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Abstract: The development of stronger team identity has previously been explained through the social identity aspect of belonging. Although this has contributed much to our understanding of sport fans, it has neglected an alternate explanation for team identity, specifically the search for distinctiveness. How then do fans develop stronger team identity by 'standing out' as opposed to 'fitting in'? This paper provides evidence of seven identity management strategies used by fans with a strong psychological connection to their chosen team. Saturation sampling was employed to interview 29 South African rugby union fans via semi-structured interviews, followed by a directed approach to content analysis. The results contribute a stronger explanation of how the psychological need for optimal distinctiveness functions within the attachment process

towards stronger fan loyalty, and provides a more complete explanation for the way in which fans can 'stand out' while still belonging.

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Albert Wöcke is on the faculty at the Gordon Institute of Business Science of the University of Pretoria in South Africa. He teaches in the areas of Human Resource Strategy and International Business. His interests are emerging markets generally but strategy and institutions more specifically. He consults widely to firms and NGOs across Africa.

1   Introduction

Not all those who are interested in sport are the same. De Groot and Robinson (2008) remind readers of Pooley's original 1978 suggestion of a continuum between a spectator who may "observe a spectacle and forget it quickly" (p.119) and a fan, whose intense feelings for the team may become "so great that parts of every day are devoted to either his team or in some instances, to the broad realm of sport itself" (p.119). Fans have been observed to identify so strongly with their chosen team that they "feel as if they are a team member" (Kahle and Riley, 2004, p.37). This team identification has been associated with behaviours such as attendance decisions (Matsuoka et al., 2003), purchase intent (Trail et al., 2000), and fan group involvement (Heere and James, 2007). Traditionally loyal fans of the New York Jets, for example, have contributed to a top five average attendance of over 77,000 and a capacity percentage of over 93% at MetLife Stadium since 2010, despite having the seventh lowest win-loss ratio in the NFL. In the English Premiership, Sunderland A.F.C. for example, achieved a top ten average attendance of over 40,000 in the past two seasons, despite having one of the lowest win-loss ratios in the league and not having won the title since 1936.

In recognising the social group nature of sport fandom (Heere et al., 2011), team identification researchers have drawn on Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) to explain why and how fans develop loyalty to their chosen team. This widely used approach has emphasised the importance of one of the social identity aspects in achieving the psychological benefits related to team identification (Wann, 2006), namely belonging and camaraderie with others. Although research on the search for belonging or assimilation has contributed much to our understanding of the emotions, thoughts and behaviours of sport fans, it has neglected an alternate explanation for team identification, specifically the search for distinctiveness.

A number of recent studies have pointed to the role of team identification motives beyond self-esteem, including distinctiveness (Andrijiw and Hyatt, 2009; Dimmock et al., 2005). Psychological distinctiveness is one of the main processes proposed by SIT, and has been defined as wishing to be different from, but compared favourably to, other groups (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008). A Manchester City soccer fan, for example, may therefore initially differentiate himself or herself from Manchester United fans by wearing the sky blue and white strip while singing 'Blue Moon,' thereby employing an intergroup comparison. To enhance psychological distinctiveness, the fan may also be among a smaller group of Manchester City fans who view the team's 'Typical City' unpredictability, including their "uncanny ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory" ("Typical City", parag. 2, 2012) as a positive and exciting aspect of its appeal (Clarke, 2014). In this way the fan is employing an intragroup comparison. Finally, the fan may seek individual distinctiveness by perceiving his or her over-the-top taunting and mocking behavior of opposing teams as more normative of a real Manchester City fan, than that displayed by other fans (Keegan, 2015). The Manchester City fan may therefore be motivated by both the need for belonging and the need for group and individual-level distinctiveness (Vignoles et al., 2006). How then do fans develop stronger team identification by 'standing out' as opposed to 'fitting in'?

Using qualitative procedures, this study examined the ways in which fans meet the need for optimal distinctiveness through team identification. Drawing on Optimal

Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991), the research demonstrates how the two mechanisms of structural reality and perceptual framing (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004) are evident in the development of team identification. Contrary to extant team identification theory, which emphasises the motive of group belonging and intergroup comparisons, the findings provide evidence of the use of individual distinctiveness strategies at the intragroup level. At an intergroup team-based level, we find that fans gain distinctiveness by identifying with strongly differentiated or smaller size team groups, perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of their supporter group, or identifying with a subgroup within the broader team supporter group. Unlike previous team identification explanations, we also find that fans gain individual distinctiveness in a sport consumption setting through role differentiation, seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist, and seeing the self to be more normative than other group members.

