufficient to establish meaningful relationships for most newcomers, several participants noted that fanship provided an additional connecting point to create new relationships or bridge beyond their existing networks. More specifically, fanship served as a topic of conversation for strangers to build relationships. Allison commented that embracing the Central sport teams had a

profound impact on her ability to meet new people in the community. When asked if fanship made her feel more connected to the larger campus community, she provided this response:

It definitely makes me feel more connected to more people in the Central community. Because some people really love our soccer team regardless of whether they're on the team or not, or regardless of whether they know anyone on the team. In a sense, if I'm supporting the soccer that gives me more connections with more people in the Central community.

After this explanation, Allison was asked whether this type of additional connection through sports had actually occurred during her time at Central. Allison insisted that it had, offering this example:

There's an acquaintance in class that I sit next to, this girl Sarah. And it's mostly just we talk; say 'hi, how's it going' type of stuff. But when you go to a sporting event and you're cheering on your team, because you have to when you're there, you can't just sit there and not cheer together. That cheering, that's something else for us to talk about, something in common to talk about. And for us, that helps form a connection that became the basis of a relationship.

Allison's example demonstrates that fanship as a topic of conversation served as an anchor on which a new relationship was built. Many of Allison's peers agreed that fanship had the potential for creating relationships among strangers. Hailey told this story of fanship starting a relationship among strangers;

I was in the hallway, and I saw the promotion of the games with flyers that the players stick up in the dorms. And you realize that 'hey, that's my friend on this time, I should go watch' or 'hey, his is really cool I should go.' And then you turn to the other person in your hallway, even if you're not real close with them, and

ask if they want to come with. And it turns into a group thing because nobody likes to go anywhere alone. And because we all knew the athletes from our hall, we all end up going as a group.

Finally, Leah provided the most explicit explanation of fanship as a topic of conversation and ultimately a creator of new friendships. After Leah recounted a story of the students living in her hallway supporting a student-athlete, she offered this response to why the group attended the game together:

It's kind of funny, because it's the same kind of idea as a freshman just going around and meeting someone new through somebody else that they know. It's this continuous chain of meeting people. And so often someone says, 'hey my really good friend Nicky is on the basketball team. I really want to go support her.'" And then that person asks somebody else to go with them, even someone they might not know well, because it's awkward just standing there cheering. So then you go and end up getting to meet this new person, get to know them, and then you make plans to go the next game too. So it just kind of moves on in that way.

The similarity between Leah and Hailey's accounts are telling in that both participants indicate the power of fanship to serve as a connector between strangers. Ultimately, both gave explicit examples of using fanship to meet fellow community members they otherwise might not have met or developed a relationship with.

Though Leah, Hailey, and Allison provided accounts of their actual experiences with fanship leading to new relationships, their testimonies are among a small minority of the participants that had real examples of such occurring. Rather, the majority of participants spoke of meeting new friends through fanship as more of a hypothetical idea; most said they believed it was possible or even likely, but could not offer a concrete



example from their experiences. Farrin, for example, discussed fanship as a conversation for building relationships only in hypothetical terms:

The community is what supports every sport. You show up, you cheer, you're proud of them because they're your team. You just support them anyway that you can. And because of that support, you meet other people there who care about the team as well. It becomes a shared base to work off of; something to talk about, something to help you move forward.

Farrin was unable to recount any actual examples from her experiences, but was adamant it was possible. Other participants noted they knew friends who had met other friends via fanship as a topic of conversation, but few claimed to have experienced such new relationships first-hand.

Some of the newcomers viewed fanship as a common interest, something beyond merely a topic of conversation, for all those in the community to identify with. Although the larger community was relatively homogenous in terms of age and background, many of the newcomers spoke of a wide spectrum of social diversity within the community. Newcomers often mentioned the vast differences between those individuals who identified with the fraternities or sororities, the arts department, the music departments, and the vast multitude of other social identities developed within the larger community. Discussing sports teams was the only proposed example of a topic that unified individuals from the various social groups. As Katie explained, the largest impact of sport teams and sport fans in the larger community was the unifying ability of supporting the teams together. When asked about the impact of sport on campus, Katie stated the following:

In my mind sports are for a sense of community and unity, you know? To gather all these people, all the different stereotypes on campus, in one place to cheer for

one team and hope we win, together as one. That's really how I see it. That how I see sport on campus. A bunch of people from all the different groups that get together to get to know each other and support that one cause, that's winning here. For individuals with little commonality besides their dedication to education and their attendance at the same school, fanship provided an effective platform for socially diverse individuals to connect and unite.

### **SPORT FANSHIP AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING AMBASSADORS**

Once newcomers had transitioned into the Full Membership Phase of the Newcomer-to-Member model, the most salient role of sport fanship was the promotion of community ambassadors. Because sport fanship aided the newcomers in developing more meaningful connections, both with individual community members and the community as a whole, the result of sport fanship was the development of community ambassadors. Specifically, sport fanship promoted ambassadors in two distinct ways: 1) by increasing the newcomers' sense of pride with the overall community; and 2) developing a sense of oppositional brand loyalty.

#### **Sense of Pride**

Many of the research participants who identified as fans of the Central sport teams cited the important role their fanship played in developing a sense of pride with the larger community and university. More specifically, several newcomers commented that through sport fanship they were most effectively and efficiently able to conceptualize, internalize, and communicate their pride in their school. Beyond wearing school sweatshirts and other university merchandise, newcomers consistently noted that supporting their sport teams was the optimal method for both developing and expressing

their sense of pride for the school. David, for instance, offered the following answer when asked what the role of the sport teams on campus was:

I think the teams are a big part. Being a small school, everybody goes to the sport events sooner or later. Most people take can pride in the school somewhat based on its academics, but more so on athletic success...I think winning keeps the community up in a positive light all the time and bring people together. Like our soccer games, they get huge crowds, and football and baseball too. They bring everybody together and contribute to that cool social environment for a small school.

Most significantly, David recognized that through athletics community members were able to take pride in belonging to the Central community. Similarly, Meredith spoke of the role sport fanship played in developing her own sense of pride with Central:

Even though we are a smaller school that is not Division I, it still draws us together. We still have a lot of passion in our teams and a lot of pride in our school. And I think athletics definitely helps with that, athletics definitely helps with that. I just think that athletics helps us have pride in our school, so I think the point of having athletics here is that pride comes from it.

Finally, Rachel also discussed the relationship between cheering for Central sport teams and developing a sense of pride with the community as a whole:

Even if I have nothing to do with the game, I still go to Central and that one connection to the players on the team, even though I didn't play or whatever, I still have that connection to the team itself. So in a sense, that connection with the team gives me a common identity with Central. And that becomes a source of pride for sure.

Rachel's comments are indicative of a larger trend among the participants, who consistently noted that sports and sport fanship provided community members the best platform through which to develop and express their sense of pride in their university. That sport provided such an outlet is especially pertinent given that many of the newcomers spoke of lacking other suitable options for conveying their university pride.

Several participants commented on the lack of public displays of pride within the community. Interestingly, their observations were usually framed as a matter of lacking ways to show one's pride rather than a lack of pride overall. Consider this comment from Katie, who after explaining how she used fanship as a means for expressing her pride stated how many others lack such a means of expression:

I think people here need a cause. They're not just going to get together for any reason. Some people, different stereotype groups, they need a common cause. And this is how I see it: through supporting a common cause like Central's sport teams, that's how we can build community here. People get behind the one cause, people tell their neighbor next to them 'lets do this!' And you get to know everybody around you, and that's the kind of community I wish we had more of here, and I think it's achievable. That's what I always do that, when I'm around campus, meet new people and hope somebody will pick up on my vibe and do it to others so we can be stronger together.

The optimism underlying Katie's comments speak to the potential of fanship in this particular community to provide a spark in increasing community pride and a platform through which to express such pride. Michael echoed Katie's comments and described sport as a complimentary activity to the academic mission of the university:

We have sports to have something to bring the school together other than academics. You don't bring a school together just to about academics, to marvel

at your school's academic accomplishments all the time. You need something else, like how we can come together and watch a football game and show that there's more going on here, more than just academics. You need to have a lot of things going for you, and for us sports are important in being those other things.

Michael's comments describe the role of sport fandom in promoting a sense of pride as a mostly internal phenomenon. For Michael, supporting sport teams complimented the academic prestige that the community valued and helped those within the community find other points of attachment to develop a sense of pride with the university. Additionally, other participants described fandom in terms of helping community members express their pride in the university to individuals outside of the community.

For many newcomers, fandom provided an important subject to discuss and brag about to individuals outside the community. The success of sport teams and the community support offered to the teams was often described as an important point of conversation with potential students or outsiders looking at the university. Allison, who never described herself as an overly passionate sport fan, said in her opinion the importance of sports on campus to help her inspire others to join the community:

What's the purpose of sports here? So I can brag about Central. If someone, like a prospective student, asks me what Central is like and all I talk about is their academics or some of the social clubs that I'm in, that person may not be interested in those things, But if I say we have a good sports team, more people are more concerned with that.