This study contributes to team identification theory by deepening understanding of the need for distinctiveness. It expands the prevailing focus on belonging by examining how the need for distinctiveness also contributes to stronger team identification. It broadens the existing argument that distinctiveness of a fan applies only to "non-members" of a team-based group (Funk and James, 2004, p.13), providing a more complete explanation for the way in which fans can 'stand out' while still belonging. In these ways, the study provides additional avenues for sport teams to nurture fan loyalty, thereby enhancing customer profitability and franchise value.

2   Background literature

2.1   Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory provides a structure for understanding social identity (Donavan et al., 2006). Tajfel and Turner (1985) argued "social identity consists of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which s/he perceives as belonging" (p.16). These social categories define one's place within the social world, including age, gender and race, or membership of a team, religion, club or corporation (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). Tajfel (1982) argued that group identification took place when two components are met; one cognitive and one evaluative, and also suggested a third "frequently associated" (p.2) component of group identity, consisting of an emotional investment in awareness and evaluation, and the necessary condition that an emotional consensus recognises the existence of the group. The consensus that social identity includes cognitive, evaluative and affective dimensions has been supported by recent studies (Jackson, 2002; Roccas et al., 2008) and lays the foundation for both intragroup and intergroup comparisons, including distinctiveness.

2.2   Psychological distinctiveness

Vignoles et al. (2002) extended the Social Identity Theory perspective of psychological distinctiveness by proposing three sources of distinctiveness: position, difference and separateness. Position refers to the distinctiveness of an individual's place within social relationships, including kinship ties, friendships, roles and social status. Difference, the typical operationalisation of distinctiveness, implied distinctiveness in individual

qualities, including abilities, opinions or traits. Separateness was related to distinctiveness in terms of psychological distance from others, including physical and symbolic boundaries. Leonardelli et al. (2010) called for the inclusion of a motivational component with respect to the antecedents of social identity. The authors pointed to ODT (Brewer, 1991), which proposed that individuals were motivated by two fundamental and competing human needs for assimilation and distinctiveness, and that individuals could simultaneously meet these needs by identifying with moderately inclusive group memberships. One of the basic tenets of the theory suggested that social identification would be strongest for social groups at that optimal level of inclusiveness "which resolves the conflict between the needs for differentiation of the self and assimilation with others" (Brewer, 1991, p.478).

Brewer's (1991) model assumed that an individual could be categorised along a social distinctiveness-inclusiveness dimension that ranges from uniqueness at the one extreme to total submersion at the other extreme. A person that strongly stands out from others in a group would thus experience a feeling of low inclusion, perhaps even resulting in a threatened sense of security. At the other extreme, a person who appears very similar to others on most criteria would experience a feeling of high inclusion, perhaps even resulting in a threatened sense of self-worth. According to the model, optimal distinctiveness is achieved through identification with groups that have a level of inclusiveness where the degrees of competing needs activation are exactly equal. Association with groups that are too inclusive or too personalised should drive the individual to return to the same equilibrium. Brewer's (1991) theory has received extensive research attention during the past two decades (Lakin et al., 2003; Sorrentino et al., 2007; Zhong et al., 2008). Brewer's model has also been applied in a variety of contexts, including consumer behaviour (Lynn and Harris, 1997; Ruvio, 2008) and sport fandom (Andrijiw and Hyatt, 2009).

2.3   Balancing the needs for belonging and distinctiveness

The theory of Optimal Distinctiveness has been extended by research on the mechanisms through which need arousal influences individual group identification. Leonardelli et al. (2010) outlined how, in response to a heightened need for inclusion or differentiation, individuals engage processes such as emotional and trait self-stereotyping, altering judgments of group memberships, perceptions of consensus, and social comparison. Drawing on similar logic, Hornsey and Jetten (2004) proposed a set of eight strategies that allow people to balance their needs for belonging and distinctiveness (see Table 1). Hornsey and Jetten's (2004) framework is organised in relation to two factors: level of distinctiveness (group versus individual) and the mechanism for achieving distinctiveness (structural reality versus perceptual framing). Structural reality refers to the "structural properties of the group itself, embedded in reality" (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004, p.259). In this way, distinctiveness is achieved through the "instrinsic" (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004, p.250) nature of the group. In contrast, perceptual framing refers to group members "reframing how they perceive their social world and their place within it" (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004, p.250). Hornsey and Jetten's (2004) contribution conceptually demonstrates how assimilation to group norms can be pursued without ignoring an individual's need to view themselves as unique.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The first strategy involves an individual identifying with a numerically distinct group. This strategy developed from research on ODT by Brewer et al. (1993), who found evidence for the role of membership of a relatively smaller sized group in balancing the needs for belonging and distinctiveness. Individuals use the second strategy to identify with groups that "have a strong sense of cohesiveness but also pride themselves on being different" (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004, p.252). Both initial strategies result in group members drawing distinctiveness from something intrinsic to the group.

Group members can also seek individual differentiation within an in-group. Role differentiation (strategy three) relates to one's interdependence with other group members. Individuals employing this strategy are not attempting to separate themselves from the group, but through playing a specific social role within the group, meet the need for distinctiveness within the group. With reference to the three types of distinctiveness (Vignoles et al., 2002), this strategy is associated with the 'position' type, which refers to social relationships, roles and status. The fourth strategy of identifying with an individualist group is similar to the second strategy above, but offers distinctiveness by allowing freedom of personal expression. Hornsey and Jetten (2004) suggested that these kinds of individualist groups "normatively prescribe individual differentiation" (p.256).

The second set of group level strategies involves the mechanism of perceptual framing. The fifth strategy to perceptually enhance the distinctiveness of their group is supported by research into self-stereotyping and heightened perceptions of in-group and out-group homogeneity, which enhance the perceptual distance between one's own group and other relevant groups. The final group level strategy (strategy six) considers individuals who may belong to larger inclusive groups, such as gender, religion or ethnicity. This strategy is based on recognition that some large-scale categories are "superimposed on meaningful subgroup differences" (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004, p.252). The framework argues that this structure can serve a psychological function where group members can adjust their level of self-categorisation to suit their needs for distinctiveness.

The final set of individual level strategies also involves the mechanism of perceptual framing. The seventh strategy of seeing oneself as loyal but not conformist is based on the recognition that individuals may view the traits of conformity and loyalty as separate, with different values attached to each. In this way, an individual will meet his need for belonging by contributing to a group in a loyal manner, but maintain distinctiveness by rejecting the depersonalisation process of rigid conformity. The final strategy relates to an individual seeing himself to be more normative than other group members. A fan that believes that his team's supporters are characterised as knowledgeable may then perceive himself as more knowledgeable than fans of another team.

The literature review suggests that fans develop loyalty to their chosen team through both assimilation and distinctiveness. Importantly, work flowing from ODT points to a number of possible strategies through which fans can balance these competing needs for assimilation and distinctiveness. Within the mechanisms of structural reality

and perceptual framing therefore, this study investigated the strategies fans use to develop stronger team identification by 'standing out.'

3 Method

3.1 Participants

Following Phua (2010) interviewees were recruited from a Repucom[i] mailing list of rugby supporters, and from intercepting Super Rugby[ii] game spectators. Rugby is regarded as one of the world's most popular sports (Miller and Washington, 2011), providing a rich context to explore social identity issues (Horton, 2009). The South African sport market dominates the African continent (Goldman, 2012), with sport fandom seen to take place within a society described as "heterogeneous, complex, and deeply segmented not only on the basis of culture, race, historical background, language, and religion, but also on economic and/or class status" (Bornman, 2010, p.239). Recent research with a diverse race and gender sample found that 70% of South Africans follow the game of rugby (Repucom, 2013). Rugby fans in South Africa were therefore considered a fairly mainstream group of fans within which to study optimal distinctiveness and team identification.