Allison continued describing how she used the sport teams to communicate her pride in the university, and explained how she actually felt a responsibility to know enough about the sport teams in order to discuss them with outsiders. She continued:

If there's a football game where we're playing Rival College, I feel some kind of responsibility to know what happened. Not necessarily that I had to be there, but just to know things like did we in? Did we lose? Did we tie? What were some of the highlights? I just feel a responsibility to know those things in case some asks. If that's what someone else cares about, and they ask me, I need to be able to answer them.

Bailey also spoke of a responsibility to know about the sport teams in an explanation very similar to Allison's explanation:

I'm always concerned about who I was talking to you about Central. If I was talking to someone who's looking at Central because of the soccer program, because maybe they were soccer starts in high school and are thinking of playing here, I need to know. If I told them 'I don't really know' and couldn't offer any information, I feel like I would let them down in a way. And also, maybe that ruins their image of Central; maybe they wouldn't want to come here anymore and I'd feel awful about that.

Whether the newcomer viewed fanship as a means to develop pride, community pride, or part of their responsibility as a community ambassador, an important role of sport fanship in the community was through its relationship with individual pride in the university. Fanship was a part of the newcomers initially developing a pride and continued to play a role as their place in the community transitioned from newcomer to a full-member with more responsibilities as an ambassador to community outsiders.

### **Oppositional Brand Loyalty**

In terms of developing community ambassadors, sport fanship helped not only develop community pride but also to establish a sense of opposition brand loyalty. For

many of the newcomers, identifying the rivals of their community was initially a difficult task. Central, like many smaller institutions across the United States, has scores of potential academic rivals but rarely views them in competitive terms. After Rachel explained how she wanted Central to do better than other schools, she gave the following response to a follow-up question asking if Central has any rivals:

I think so. Maybe they have one main rival or something, I don't know. I'm not aware of any, but maybe they have one, they must. But I don't know who that would be.

Interestingly, while Rachel spoke earlier of her pride in the Central community, when explaining her lack of knowledge regarding a potential rival she referred to Central as "they" rather than "we." Newcomers like Rachel struggled to conceptualize oppositional brand loyalty in purely academic terms. Consider the following comment by Matt, who was asked about being a fan of the university ignoring the sports teams:

Anyone who wants Central to do well relative to other universities. So someone who wants to see Central succeed in whatever it is we're doing relative to other universities. So not just, 'I want them to do well in general' but more 'I want us to be better than other universities.' But it's odd thinking of that in academic terms. I guess a fan would want Central professors and academics to have accomplished things that other universities can't or don't accomplish? But that's hard to think about it.

Matt was clear about the importance of being "better" than one's peers, yet had difficulty conceptualizing that in purely academic terms. Rather, like most of his peers, Matt internalized the notion of bettering his rivals in strictly athletics terms. For Matt, Sport fanship was the most popular way for newcomers to develop and understand better their rivals and the notion of oppositional brand loyalty.

As newcomers began to develop oppositional loyalty through sport fandom, interestingly the first step did not involve Central College versus other similar institutions. Rather, the rivals of Central were conceptualized in terms of a more generalized small-college versus big-college structure. For example, Patrick explained fans of Central sports in terms of being different from big-time college sport fans:

I think sports at Central causes you to develop a different kind of fan. At State University, fans are more prototypical – they get drunk, go to games, are really loud and obnoxious and are super invested in how the teams does. They know all sorts of shit about the team, all these statistics, but they don't know the individual players. It's much more of a hypothetical team. They like this idea that they've constructed of what the team is. You can really say it's almost like they're just joining this cult of being a fan of State U sport fan. But here, you have a little bit of that sense that you're a part of a cult of fandom of our sports, but unlike at State U you actually know the people that are on the team. And so you have a different kind of emotional investment in how they do.

Patrick's sentiments that fans at Central are somehow the opposite of those at State University was strongly echoed by his peers as well. Often, the difference between the small-sport structure and the big-time sports structure was explained in terms of knowing the athletes. Just as Patrick called State U's sports "hypothetical teams" versus really knowing the athletes as Central, Sean offered a similar contrast between the two:

Because we're a small university, you're probably going to know the people on the sports team. They're not just some distant celebrity-like person. At State U, you might know how the star player is, you know he goes to the university, but you have ever seen him? Maybe. Have you ever talked to him? Probably not. He's just a concept really, a symbol of the sports teams. But at Central, you've almost



certainly run into the people that are on the teams. You're going to meet them and probably end up getting to know them a little bit. So it's going to be very different than at State U.

The difference noted by both Patrick and Sean is strongly related to the fan-as-friend theme discussed earlier. Because big-time sports presumably prevented fans from also being friends of the athletes, many of the newcomers spoke of this structure of college sport as being completely different from sports at Central. Interestingly, while discussions of Division I versus Division III sports are usually framed in terms of scholarships versus no-scholarships, or big stadiums versus smaller stadiums, the participants in this study more often cited the difference in personally knowing the student-athletes as the diverging features of the two sport structures.

Some newcomers extended the notion that Central sports were the opposite of State U's program. Rather than discussing the difference between fans of the two programs, newcomers like Nicholas explained the entire sports program at Central in terms of how it is different and better than at big-time programs:

You could say that at State U the sports just run everything. It's really just a giant sports complex, a football training camp, where athletes are just treated like kings rather than students. You can go on and on about Division I athletes and how they're treated. And so you could say 'I don't really like that, I'm not a fan of their athletics but I am a fan of the university.' At Central, student-athletes don't have that level of standing. Student athletes are not treated like kings, we don't have huge, huge, programs. So it would be unusual to really have a problem with our athletics because it's not like it is at State U.

Nicholas' comments used the perceived negatives of big-time athletics to frame Central's program in a more positive fashion. Alex used a similar strategy, yet he framed

oppositional brand loyalty in terms of a criticism of the larger-school structure beyond just athletics:

Sports are the way for people at big schools to feel community. Because they're not going to feel it if they're just going to their individual classes because they just see random people that are in those classes. But with sports, when they're experiencing something that everybody sort of goes to, everybody focuses on, then they can have that big community feel. We don't need that here, because, you see guys walking down the path and you know some of them. So you just don't go to sports to foster that community as much because, we don't need to. Because when you're at a small school, you're already in the community already.

Several of Alex's peers echoed this sentiment that fans at the larger schools needed sports to feel a part of the community while in Central's model sport fanship was merely a way to enhance the feeling of community already present. Sports seemed to be reflective of this larger phenomenon on campus where members belong and feel a part of something larger, rather than the driving force for small periods of belonging at State U. Consequently, the newcomers often felt a need to defend the small-school model when those more familiar with big-time sport criticized it, such as this example provided by Samantha:

Because we are a DIII school, all my other friends who go to big schools are like 'haha your team sucks.' And I'm constantly defending them and saying 'no.' You want to defend your honor, kind of, to your friends who go to State U or something with their big sports teams who are number one or whatever. They have some more brand recognition. And then I go from a huge high school to tiny sports teams, it's pretty clear that I'm not here for the sports teams. But I still defend our sports against State U's, and honestly I prefer it.

As Samantha's statement illustrates, new fans of Central's teams often supported the level of athletics in which Central participates, and in many ways that philosophy of intercollegiate athletics that Central's teams represent, in addition to simply hoping their teams won. In many ways, the development of oppositional brand loyalty against big-time athletics rather than on-court competitors was one of the first steps in the development of fans and brand ambassadors in general.

### **SPORT FANSHIP AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION**

As newcomers transitioned into the final stages of the Newcomer-to-Member process, one of the more surprising psychological processes that became apparent was the role sport fanship played in stimulating the process of identity negotiation. Namely, many of the newcomers found themselves actively negotiating between their prior social identities as "non-sport fans" and their increasing identification with their new community. Identity negotiation is an important process in the newcomer adjustment process, and the participants' experiences support the notion that sport fanship helped initiated this often-difficult process for many of the newcomers

#### **Battling Non-Sport Fan Identities**

When several of the participants were first asked about sports on Central's campus, there was an immediate rejection of the subject matter altogether. Whether they were asked their role of sport on campus, their perception of sports team, or simply asked to provide information about the sports teams, a handful of participants abruptly rebuffed any attempt to discuss the role of sport on campus. When the subject of sport was first posed to Christine, she responded with, "I'm a bad person to go to for this." Similarly, Melissa replied to the same interview prompt with, "I am not a good source of information for that topic." Likewise, Samantha responded with, "Do I have to? I

wouldn't even know enough to begin talking about it." The audacity and quickness with which these three participants dismissed sport as a discussion topic is indicative of the tone these particular newcomers used throughout most of their responses to sport prompts during the early stages of the Newcomer-to-Member model. Each of those three quotes took place during the first-round of interviews, only a few weeks into the newcomers stay in the community.

Over time, many of the self-described non-sport fans began to acknowledge that an emotional attachment to the sports at Central had slowly developed despite their existing social identities as non-sport fans. For Christine, this was the result of their individual friendships with student-athletes trumping their existing non-fan sentiments. Consider the following conversation between Christine and interviewer during her third semester on campus:

Christine: I just don't like sports. So I'm sarcastically like 'Yea, go Bulldogs, whatever.' But for the athletes, the people, you're good. I can't articulate it any further that.

Interviewer: So what's the difference between caring if Suzy does well versus caring if Suzy's team does well?

Christine: I guess if I were to truly care about Suzy and I put her emotions in there, fact that in, that I would want Suzy's team to do well also. So yes, by caring for Suzy I'm also caring about the teams. And I don't know why it's so important for me to specify that I don't actually care about the team itself.

Interviewer: You seem very defensive about that. How come?

Christine: You know, I don't know. I've just grown up around sports, and I've never cared for them. Honestly, I think the competitive nature in people is kind of alarming and I'm just not that into that. And I think it's fascinating that people

develop these loyalties and are really cutthroat about everything and some people follow college football for their entire lives. I think that's fascinating, and I can never remember experiencing it for myself because, I don't know, I'm missing that part of my brain.

Despite Christine's initial insistence that she was not a sport fan and her attachment to the team stopped with her friendship to Suzy, she ultimately concluded that she did care about the team. During this interview, it was very clear that Christine was negotiating her identity; hence when she even questioned why it was so important for her to call herself a non-sport fan. Ultimately, her dedication to Suzy as a friend and the larger Central community superseded her long-held identification and notion of not being a sport fan. Samantha similarly negotiated her identity as a non-fan during an interview.

While Christine discussed her growing identification as fan in terms of her friend, Suzy, Samantha experienced a similar negotiation of her non-sport identity but her negotiation was framed as something larger than a single friendship. After Samantha told a story of defending Central's sports teams to friends at big-time athletic institutions, Samantha tried to explain the contradiction between defending the teams and identifying as a non-fan:

I guess that I do care a little bit. I have to think about that one. I would never think about caring about sports immediately. Like to a random friend or someone else, when we're talking about our sports teams I would automatically said I don't really know, I don't really care that much. I guess I just say that because it's what I feel at the surface level, because I never think about it deeper.

Samantha recognized that her automatic rejection of knowing or caring about sports was deeply engrained in her identity and had become a habit, almost a programmed response. She had difficulty explaining why, or even understanding why herself, simply because

her identification as a non-sport fan had become an assumption. Melissa offered a similar explanation to Samantha's comments, yet Melissa was more cognizant of the growth and development of her fanship despite her initial resistance of the idea:

If someone asks me, 'do you care about Central sports? I'm always like 'no, I don't. I don't really care.' That's just what I stick to. I don't really care, but at the same time I'm starting to realize that the thing is, if you really love something than you love everything about it. Even the stuff that's not really that great or that you personally don't think is great. And I love it here, so I'm not sure my usual answer works anymore. I guess last year I didn't really understand or care that sports were a part of Central. And now that I see that they are a part, I now realize that I even though I don't really have personal connection to sports – I'm not on the 50-year line every game screaming – when I'm exposed to sports not I kind of sort of care. Even if I immediately say 'no' – the truth is I do care. That was a weird answer, I'm sorry.

There are several pertinent aspects to Melissa's comment. Like Samantha, Melissa recognized that her immediate rejection of knowing sports was somehow ingrained within her identity as a non-fan and had become an automatic response for her. Melissa recognized that as her love and attachment towards Central increased over time, she could not longer distance herself from Central's sports. For Melissa, it was unquestionably a case where her attachment to the university drove her increased connection with the sports rather than the other way, but Melissa's statements indicate that she reached the Critical Mass Loop noted in the Newcomer-to-Member model. Her commitment to Central had reached a point where she could no longer ignore any individual part of the larger community. In the case of Melissa, her identification with the

university forced her to renegotiate her non-sport fan identity, a new identity she was still struggling to understand.

In a final example of the sport fanship and identity negotiation, Morgan similarly rescinded her previous statements of knowing nothing and not caring about the sport teams. After repeatedly classifying herself as a non-sport fan, Morgan expressed that whether Central's team won or lost did matter to her:

Yes, I guess it does matters. It makes me proud to go here. It makes me happy for the people who are on the team and for the school as a whole. And because it kind of gets everybody jazzed up about our sport teams and our school. And, you know it just kind of creates a feeling of unity for a little while. So I would say that it matters, but it certainly doesn't have a great impact. But if I hear about it, sure, I'll be happy if we win for a few minutes. But I mean, because sports just aren't a big part of my life, it doesn't really affect me for that long when I hear about it.

Morgan's words demonstrate the conflict between those newcomers who identified as a non-sport fan, yet found themselves increasingly concerned with and affected by the Central sport teams. It is important to note that these conflicts only presented themselves during the third-round of interviews, which took place once the newcomer had participated in the community for a full-year. During the initial two-grounds of interviews none of the non-sport fans expressed any statements of contradiction or positive feelings towards the sport teams.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF SPORT FANSHIP**

While the previous sections have illustrated the various ways in which sport fanship assisted the research participants in their newcomer adjustment process, there are numbers of theme relating specifically to the limitations of sport fanship as a tool to assist

newcomers. The experiences of the newcomers leave no doubt that sport fanship was, in a multitude of ways, able to assist in their adjustment process; yet for some newcomers the impact of fanship was limited. The data presented in this section explore the limitations of fanship as a tool for assisting newcomers in their adjustment process.

### **Fan-as-Friend**

The fan-as-friend phenomenon was discussed thoroughly earlier as an important benefit of sport fanship in this particular context, yet for some of the newcomers this ultimately became a limitation later in their transition period. Many of the participants expressed that their initial fanship was marked by fan-as-friend, yet as they made more connections in the community and became more involved on campus, their fanship expanded beyond their particular student-athlete friends. But for a few of the participants, their attachment to individual student-athletes never transformed into any increased connection with the other members of the community or the university itself. Alysea, for instance, explained during her first semester that she attended sporting events only when her friends were playing. When she was asked during the third semester if her allegiance ever grew beyond her individual friends, she responded:

No, not really. Not for the team themselves as a whole. For my individual friends on the team, I do feel a responsibility to support them and go watch. But not for the team, no.

Similarly, Bailey explained that she only cared if sport teams won when her friends were on the team. Even in her fourth semester, she still felt the same way:

I care that her team wins because it's important her and she's my friend. So if she said 'I did well,' that's a lot different for me than just the team doing well. When it's her doing well, that's great and I'm really happy for her. Whereas if Central



just did well in general, it's kind of like 'uhh ok that's great, go Central [sarcastic].' But it's that personal connection with her that really warrants a better or more excited response from me. Not simply because Central won.

As the comments by Alysea and Bailey indicate, not all of the fan-as-friend attachments developed into something more meaningful in terms of the larger community. With a more meaningful attachment resulting from the initial fan-as-friend sentiment, fanship offered little assistance to Alysea and Bailey in terms of finding involvement or meaning in the larger community.

Moreover, when the fan-as-friend never developed into something larger the individual attachment to the team remained fragile and weak. Without an additional bridge to sport team besides a single friend, the newcomer's relationship with the teams was invariably dependent on that single friendship. Because friendships, especially among newcomers, are dynamic relationships, there were several newcomers whose attachment as a fan was disrupted by changes in specific friendship dynamics. Katie, for instance, spoke of how changes in her relationship with her friends on the soccer team affected her attachment as a fan:

I liked our soccer team freshman year, I really did. They did great as a team, had great teamwork, won a lot of games, it was really awesome. This year, I simply don't care for them. The guys aren't as nice as they used to be, they're not inviting everyone to the games anymore, and most of all they're not as involved with the community as they used to be. They're just not as nice to people in general anymore. And once I noticed this, I immediately said 'no more, I'm out.' I haven't been to a game since; I'm not even sure how they're doing this year. I really don't care anymore.

While Katie's disrupted connection through fanship was a result of her purging from a failed friendship, other newcomers lost their attachment from the fan-as-friend phenomenon in other ways. Meredith, for instance, ended her attachment as a fan because of an injury to her friend on the team:

My friend was on the basketball team – but she tore her ACL over vacation. If she were playing, I would definitely be at those games because that's an incentive to go support her. Because she's not playing and I don't really know anyone else on them, I don't feel any obligation or desire to go. I have other commitment and there's always something going on at the same time, and without my friend playing it just doesn't matter as much. Honestly, I feel like I should support my school still, but there's such a variety of things to do and without playing it's just not very high up on priority list. I know that sounds terrible, but I'd just rather be something else.

In Meredith's case, her estrangement from the basketball team, and Central sports in general, was ultimately the result of a fluke injury. Given the volatile nature of athletic participation, such injuries are bound to occur periodically. Consequently, Meredith's initial attachment through the fan-as-friend phenomenon was simply not strong enough to survive the loss of her friend's participation. This inherent weakness of building fans through the fan-as-friend approach is an important limitation of fanship as a tool for assisting newcomer adjustment.