Theoretical saturation (Bloor and Wood, 2006) was adopted in deciding how many interviewees to include in the final sample, with a smaller number of new codes or examples being found as the iterative data gathering and analysis process continued. The final sample of 29 rugby fans (see Table 2) compares favourably with previous qualitative samples (Decrop and Derbaix, 2010; Mason, 2010).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

3.2 Procedures

Data was collected through in-depth telephonic interviews (Wilson et al., 1998) of between 40 minutes and 70 minutes with rugby fans in South Africa. With the interviewees' permission, the discussions were recorded and transcribed. To enhance reliability, three interview transcripts were checked for accuracy against the original recording a second time. No errors were found. The first analysis activity of data reduction involved the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the field notes and transcripts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data was reduced through coding and memoing, while following Tesch's (1990) organising system steps. In this way, trustworthiness was increased by ensuring that all possible occurrences of the influence of team identification on optimal distinctiveness were captured (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

The interviews conducted produced 330 pages of transcripts, which were coded with support from Atlas.ti (Barry, 1998). From this data, 506 codes were generated - based on 689 quotations - and categorised into 27 code families (see Appendix 1). A combination of patterns and themes, clustering, and making metaphors was used in order to draw conclusions during data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). An *emic* or insider view approach to initial coding was used in order to draw from the specific life

experience of the interviewees. For example an interviewee comment: "I think a lot of people have gotten behind the change in strip band and all the fancy that is not typical rugby. Um, but ja, I don't go for that type of thing" was coded as [In-group I: am more conservative], which was later clustered into the code family [In-group I: am more traditional].

The first author shifted during the iterative gathering, coding and analysis cycle towards a more *etic* or outsider view approach to coding, which then resulted in themes strongly associated with Hornsey and Jetten's (2004) ODT mechanisms framework. By strongly linking the data to the theory under examination, internal validity was enhanced (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The code family [In-group I: am more traditional] was therefore coded as evidence of the related perceptual framing mechanism strategy: 'Seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist.' In this way, a directed approach to content analysis was followed; whose main strength is the validation or extension of a conceptual or theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). To further enhance internal validity, thick descriptions were provided as evidence of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The extensive use of the interviewee's actual words contributes to interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992). The first author followed Kvale's (2007) interview qualification guidelines to increase the accuracy of the inferences made from the words of the interviewees. Specifically, the first author employed the gentle, sensitive, critical, remembering, and interpreting qualifications in order to use follow-up questions, linked statements, and pauses in each interview.

3.3   Materials

An interview guide was followed (see Appendix 2), developed by drawing on Andrijiw and Hyatt's (2009) protocol as well as from the findings of the literature review. Questions in the guide were developed to contribute thematically to knowledge production about the influence of team identification on optimal distinctiveness, as well as contribute dynamically to promote good interview interaction (Kvale, 2007). For example, question three provided an opportunity for a fan to discuss what his or her team identification meant to them, while question four triggered a discussion of the role of the fan's team identification in their life.

4   Results

The findings provide evidence of seven ways in which fans meet the need for optimal distinctiveness through team identification. These seven strategies are drawn from the mechanisms of structural reality and perceptual framing, at both the group and individual levels. The results did not provide evidence of the use of the strategy of identifying with an individualist group, which will be discussed further later. Table 3 summarises the findings, including illustrative quotations for each strategy found (as per Pratt, 2008). Following the theory-guided presentation direction provided by Chenail (1995), the findings relating to each strategy are discussed below. As per the Institutional Review Board guidelines and qualitative research practices (Kaiser, 2009) pseudonyms have been used to identify relevant interviewees.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

4.1 Identifying with numerically distinct groups

In terms of identifying with numerically distinct groups, a fan of a non-local team may use the limited number of fellow supporters in that location to gain distinctiveness relative to groups of supporters of other teams. For example, Dirk has been a KwaZulu-Natal province Sharks supporter since childhood, growing up in Durban – the home of the Sharks - and continued to support his team during the years of living and working in Cape Town, a traditionally strong Stormers area.

> *My involvement there was on that basis, during the week. You know, reading articles on the Sharks, trying to get team stats, who is playing on the weekend, all that kind of stuff. Um, I bought my nephew Sharks beanies and all that kind of stuff... It is a small community, you are in Stormers country... it was (laughs) quite a lonely brand in Cape Town, by yourself, being a Shark supporter you know, it was really watching matches with your family then, because my mom and dad were Shark supporters and it was that. Oh my friends are all Stormers supporters, so all province boys. (Dirk)*

Alex, a long-time Western Province Stormers supporter from Cape Town who had been living in the Blue Bulls dominated North West province for 12 years, similarly used the minority nature of his non-local support group to gain distinctiveness in his work environment.

> *I like to wear my jersey on game days. Um…where we do have opportunities to play in the final I would like to wave my flag, put it up somewhere where it can be seen at my house. When we meet in town at the restaurant or a bar and the other guys with their jerseys, um, we all know one another in town, we are the Western Province supporters. So ja, daily people will…. Because when they walk into my office they will see my photo of the Currie Cup winning team is on my notice board, so daily people can associate me with being a supporter. Well this is Blue Bull country so I get a lot of flack about being a Western Province supporter. (Alex)*

Howard, a long-time Free State Cheetahs supporter who now lives in Cape Town, expressed similar intergroup distinctiveness based on the relatively few Cheetahs supporters attending an away game in Cape Town.

> *It is fantastic! I mean obviously we are in the minority there, but you can identify, there are a lot of guys I have seen each and every day when they play here and they ride from their farm somewhere in the Free State or the Northern Cape or wherever they come from and they come and support their team. But not large in numbers, in the sense that if you know you look at a typical Newlands/Free State game it doesn't draw crowds of 50 thousand like it used to in the past… you get about 15 or maybe 18 thousand. Or maybe among that there are maybe 2000*

guestimate Cheetah supporters. So although you are in the minority you still support the team…You know I don't mind, I have been the underdog many a time in my life, and it is sometimes better to be the underdog and be the minority…'Cos then the satisfaction in winning is just bigger when you do it! (Howard)

Dirk, Alex and Howard displayed their membership of their chosen team group, while gaining group distinctiveness from their relatively smaller non-local distinct supporter group, within "Stormers country" or "Blue Bulls country." In this way, fans are able to belong to a numerically distinct "we" group, which simultaneously meets their needs for assimilation and distinctiveness.

4.2   Identifying with groups that are strongly differentiated from the mainstream

In terms of the second strategy of identifying with groups that are strongly differentiated from the mainstream, fans can draw on language and historical political differences to distinguish between their in-group and the majority out-group. Kale grew up on the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa and, although he has lived in the Johannesburg area of the Gauteng province for over 20 years, he remains a staunch Sharks supporter. As demonstrated by the quotation below, the unique nature of the team and supporter group provides Kale and other Sharks supporters with group distinctiveness, relative to other rugby teams and supporters in South Africa.

I think it is just you know Natal was always a last outpost, it was always from a very different part of SA – certainly for those of us who grew up in the sort of 70s or 80s and into the early 90s in SA; Natal was always a very different place, maybe it was very predominantly English, um… and I think you know Natal rugby represented you know for all of us very much the whole, the underdog, you know we were the last outpost playing the Afrikaans game in this country… it is a very interesting team in that respect, that it represents a lot more than just a rugby team. (Kale)

By describing rugby as "the Afrikaans game," Kale is expressing the way in which the South African Apartheid regime made the game their own after British immigrants had introduced rugby to black and white South Africans in the nineteenth century (Booth, 1996). Archer and Bouillon argued in 1982 "in symbolic terms, rugby bears the print of Afrikaner culture… inspired by faith and an uncompromising moral ethic to defend the cause of their people and the God, the Afrikaner people… conquered the game" (Booth, 1996, p. 463).

Mary, who has supported the Sharks for two years after being introduced by a friend who plays rugby, draws distinctiveness by following a sport that is strongly differentiated from the mainstream soccer fandom in her community.

I am not a soccer fan and it always boils down to you know most of them don't like, or some of them don't like rugby. They will tell you how aggressive it is or they will tell you how it is not kind of a black sport, you know? Because I am a

black person and I live in Soweto, so you must understand that soccer is the type of sport that everybody loves. So when you like rugby it is a bit weird! I am the sort of person I don't like being the same as everybody else; I have always been that one person that is a bit odd. So it was only natural for me to like rugby because predominantly in my society it is soccer. So my mom wasn't even shocked you know? It was 'oh, we expected that – that is you'. (Mary)

4.3   Role differentiation

Within role differentiation, fans employ the position type of distinctiveness (Vignoles et al., 2002) by differentiating themselves in terms of social relationships and status. Abby, a Blue Bulls supporter who grew up around the stadium in Pretoria, Gauteng, and whose father played for the team, spoke about her role within the social relationships of the supporter group. In response to a prompt about wearing the blue hair wig worn by some supporters, she described those Blue Bulls supporters as "common." Chris, a Stormers supporter from Cape Town who also studied rugby in the Western Cape and is a coach and referee, provided an additional example of differentiating himself through the scrumhalf player position (number 9 on the field) he plays.