### **Compared with other Involvement Groups**

Without extending one's fanship from fan-as-friend to an attachment with the larger team or the university, several of the participants felt involvement via sport fanship was not much different than any other extracurricular activity in the campus community.

Many of the newcomers commented on the larger amount of clubs and organizations on campus; for a few of the participants, the sport teams and thus involvement through sport fanship was just like participation in any other subcommunity on campus. When Matt was asked what role the sport teams play on campus, he gave this response:

They're just another organization to me. It's something that students do. Like, 'oh that's great you do sports,' but I have no personal interesting in what you're doing anymore than some other group around here. It's not that I don't care what they're doing, but it's nothing special to me.

Christine echoed this comment, comparing sport teams to other groups on campus:

Sports are definitely the same as other groups. They're the same – they carry the same weight as the art club, the literary magazine, the fraternities and the sororities. For me, they're just another group here. Maybe a bigger group, but just another group.

And Samantha spoke similarly regarding sport as another group on campus when asked if she cared whether sport teams lost or not:

On some level I do care about them doing well. I guess I would care if they individually did well in sports situations. To me, being on the sports team is just another one of things that people around here do. It's not any different than someone being in Sorority or Orchestra.

As these three comments indicate, one of the more salient limitations of sport teams and sport fanship on campus was that it was inherently similar to other groups on campus. For many of the newcomers who identified as non-fans or expressed a disinterest in sports in general, they had trouble understanding what differentiated sport-based groups on campus from social or academic groups in the community.

Another similarity between sport and other groups on campus was the voluntary nature of supporting the various groups. Many of the newcomers recognized they could not be involved nor invested in every group on campus; the sheer amount of subcommunities prevented this from happening. So for some of the participants, choosing not to support the sport teams was no different than choosing not to support another group on campus. As David explained:

Everybody does their part to support the things they like at Central. And all those things work together to build a big supporting community in general here. But if somebody doesn't support sports, they are somewhere else on campus supporting other Central things or they're doing their best to uphold Central academics. They can be a good study if they're not going out and supporting Trinity. Sports are just one thing that makes the Central community. And it's the combination of all those different things that makes Central great, so as long as you're supporting some of those things, you're doing your part here.

For those who viewed sport as merely another group on campus, the value of sport teams and sport fandom was greatly limited. Some of these newcomers noted that sport groups required a vastly higher monetary commitment than social clubs that had similar impacts on the campus community. The failure of fandom to appear different than other forms of supporting the Central community was an important limitation of sport fandom in assisting newcomers.

### **Declining Importance**

A final limitation of sport fandom in terms of helping newcomers is the declining importance of fandom over time. Several of the participants expressed that their involvement via fandom was initially high, yet declined substantially throughout their

time in the community. One significant positive impact of fanship was the flexible option for involvement fanship provided early in the newcomer experience. While that is undoubtedly an important impact of fanship, it also dictates that a limitation of fanship is diminishing importance of fanship for the newcomer during their stay in the community. Alex, for instance, explained how his attendance at games had greatly lessened during his second year:

It's hard to figure out actually, because last year I went to lots of games. I went to most of the soccer games and this year I haven't even gone to one. And that's even though I've probably become more of a soccer fan. It's interesting, I don't really know why. I guess I've just got other things going on.

Alex continued his explanation, turning next to his decreased attendance at football games as well:

As far as football goes, I think I went to every home game last year. I haven't been to any this year, I've just sort of watched a few of them from my balcony this year. Last year, it was something to do on Saturdays. This year, it's like there's better things to do. I'm not quite as interested. I still watch from my balcony sometimes, but it's just not as important to me. Last year it was the thing for me to do. Go to the football game; it was something for freshman to do to sort of connect. But not anymore, there are just other things now.

The declining role of sport fanship during the newcomer transition was often the result of newcomers finding involvement in other places on campus. While involvement via fanship was a solution for newcomers early in their newcomer adjustment process, the opportunity cost for attending games and remaining involved through fanship simply became too much to bear. Patricia expressed this increasing opportunity cost with powerful imagery:

I guess the sporting games are like the chocolate cake. And now the chocolate cake is next to the pudding. And you know what? I just want to banana pudding more.

Patricia had found involvement in other places on campus and no longer relied on fanship to provide the foundation for new friendships, involvement, or a sense of belonging. As her metaphor makes clear, newcomers simply saw better opportunities to take advantage of as their involvement in the community increased and they became more aware of alternative activities. Thus, the effect of sport fanship for newcomers diminished in importance as the newcomer continued throughout the Newcomer-to-Member process.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion of Sport Fanship and Newcomer Adjustment**

What is particularly salient from the data exploring the role of sport fanship in assisting newcomer adjustment is the ability of sport fanship to help integrate newcomers into the campus community. Astin's (1985) influential Theory of Involvement asserted that students learn by becoming involved, and the participants in this research consistently viewed sport fanship as a type of involvement in the campus community. Astin (1985) proposed sports as a means for students to find involvement, yet the current study expands on and clarifies the relationship between sport fanship and campus involvement in important ways. First, while Warner et al. (2011) concluded that involvement via fanship was not sufficiently influential within the context of a new college football team to achieve social integration and other university outcomes, their work did not actually measure fanship. Rather, they found no significant relationship between spectatorship and student integration. Simply attending games may not prove as much of a catalyst to serve as a means for social integration, but the participants in this study indicated when an emotional attachment to the players involved was present, fanship did provide a mechanism for both involvement and integration.

The distinction between sport fans and sport spectators is not a new concept in sport management literature (e.g., Sloan, 1989; Trail et al., 2003). Wann and Robinson (2002) and Clopton (2007, 2008a, 2008b) have previously examined the relationship between fan identification and university outcomes, generally finding that identification with university sport teams was significantly related to measures of campus integration,

persistence intentions, sense of community, and social capital. Yet the present study expands upon their findings by not simply measuring *if* sport fanship leads to university outcomes, but explicitly examining *how* sport fanship assists in campus integration, involvement, and belongingness. The earlier works make no reference to the underlying processes or structure that link fanship with their measured outcomes; rather their data were correlational in nature and stopped short of exploring how or why fanship fostered such powerful outcomes as integration and sense of community. Establishing these relationships was an important early step in understanding the impact of sport fanship on campus, yet they require a more specific understanding of the mechanisms underlying the relationships presented in their data. Wann and Robinson (2002, p. 42), concluded, “The specific use of the athletic program in retention may be an important complementary piece in the collective undergraduate retention puzzle.” Like much of the previous literature, there is no discussion of how to best structure sport fanship to maximize its impact on the retention puzzle or to ensure fanship remained a positive influence. The themes presented in the current research, represent a step forward in understanding how sport fanship leads to increased belongingness and campus integration.

Chalip (2006) wrote that the degree to which sport, and consequently sport fanship, plays a salubrious or detrimental role in individual socialization is dependent on the way in which the sport programs are designed and implemented. It is not an inherent characteristic of sport itself which leads to socialization and psychosocial outcomes, but rather the manner in which sport is organized. As Chalip (2006, p. 6) wrote, “It is not the sport that matters; it is the experiences that particular implementations of sport enable, as



well as the learning those experiences foster.” The four themes presented in the previous chapter represent the ways in which sport fandom can help newcomers foster belongingness and integration into their new communities. Rather than interpreting sport fandom as some process inherently helpful or harmful, the four themes presented in this research present a framework for understanding how fandom accrues positive communal outcomes. It is through providing an early and flexible form of involvement, creating meaningful individual connections, promoting university ambassadors, and stimulating identity negotiation that fandom possesses the ability to substantially assist in helping newcomers and integrating community members.

Identifying these four themes as the mechanisms that connect fandom with belongingness and integration is the most paramount conclusion of this research. Just as Warner and Dixon (2013) heeded Chalip’s (2006) statements about better understanding the implementation of sport in the context of sport participation, the pertinent finding from the preceding chapter is the means by which fandom promotes individual and organizational level outcomes. Interestingly, previous scholars examining fandom have noted the need to better understand the relationship between fandom and a student’s connection to campus (e.g., Clopton, 2008a), and the results from this research represent an important step in satisfying such a need. Wann and Robinson (2002) explicitly noted the need for a longitudinal examination to further clarify the relationship between fan identification and university perceptions and persistence, and Clopton (2008b) wrote of the need for a longitudinal study of a freshman cohort tracking the relationship between fan identification and the resulting sense of community. By moving beyond correlations

and proposing specific and identifiable structures of sport fandom that lead to belongingness and integration, the four themes presented here represent ways to structure and manage sport fandom to maximize the beneficial outcomes for newcomers and individuals participating as fans. In an aggregate sense, the first noteworthy finding from this research is that sport fandom *can* lead to increased belongingness and integration; yet this is not to be confused with claiming sport fandom *does* lead to belongingness or integration. After an exhaustive historical review of sport fandom, Guttman (1986) found instances where fandom led to increased sense of community as well as instances where fandom resulted in diminished belongingness. As Guttman (1986, p. 185) concluded, “We must maximize the positive potentiality of representational sport and make the most of sport’s propensity for bringing people together.” It is through the four themes presented in this research that Guttman’s (1986) words can ring true, and why in this particular research setting sport fandom *did* lead to increased belongingness and integration.