They always keep it interesting. Paint themselves and the blue – I won't do that. No. (laughs) No, not for me. I have my blue jersey on – that's fine! (laughs)... Oh no, that's common, I don't like that at all! (laughs)... if you know me you will know I am different (laughs). (Abby)

I bought myself a jersey what was it, two years ago, a Stormers jersey as well. And then my grandma worked me – because I was scrumhalf at school – I had her work me a no. 9 on the back of my jersey. (Chris)

Tina, a Blue Bulls supporter who grew to like the team over the past four years through her employer's sponsorship of rugby, provided an example of playing an unexpected gender-based social role to distinguish her from other supporters.

Um... You know, being able to sit between a bunch of guys and say 'oh, that was a forward pass' or something, and then they look at you as though you are stupid, and then the ref calls it as a forward pass and.... (laughs) Ja, so... I enjoy it, because you know sometimes you always get that one guy that thinks he knows more about the game than you do; it is a good feeling... I think a lot about the actual game, the rules of the game and that type of thing. (Tina)

4.4   Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of the group

In terms of perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of the group, fans employed self-stereotyping to enhance the perceptual distance between their team supporters and those of other teams. For example, Rob, a Sharks supporter since the 1960s who recently relocated back to Durban, and Charles, a Sharks supporter and Durban resident of almost 20 years, shared their perceptions of the superior experience at the Sharks home stadium.

I have been to many rugby matches in a huge stadium, and the atmosphere has been dead, whereas in the Shark Tank I went to the final cup years ago and um, you know, the stadium was packed and the atmosphere was electric! And you can see the team rising to the occasion, it is visible, it is fantastic. So it is a wonderful experience! (Rob)

You know I have been to rugby at Loftus Versfeld a couple of times and that is not an enjoyable experience because the Bull supporters are actually very bad losers and a lot of fighting and things like that at the Bulls, whereas if you go to the Sharks it is all very much a happy environment. Ja. (Charles)

Other interviewees' evaluations were based on their perceptions of more polite and friendly athletes: "compared to some of the other players from the other provinces; the way they come across is you know, very nice!" (Tina); or of fellow team supporters who "are way better than other supporters… [and] tend to be in my opinion more respectful of other teams" (Dirk). Fans can therefore use their perceptions of their team or supporter group being superior to other teams in order to gain intergroup distinctiveness.

4.5   Subgroup identification

In terms of the group-level perceptual framing strategy of subgroup identification, our analysis suggests that fans use different levels of team knowledge and behaviour to meaningfully emphasise subgroup differences. Sean is a Western Province Stormers supporter since relocating to Cape Town almost 20 years ago. He uses knowledge about rugby and his chosen team as the criteria to separate out a subgroup that he identifies with.

I think most of my friends who support Province have played rugby – not all at a high level but um, you know, they know about the game, they understand the game – and it is not just watching thirty players running around the field with a ball; they actually understand his position and what is going on, and what is expected of the guys. But I think, I must say my friends that support Province and myself, are knowledgeable about rugby. (Sean)

Iraj, a Blue Bulls supporter of almost 40 years who grew up in the Blue Bull dominated Pretoria area of Gauteng, also employed subgroup identification, although the criteria he used related to fan behaviour in different sections of the Blue Bulls stadium.

I call them the East Pavilion crowds (laughs), they are more the 'Brandewyn [brandy] and Coke brigade'. Um, they are more in it for you know, going and having a piss up more than what it is watching the game… They tend to go overboard with the blue faces and the funny horned hats and whatever, um, so ja (laughs) (Iraj)

Greg, a Western Province Stormers supporter since the mid-1970s who grew up in Cape Town, also identified with his chosen subgroup based on fan behaviour, although in his case the choice was for the livelier group.