Another important finding derived from this research project is differentiating between active sport fandom and passive fandom. While previous scholars have differentiated between fans and spectators (e.g., Trail et al., 2003), die-hard fans and fair-weather fans (Wann & Brandscombe, 1990), or a three-level classification of lowly, moderately, and highly identified fans (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997), an interpretation of the findings in the current study suggests that another important distinction is necessary as well: active versus passive fans. The distinction between active and passive fans is not a matter of comparing scores on fan identification scales or

varying levels of psychological commitment to the team. Rather, passive fans are those individuals whose fanship does not lead to any behavioral involvement whereas, by contrast, an active fan is an individual whose fanship does lead to behavioral involvement. Active fanship refers to those individual fans whose commitment to the team leads to behavioral involvement in some subcommunity and possibly some larger community if one is connected to the sport team. Passive fans are those individuals whose fanship does not lead to behavioral involvement into any subcommunity or the larger community. They might attend more games, may be more invested in the outcome of a game, and could possibly score higher on fan identification scales; but if their fanship does not lead to behavioral involvement into a subcommunal or community they will not benefit from their participation as a fan in the same ways that active fans will benefit from their role as a fan. For sport fanship to create belongingness for newcomers, the results from this research provide strong evidence that fanship must lead to behavioral involvement, not just a psychological attachment.

In this research, only the participants who used fanship as a means to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships or as a mechanism for involvement in the larger community conceptualized fanship as an active phenomenon. Consequently, they reaped benefits of such active fanship that mirrored the psychological or emotional benefits traditionally associated with direct participation of athletes and helped the newcomers transition from the Initial Entry Phase to the Developing Membership Phase. On the other hand, some of the newcomers simply interpreted fanship as a passive exercise. If one's fanship was unable to create new relationships, provide a means for involvement,

stimulate identity negotiation, or promote brand ambassadors, they viewed fanship as passive. So while there is a tradition of differentiating fans on the basis of identification measures or psychological commitment, in order to understand the benefits of fanship it is more pertinent to differentiate fans on whether their commitment to the players or athletes leads to active or passive fanship.

In terms of the specific themes presented in this research as the underlying mechanisms allowing fanship to assist in the newcomer process, the flexible nature of sport fanship is of paramount importance. Wuthnow (1998) wrote of the need for modern communities to be characterized by porousness and looseness, and many of the participants in this study characterized fanship as a means for involvement as exactly that. While the community may have numerous subcommunities, no other subcommunities can match sport fanship in terms of flexibility and malleability. Newcomers emphasized the importance of looseness and porousness as one of the great struggles they faced relating to time management issues and coping with the increased stress and anxiety of entering a new community. Finding involvement and engagement can actually help with those struggles, including increasing one's life satisfaction (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013). Newcomers, perhaps more than typical community members, search for involvement that allows participation based on the schedule and needs of the newcomer rather than the subcommunity. There is no penalty for not attending a sport game; there is no punishment for leaving early or arriving late. There are few other means of involvement on a college campus that meet those requirements. Consequently, the advantages based off the flexibility offered by

sport fanship as communal involvement is greatly supported by the larger work of Wuthnow (1998) and Brint (2001).

Related to the flexible nature of fanship, the participants in this study viewed fanship as a particularly attractive form of involvement during the earliest stages of the transition process. Many of the participants expressed difficulty initially finding involvement, and based on the Newcomer-to-Model the transition from outside to insider cannot progress until the newcomer finds sources of involvement. Consequently, any communal structure that is especially appealing increases its value to the larger community. Newcomers who find involvement early in the adjustment period are significantly more likely to persist than newcomers who fail to find early involvement (Kuh, 1995). Similarly, work by Hausmann et al. (2007) found that sense of belonging was most strongly related to persistence intentions early in the year, and as a consequence, any tools capable of increasing a newcomers' sense of belonging early in their transition period has great importance to the university. Helping newcomers find involvement to support feelings of belongingness is strongly supported in the literature, and it is important to note that said involvement might occur in component of an institutions' academic or social system (Braxton et al., 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, while fanship is absent from the student retention literature as a tool to help newcomers and persistence behavior, there is strong theoretical support in the literature that sport fanship should be included as a tool for helping newcomers.

Sport fanship appears to be especially equipped for helping newcomers early in their adjustment process. Clopton (2008b) found that students' perceptions of the role

and importance of athletic teams on campus are highest during the first-year on campus. Afterwards, Clopton (2008b) demonstrated a significant, negative relationship between perception of importance of athletics upon the campus community and one's year in school. While the declining importance of sport fandom is ultimately a major limitation of sport fandom, at this point it is important to recognize that in terms of impacting retention behavior, it is more valuable to affect students stronger early in their time on campus than later. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), for instance, found that engagement positively affected grades more in the first year than other year, and affected persistence most strongly from the first to the second year, even after controlling for pre-college characteristics. Despite the declining importance of fandom over the life course of communal members, the value of providing a form of engagement early in a newcomer's transition is hard to overstate.

In this research setting, part of the reason fandom led to active participation and assisted newcomers in their adjustment process was strongly related to the fan-as-friend phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter. While this finding might be limited to specific context of Division III sports, throughout the two years of this research the most palpable and consistent comments by the research participants concerned the relationship between being a fan of the teams and a friend of the particular student-athletes. Previous research has shown that sport teams can be representative of associated communities, whereby supporting a sport team is really an extension of supporting some other element of one's identity such as a city or a nation (Heere & James, 2007). In this particular research, sport fandom was strongly indicative of one's role as a friend to the athlete.

Robinson et al. (2005) similarly noted that in the lower divisions of intercollegiate sport, it is often the players themselves to which individual fans attach. Yet their work also found fans of the lower divisions had higher levels of identification with the specific sport they were attending, a finding that was not duplicated in the current research. Rather, for fans in the current research the individual connection with the athletes was the primary component of their connection with the sport teams.

Accordingly, perhaps there is a relationship between an emotional connection with the actual players on the field and conceptualizing fanship as an active form of involvement. The participants viewed their actions as fans in terms of improving their individual relationships with the players; thus they accomplished something through their fanship. Whether this personal connection to the players is somehow stronger than an emotional connection with a university, city, state, or nation that a team represents is beyond the scope of this research. Nonetheless, it is an important contribution of this research that emotional attachments with the players, and thus the fan-as-friend approach to fanship, may result in a different type of fanship that other commercialized sport ventures where the fans and players neither meet face-to-face nor develop interpersonal relationships. Since fanship became a means for enhancing individual relationships, in the current research many of the participants viewed their involvement as fans to be an active, rather than passive, phenomenon.

There are other important outcomes of the fan-as-friend phenomenon as well. Clopton (2008) wrote about the strong divide between athletes and non-athletes in their perceptions of athletics on college campuses. Similarly, other scholars examining the

impact of college sport typically conceptualize student-athletes and non-athletes as conflicting groups, representative of the larger divide between intercollegiate athletics and the academic goals of a university (Sperber, 2000). But in the particular setting of the current study, sport was not a source of divisiveness between athlete and non-athletes but rather a source of commonality and connection between them. Perhaps this is a result of the specific type of intercollegiate athletics offered, as Clopton's (2008a) setting closer resembled "big-time" college sports as opposed to the Division III structure of this research. Sport management research must further evaluate what structures of sport lead to increased relationships between athletes and non-athletes in addition to what structures promote further division between these two types of students.

The newcomers in this study did not discuss sport fanship as enhancing relationships only between athletes and non-athletes, but rather as a tool for the social integration of all community members. The importance of peer interaction is well understood in the retention literature, especially early in the newcomer adjustment process and the ability of sport fanship to help promote peer interaction is an important contribution to the literature. Hausmann et al. (2007) found that early social experiences are better determinants of individual levels of sense of belonging on campus than demographic characteristics of academic experiences. Likewise, Swenson, Nordstrom, and Hiester (2008) found that academic and social adjustment and institutional attachment are associated with finding friends who appear loyal and who share some common interest. Based on the results of this study, sport fanship served as a common interest that created lasting and meaningful relationships. Warner and Dixon (2013)



identified common interest as one of the core components of sport leading to increased sense of community, and the newcomers in this study very much described fanship as such a common identity that promoted feelings of belongingness. Rein, Kotler, and Shields (2006) referred to the conversational power of fanship as “social currency” that is exchanged information for maintaining and encouraging social interaction, and the newcomers in this study used the social currency resulting from their fanship to form a common interest among themselves. In the context of this study, sport fanship was able to provide opportunities for peer interaction and the needed common interest to develop meaningful interpersonal connections.

Furthermore, the importance of promoting peer interaction among newcomers is strongly supported in the organizational socialization research, especially promoting relationships between newcomers and community insiders. Miller and Jablin (1991) identified relational information seeking, which is linked to the quality of relationships between newcomers and organizational insiders, as one of the most paramount indicators of a successful newcomer adjustment process. Reichers (1987) similarly wrote of the importance of interactions between newcomers and organizational incumbents and Klein and Heuser (2008) regarded the role of experienced community members as socializing agents in terms of providing feedback, information, and resources as an essential component to the entire socialization process. In an aggregate sense, newcomers need to interact with experienced community members, and in this research sport fanship provided the participants with an easy and available method to meet, converse, and develop relationships with organizational insiders. Sport fanship has not previously been

explicitly mentioned as a mechanism for fulfilling the need of newcomers to interact with insiders to assist in their socialization process, yet it appears to be a powerful tool in doing so.

The relationship between sport fanship and stimulating identity negotiation is also an important finding from this research and the importance of identity negotiations is strongly supported in the organizational socialization literature. Ashforth et al. (2007) suggested that newcomers strive to develop a situated identity in their new settings that combines individual notions of one's self-identity and expectations or requirements of one's new setting. Ashford and Murmohamed (2012) explained a situated identity as a way to bridge the gaps that arise between the new and old roles of an individual; newcomers are faced with the task of creating a new identity in their new organizational roles that must coexist with their existing social identities. Participants in this study often endeavored to synchronize their previous identities as non-sport fans and their growing identity as a member of the Central community and their specific subcommunities.

Ibarra (1999) wrote that newcomers adapt to their roles by experimenting with images of themselves, called provisional selves. These provisional selves bridge the gap between their previous self-conceptions and the attitudes and their representations about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in their new roles. For the newcomers discussed in the negotiating identity theme, there is strong support in the data that beginning to identify as a fan of Central sports or Central student-athletes helped initiate their larger identity negotiation process. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) explained how identity negotiation is crucial to newcomers sustaining feelings of authenticity and

comfort in their roles; and the role of sport fandom in stimulating the identity negotiation process is an important finding from this research. Newcomers who struggle to craft and negotiate new identities in their adjustment process experience great difficulty in adapting to their new roles. It is through the process of experimenting with provisional selves that newcomers successfully adapt to new roles and personal transformations (Ibarra, 1999), and for several of the newcomers in this study their negotiation with sport fandom played a prominent role in their larger negotiation process as a newcomer in the Central community.

The most salient theme from the role of sport fandom in the newcomer adjustment process is rather straightforward: sport fandom *can* play an important role in the newcomer adjustment process. But sport fandom does not automatically help newcomers in their transition; rather, sport and sport fandom need to be structured in specific ways to promote the four themes from this research. While earlier research (e.g., Wann & Robinson, 2002) simply stated that sport teams and fandom should be used by administrators to promote retention and integration, such a suggestion lacks the details and characteristics needed to ensure sport fandom leads to positive outcomes and not negative. Reflecting on both Chalip (2006) and Guttman's (1986) statements, sport fandom must be designed to offer an early and flexible form of involvement, create meaningful individual connections, promote university ambassadors, and stimulate the identity negotiation process for newcomers to optimally benefit from sport fandom.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

The structure of community in modern society has changed. Subjugated to the periphery of communal life are the geographically based communities and the traditional forms of interest-based groups so popular among earlier generations (Putnam, 2000). In their place, modern individuals have found and created new forms of communities to satisfy their need to belong consistent with the demands and wants of the modern economy and lifestyle. Looseness and flexibility (Wuthnow, 1998), the very characteristics that make modern interest-based communities attractive, also form the inherent weakness of modern communal structures – fluidity of membership. Without long-term commitment, hierarchical structures, or geographical roots, individuals are free to enter and leave loose communities at their own peril. Yet despite the importance of fluidity in understanding modern communities, there is a dearth of literature explicitly examining the experience newcomer joining communities. The Newcomer-to-Member model presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5 represents an important step in better understanding the experiences of newcomers and the processes that underlie the newcomer adjustment process into communal structures.

The second stated goal of this research built upon the findings of the Newcomer-to-Member model and explicitly examined the role that sport fanship can play in the newcomer adjustment process. Building on earlier research that found correlations between sport fanship and newcomer outcomes like integration, sense of community, and persistence intentions (e.g., Clopton, 2008b; Wann & Robinson, 2002), Chapter 6 presented four themes explaining how sport fanship affects the newcomer experience and Chapter 7 discussed each of the four themes. Is it through offering an early and flexible form of involvement, creating meaningful individual connections, promoting university

ambassadors, and stimulating the identity negotiation process, that sport fanship can help newcomers satisfy their inherent need to belong in new environments. The recognition of these four themes gives managers of sport specific structures to utilize in order to maximize the benefit derived from sport fanship. This represents an important advancement beyond simply suggesting community administrators use sport fanship to help integrate newcomers without specific details and structures to guide them.

Taken together, the results from this longitudinal qualitative exploration of incoming freshman have implications in a variety of disciplines and fields. Since the theoretical implications have already been discussed at-length in previous chapters, it is only necessary here to reiterate on a few of the more salient findings. The first predominant theoretical implication from this research is a reiteration of the individual need to belong, especially among newcomers. Finding interpersonal relationships and belongingness aids in the newcomer adjustment process, especially early in said process. Those newcomers who arrived with a pre-existing network did not experience many of the struggles and difficulties of their Blank Canvas peers. It is clear that the early experiences of newcomers have a greater impact than later events, and these early experiences are manageable through promoting a common interest and a meaningful group experience.

A second significant theoretical implication is the importance for newcomers to find involvement. While the importance of involvement is well established in the higher education literature (Astin, 1985), it is worth echoing again that involvement is a fundamental component of the newcomer adjustment process. Moreover, there is strong support in this research that not all forms of involvement are equal. Sport fanship was the most flexible early involvement option for newcomers. The unique ability of sport fanship to serve as a unifying platform for all subcommunities and lead to Venn

Diagramming is proof that sport fanship is an advantageous for communal involvement – both for individuals and the organization. Moreover, the importance of Venn Diagramming as an indicator of full-membership status within a community is strongly supported in the data from this research, implying that connecting subcommunities have replaced hierarchical leadership positions typically associated with full-membership status in more traditional forms of communal structures.

Additionally, finding that belonging through subcommunities precedes newcomers connecting with their larger community is a fundamental conclusion from this research. While the distinction between sense of belonging and sense of conclusion is often blurry and at times nonexistent, the results from this research are consistent with the notion that horizontal relationships in a community are a prerequisite to establishing vertical relationships (Katz & Heere, 2013). Similarly, while early sport fanship researchers were unable to determine the casual nature of the relationships between fan identification and university perceptions, the bottom-up approach dictated by the role of subcommunities in the Newcomer-to-Member process indicates that fan identification in this research setting came before larger perceptions of the campus community as a whole. This was not the case for all newcomers in this study; but for those who found involvement through the sport fanship subcommunity there is strong evidence that sport fanship preceded developing positive perceptions of the university.

In relation to sport management and fanship theory, the identification of four salient themes explaining how sport fanship assists newcomers provides a foundation for a substantive theory of sport fanship as a tool for newcomer adjustment. Such a theory is far from complete; yet the ability of sport fanship to assist newcomers when properly and specifically structured is one of the most paramount theoretical finding resulting from this longitudinal qualitative research project. Rather than merely suggesting sport fanship

leads to communal outcomes or concluding that sport fanship is an important tool for community administrators, the identification of the four themes in this research present a blue-print for developing specific strategies and tactics related to sport fanship to maximize positive effects of sport fanship on college campuses. It is only through active fanship, where one's connection to the team leads to behavioral involvement into some subcommunity, that sport fanship is a beneficial phenomenon for newcomers and other community members alike. Instead of differentiating between fans and spectators, or based on scores from fan identification scales, there are important distinctions in the benefits and impacts of sport fanship based on differentiating between active and passive fanship.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Non-Sport Implications**

One of the most salient findings from the Newcomer-to-Member model is the importance of recognizing differences between Blank Canvas newcomers and Pre-Existing Network newcomers. From a practical standpoint, organizational departments charged with socializing and assisting newcomers will be wise to recognize the differences between these types of newcomers and tailor specific orientation activities specifically for Blank Canvas newcomers. Because Blank Canvas newcomers lack meaningful relationships and struggle more than their Pre-Existing Network peers in their early transition process, orientation activities could benefit from explicitly offering opportunities customized to the needs of Blank Canvas newcomers. This is not a suggestion to separate Blank Canvas newcomers throughout the orientation process. The goal should not be to segregate Blank Canvas newcomers but rather to recognize their lack of established networks and normalizing and validating their absence of existing

interpersonal connections. Something as subtle as inviting Blank Canvas newcomers to extra information sessions designed to acknowledge that many newcomers lack pre-existing networks and more importantly, that the organization recognizes and appreciates the important role that Blank Canvas newcomers play in developing organizational culture and success. Creating orientation programs designed for Blank Canvas newcomers sends a message to Blank Canvas newcomers that they are appreciated, and the symbolic nature of tailoring activities specifically for Blank Canvas newcomers is important to express institutional priorities toward Blank Canvas newcomers. Blank Canvas newcomers require more attention in their adjustment process than their Pre-Existing Network peers, and organizations should strongly consider normalizing, validating, and supporting the Blank Canvas adjustment process.

While the vitality of the earlier experiences for newcomer is not necessarily a new finding, the importance of the first few weeks for newcomers cannot be stated enough. In terms of practical implications, organizations might benefit from dedicating disproportionately high levels of resources during the early weeks of the adjustment process. In the realm of higher education, student affairs divisions and residence life offices dedicate substantial resources creating and implementing programs to help first-year students. Based on the findings from this research, residence life offices might increase their effectiveness by more heavily utilizing their resources in the first few weeks of a newcomers' time on campus. Rather than dedicating resources linearly throughout a semester or year, the heightened importance of the early experiences suggest resident advisors and residential life departments should schedule the majority of their events in the first days/weeks of the newcomer transition process. The importance of the early experience is so fundamental to the newcomer adjustment process that residence departments might consider hiring temporary staff members for the early few weeks.



Once the first weeks have passed, the effectiveness and need for additional residential advisors and resident activities greatly diminishes; as a consequence the most efficient use of institutional resources is by heavily focusing on the earliest experience of newcomers.

Based on the findings of this research organizational attempts at creating subcommunities and cohesive groups should provide both a common identity and a group experience to help develop interpersonal relationships. All newcomers in this study were assigned to a freshman residence group; yet most indicated their groups lacked any common identity beyond simply being freshman. One of the reasons why other subcommunities had more success in promoting meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships is because other subcommunities, from sororities to sport teams to service clubs, gave the newcomers an additional common identity on which to develop relationships. Being a freshman and attending the same school was not powerful enough to develop relationships on its own; newcomers needed a layer of differentiation from the hundreds of other freshman.

In addition to a common identity, this research indicates that successful early subcommunities require some type of unique experience to help promote bonds and friendships. Beyond a common identity, what separated the early church groups, athletic teams, and other forms of involvement from freshman mentor groups was the lack of a unique experience. The monotony of icebreaker games and hallway meet-and-greet sessions prevented these activities from promoting meaningful group experiences. Rather, residence advisors should think more creatively to distinguish the experiences of their freshman from the numerous other freshman groups; contrived and stereotypical activities simply did not have the same impact as creative and unique experiences. Combined with the early implementation of more resources early in the newcomer

adjustment process, research residential life offices should try to provide intensive, unique, and creative initial experiences for their newcomers. Undoubtedly such experiences are not sustainable throughout the course of the year; but by dedicating resources and effort early in the process, newcomers will not require as much assistance in later parts of the year.

Moving beyond residential life offices, there are also important practical implications for student affairs in general. Specifically, the importance of Venn Diagramming suggests that student affairs may benefit from creating events where individuals from different subcommunities congregate for a common overarching identity and unique experience. But the important practical implication from this study is that the members attending such a superordinate event must not be leaders from the individual subcommunities, but rather peripheral members. The best way to encourage Venn Diagramming is to connect individuals who live on the margins of subcommunities with peripheral members from other groups; it is non-centralized subcommunity members who can most efficiently complete the Venn Diagramming process. Subsequently, it is important that the connecting of multiple subcommunities becomes normalized; as interacting with other subcommunities and connecting multiple subcommunities becomes an expected behavior within a campus climate, the result is a more cohesive campus community marked by a powerful sense of belongingness.

Also within higher education, development offices may benefit from the findings of this research. If the goal of development offices is to promote lasting and meaningful relationships with alumni (Gasman, 2013), the findings in this study provide strong support for the importance of the early experiences in one's tenure as a student in enhancing and supporting long-term involvement. Development offices should consider working in tandem with orientation or first-year programs in order to maximize the

effectiveness of a student's earliest experiences. Ensuring new students have a meaningful and relatively unique experience early in the entrance into the campus community may have a lasting impact on alumni willingness to support and remain involved in the university. Rather than waiting until students have graduated or approach graduation to begin building relationships with students, the findings from this study provide justification for development offices allocating resources and efforts as soon as a student enters the campus community. Waiting until a newcomer has completed the Newcomer-to-Member model may be too late reach many students; the most effective way to create meaningful and sustainable relationships with students is during the earliest stages of the newcomer adjustment process.

### **Sport-Related Implications**

While the previously discussed practical implications did not involve sport fandom on campus, there are a number of practical implications for how to best use sport fandom as a tool for helping community newcomers. First, student affairs departments should consider classifying sport fan subcommunities as recognized student organizations or affinity groups. Because the fandom subcommunity was the most efficient and successful subcommunity in this research as connecting other subcommunities and transcending other social barriers, sport fan subcommunities play a crucial role in creating a cohesive campus community. If the goal of student affairs is to help integrate students and support student growth, fandom groups should be recognized as legitimate student organizations. Sport fandom is beneficial to newcomers when it leads to subcommunal involvement; there is no better way to ensure fandom promotes subcommunal involvement than to recognize fandom groups as independent subcommunities. The social diversity of sport fans will promote Venn Diagramming

between sport fanship subcommunities and other subcommunities on campus and create linkages between the multitudes of campus subcommunities.

Moreover, because sport fanship offers the flexibility desired by campus newcomers, it should be used as a mechanism to help newcomers earlier in the adjustment processes. Institutions should consider sponsoring competitions or sporting events very early in the academic calendar and ensure these early sporting events are designed to promote newcomers to attend and become involved. Perhaps by inviting freshman onto the field, allowing freshman to organize pregame festivities or halftime, or simply enticing them to become involved in other elements of the pageantry part of sporting events (i.e., ball boys, flag bearers), organizations can best structure their sporting events to help freshman when help is most needed: early.

But the most salient implication from this research is the importance of conceptualizing fanship not merely as attendance or identification but as involvement. Attendance is not necessarily an active phenomenon; sitting and watching a sporting event does not inherently lead to positive individual or organizational outcomes. Rather, institutions should structure their fanship experience to entice and promote involvement into either sport fanship subcommunities or other subcommunities. The more active of a role fans have in the game experience, whether carrying a flag, leading a cheer, preparing the field, or organizing events or activities based around the competition, the better the chance that fan will use fanship as a means to find further involvement. Fanship needs to lead to behavioral involvement for individuals and organizations to reap the benefits from fanship. Additionally, for the hundreds of athletic programs whose goal is not merely generating profits, the mission of the fan experience should not be structured around attendance but rather behavioral involvement. Fans might even be better served participating as a fan outside of the bleachers. Activities like tailgating or communal

watch parties in movie theatres or classrooms should not be viewed as competition to attendance but rather a complement to assist fanship in promoting subcommunal involvement. Attendance should not be viewed as an outcome but instead as one component of the sport fanship experience which leads to greater individual and organizational consequences from newcomers finding behavioral involvement and ultimately belongingness on campus.

There is also strong evidence from this research that sport programs are most effective as tools for campus integration, especially when there are strong relationships between student athletes and non-athletes. Rather than separating student athletes from the rest of campus, student athletes need to be intermixed with the rest of the student body. To reap the benefits that sport fanship can offer, residential offices might consider maximizing the number of non-athletes who live with student athletes during their freshman years and consequently gain from the impact of using sport fanship as an early tool for involvement and creating meaningful relationships with their student-athlete roommate or suitemate. Student athletes need to be active in the campus community, as student athletes were generally among the most successful and efficient initiators of the Venn Diagramming process. The more integrated student athletes are into the larger campus community, the greater the positive impact sport fanship can have on campus population.

Finally, there are also sport-related implications beyond the specific context of intercollegiate athletics. All sports teams are tasked with recruiting and socializing new fans since sport fanbases are inherently porous institutions. Because there is very little leverage forcing individuals to remain loyal to sports teams – fans do not have contracts or legal responsibilities to remain fans – sport fanship is best conceptualized as a temporal and dynamic psychological phenomenon. In order for sport fan bases to grow or

even remain the same size, sport marketers are tasked with constantly recruiting new fans and socializing them into their fanbase. Based on the results of this study, sport marketers will be best served by socializing new fans through subcommunal involvement. Whether through tailgating groups, specific sections of the stadium, official fan communities like “Red Sox Nation,” or organized watch parties outside of the stadium, new sport fans are best socialized in smaller groups or subcommunities. Newcomers are more likely to be socialized and maintained by first developing horizontal relationships with other sport fans within these subcommunities rather than marketers trying to initially develop a vertical relationship between the new fan and the larger organization. New sport fanship develops through a bottom-up approach, and marketers may benefit from encouraging new fans to find initial involvement in some type of smaller subcommunity.

Once new fans are socialized into subcommunities or smaller groups, there is support from this study that marketers will benefit from creating strategies and structures where subcommunities interconnect and interact. Katz and Heere (2013) wrote of the importance of individual tailgating groups and the initial relationships between leaders and followers within specific groups; yet their model is inherently dependent on the group leaders continued dedication. A more sustainable model of fan interaction through subcommunities necessitates integration between the smaller groups within a collective fanbase. Sport marketers should encourage Venn Diagramming within the fanbase, encouraging different tailgating groups or subcommunities of fans to interact rather than remain isolated and independent. Moreover, marketers may further increase the strength of a fanbase by conceptualizing their fanbase as a subcommunity within some larger city-based or regional community. If there are other subcommunities in a city, perhaps volunteer groups or business coalitions, which a fan community can interact with and Venn Diagram with, marketers can strengthen their own fans. If sport teams can become

a vital connector within a larger city-based, regional, or even national community, an individual's involvement as a fan becomes increasingly powerful and long-term.

### **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The limitations of this study stem from two main areas: grounded theory as the chosen methodology and the specific setting used throughout this longitudinal research. Grounded theory was specifically chosen to guide this research due to its usefulness when existing theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon of interest, its inherent flexibility, and because the research goals explored patterns in social processes. There are still limitations to grounded theory that warrant mentioning here. Grounded theory requires that the data collection process occur in an environment constructed by interactions between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2013). As a result, it is possible that had a different researcher or a different group of participants partaken in this dissertation the findings could have been different.

Moreover, the flexibility that is crucial in conducting meaningful grounded theory research also presents potential limitations in terms of the researcher's biases. The constructivist approach to grounded theory does not deny the role of the researcher in interpreting the data and selecting what research topics to pursue; rather it embraces the fact that theoretical findings are an interpretation that depends on the researcher's view. Resulting theories do not and cannot stand outside of the interaction between participants, researcher, and setting; all analysis is contextually situated in time, place, culture, and situation (Charmaz, 2012). By sticking close to the data and using the words of the participants whenever possible, the reliability of this research is unquestionably increased; yet the constructivist approach that guided this project foster the researchers'

flexibility about their own interpretation as well as those of their research participants (Charmaz, 2012).

Another limitation of this dissertation is the specific research setting in which the research took place. Central College is representative of a certain type of educational institution and a very precise sport structure. The results in this research are very much a product of the specific setting of Central College, which is both a strength and limitation of this work. As a limitation, the findings from this research should not be generalized into other settings and the implications from this research may not be appropriate in other types of educational or sport contexts. The goal of grounded theory, however, is not generalizability. Rather, the goal of grounded theory is situating studies within their specific contexts to allow nuanced comparisons between different studies of different contexts (Charmaz, 2012). So while the results of this research may not be extendable into other settings, this specific setting is the first-step in being able to compare the experience of newcomers and the role of sport fandom in a variety of settings. Generality will come from the analytic process of comparing studies from different settings; generality is not a prescribed goal for this research, but rather a potential extension in the future.

While the findings from this study are limited to similar contexts as Central College, understanding the newcomer experience and the role of sport fandom in this particular context is incredibly valuable – perhaps more so than in other contexts. In terms of intercollegiate athletics, it is the smaller Division III institutions that cannot err in structuring their sport programs in terms of its effect on the student-body. While “big-time” college athletic programs like the University of Texas or Louisiana State University are concerned with generating profit, schools like Central are more concerned with using their athletic program as a mechanism to improve organizational outcomes like retention.



For schools like Central, retention is the lifeline of organizational survival. As a private institution, Central cannot depend on public financial support; so every student who decides to transfer out of the Central community constitutes a substantial loss in needed revenue. Most private, liberal-arts colleges rarely accept transfers after the first-year of enrollment; therefore every dropout represents a loss of perhaps \$150,000 in tuition over the course of three years in addition to lost future alumni donations and word-of-mouth marketing. Any potential tool for impacting retention is magnified in importance in a setting like Central College.

Structuring an intercollegiate athletic program to maximize its impact on retention could increase the benefits of supporting athletics at schools like Central. Division III institutions are not designed to make profits; they are not designed as a revenue stream to help the operating costs of the university. So while the implications discussed previously may not extend to intercollegiate programs hoping to generate profits, the bleak realities of college sport insinuate profit-making athletic programs are an extreme minority. Besides the 23 programs who reported profits in 2012 (Fulks, 2013), the rest of the nearly 1,000 NCAA member institutions should consider designing a sport program to enhance other positive outcomes for the university besides ticket sales – namely levels of belongingness on campus and retention. If college sport programs are not going to make money, and the financial impact of exposure is limited and inconsistent at best (Clotfelter, 2011), the findings and implications of this research should extend to many intercollegiate athletic programs besides just Division III institutions.

Additional research is needed to better understand the behavioral components of active and passive fanship. While suggestions have been made in this research in defense of promoting behavioral involvement via fanship, it is unclear whether behavioral involvement will lead to increased consumer behaviors. For those organizations primarily

focused on increasing revenue, the present research was unable to verify or refute that behavioral involvement will increase purchasing intentions or long-term consumer loyalty. Moreover, there is additional work needed to better understand how behavioral involvement extends to sport contexts outside of college campuses. In this setting, there were clearly delineated subcommunities and a larger community; for many sport settings outside of college campuses, this may not be the case. It is unclear, for example, what constitutes subcommunal involvement in the context of a professional sport teams; it is also unclear what the larger collective community that encompasses those subcommunities is for professional franchises. The lack of clarity in these matters is less a weakness of the active versus passive fanship differentiation; rather it presents promising opportunities for future research to extend the differences and consequences between active and passive models of fanship.

The next natural step for the results from this research is to design orientation programs and sport programs that better fit the early needs of newcomers to find both community and belonging. The theoretical models presented previously must be transformed into something more useful for university decision makers. There are opportunities for pilot studies and programmatic interventions to test whether the themes of this research can improve the experiences of newcomers and help with retention outcomes. After initiating said pilot programs, there is a need for quantitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the program. Creswell (2012) suggested the next step for substantive level theories is for empirical verification through quantitative data, and that appears to be next step for the larger researcher agenda of understanding how sport can help individuals find belongingness. Colleges and universities already dedicate substantial resources to the newcomer experience – finding appropriate settings to

implement and test pilot studies to better understand the effectiveness of the theoretical models discussed in this research is the natural next step.

Moreover, using sport fanship to assist in the newcomer adjustment process is just one example of how sport fanship might be able to help individuals. Future research should explore what other difficult individual processes can benefit from using sport fanship as a mechanism to alleviate individual or organization struggles. Sport fanship has already been associated with outcomes like collective self-esteem and psychological well-being (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001) – the next step is understanding what structures and characteristics of sport fanship can best help newcomers improve their experiences and quality of life. As Chalip (2006) and Guttman (1986) both declared, it is not some inherent value of sport fanship that leads to positive outcomes. Rather, future research needs to explore how sport fanship can best be structured and designed to allow fanship to assist individuals in a multitude of contexts and settings.

## **Appendix A: Interview Consent Form**

IRB Approved: 8/29/2012

Conducted by: Matthew Katz      413-335-2908      mkatz@utexas.edu  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Bob Heere      Faculty Sponsor Telephone: 512-232-2376  
The University of Texas at Austin: *Department of Kinesiology and Health Education*

### **Consent for Participation in Research**

**New fans, new places: The role of intercollegiate athletics on student socialization and development**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent. Participants must be 18 years old or older to participate in this study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You have been asked to participate in a research study about how Division III athletics impacts new student socialization. The purpose of this study is better understand the roles that college athletics play in how new college students become a part of their campus communities.

#### **What will you to be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in individual interviews.

This study will take approximately two years to complete. You will be asked to participate in two interviews per semester: one at the beginning of the semester and one towards the end. Each interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour in length. This study will include approximately 30 study participants. Your participation will be audio recorded.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

There is minimal risk involved in this study. Since the researchers will obtain contact information from you (name and e-mail address), there is some risk of loss of privacy and confidentiality. The researchers will minimize this risk by storing all information on a password-protected computer and only the researchers for research purposes will use your contact information. However, if this list was to be comprised in some way, a breach of privacy and confidentiality may result. We believe this constitutes a small risk and is unlikely, but the potential for a breach of privacy (names and e-mail addresses) does exist.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the results of this research may help institutions of higher learning better evaluate their campus cultures and the role sport plays in their development. Such findings may help athletic departments and university administrators better gauge the importance and value of their athletic programs

**Do you have to participate?**

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate, please email Matt Katz ([mkatz@utexas.edu](mailto:mkatz@utexas.edu)) stating your intention to participate. You will receive a copy of this form.

**Will there be any compensation?**

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

**What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?**

This study is confidential. Only the researchers will view your interview responses, and they will be used only for research purposes. Furthermore, your name will not appear in any of the research findings or data compiled. Your name will be replaced with a numeric code, and only the researchers will view your responses.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recording recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for two years and then erased. The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Matt Katz at (413) 335-2908 or send an email to [mkatz@utexas.edu](mailto:mkatz@utexas.edu).

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

**Participation**

If you agree to participate, please return this signed consent to Matt Katz ([mkatz@utexas.edu](mailto:mkatz@utexas.edu)) stating your intention to participate.

**Signature**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You

voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

**NOTE: Include the following if recording is optional:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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