> *I am not sitting with the hand clapping support, I tried that once and it didn't work for me, when I went to sit with my manager, it was a bit boring for me because at the railway stand - or the Danie Craven stand, where the shouting and booing goes on – I am really more one of those supporters... They are completely different. They will go and sit and be having a beer, clapping hands: where the supporters I sit with will shout and I am more like those kinds of supporters. (Greg)*

Sean, Iraj and Greg gained group-level distinctiveness by identifying with a subgroup of their team supporters. Unlike the previous three group-level strategies, where fans compared themselves to supporters of other teams, the subgroup identification strategy sees fans using intergroup comparisons within their larger team supporter group. In this way, fans demonstrate how they shift their level of self-categorisation to suit their needs for belonging and distinctiveness (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004).

4.6   Seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist

Fans express their loyalty to the team without sacrificing their personal values, thus employing the strategy of seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist. Ryan, a Blue Bulls supporter who grew up and went to school and university in the Pretoria area, shared his commitment to the team, as well as his reluctance to embrace some of the "nonsense" associated with other Blue Bulls supporters. Similarly Mike, a Boland province Cavaliers supporter whose grandfather played for the team in the 1920s, expressed his difficulties with the "typical" supporter.

> *I have got the jersey – that's it. And I have got a cap. I don't, no, no, no, I am not one of those guys with the 'bal' [ball[iii]] and all that nonsense – no. (laughter)... I don't know, I just have never gone through... I just feel I am a bit more conservative I suppose, to be honest. (Ryan)*

> *Well, ja, it can be a bit noisy! (laughs) With the [Boland] Cavalier supporters! They get excited and so on! Uh, ja, I just watch the game, I don't … I am not your typical… I won't say I am your typical flag-waving and shouting type. (Mike)*

These fans see themselves as "traditional loyalists" who are not fully comfortable with conforming to current behaviours and therefore distance themselves from more negative connotations associated with conformity to the group, such as more "fanatical" and "over the top" group behaviour.

4.7   Seeing the self to be more normative than other group members

In terms of the strategy of seeing the self to be more normative than other group members, some fans suggested that they were "real fans" that more strongly demonstrated the behaviours expected of their team's supporters. Tina expressed this view in spite of team results, while Carla, a member of the Western Province Stormers supporter's club who grew up watching her father play, believed that she needed to "dress the part" to be a supporter.

> *Look there are people that chop and change, 'ooh, the team I am supporting this year is doing really bad, no, I am going to go and support another team next year'. Um, I am not like that. As I said before as well, um, I am a Bulls supporter and no matter how they play I will always support them. (Tina)*

> *My friends are okay with it. Ja, they don't have a…. they become crazy like when I sometimes carry on and everything else. But they are accepting of it… Sometimes they think I go overboard. Ja, one of them said: 'Why would you paint your face?' (laughs) You know? 'Why would you wear blue hair?' 'Why would you….' You know? Because you are a supporter, you need to dress the part – I think! (laughs) (Carla)*

In summary, our findings demonstrate the use of structural reality and perceptual framing strategies. As mapped and expressed in Table 4, these findings provide an explanation for the ways in which fans balance their needs for optimal distinctiveness at a group and individual level.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

5   General discussion

The research provides empirical evidence of the mechanisms of structural reality and perceptual framing, and seven of their resultant identity management strategies, as fans meet their need for optimal distinctiveness through team identification. It contributes to initial social psychological work on perceptual framing in sport, including Abell's (2010) finding that fans perceptually frame their support of a team to indicate belonging and distinctiveness. The finding of the use of the perceptual framing mechanism and the related four strategies also broadens the existing boosting (Finch and Cialdini, 1989) and blasting (Cialdini and Richardson, 1980) concepts within sport marketing.

The use of the structural reality mechanism provides evidence of how individuals draw distinctiveness from something intrinsic to the group. The use of location and isolation by fans, as aspects of their team identity, confirms the importance of a minority category (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004) in seeking optimal distinctiveness. In this way, the finding supports previous sport fandom research on nonlocal fans, including Andrijiw and Hyatt's (2009) examination of nonlocal Canadian National Hockey League fans. The fan isolation results builds on an alternate stream of research examining the impact of enduring versus transient social connections for displaced fans (Wann et al., 2011). The

results did not provide any evidence of the use of the individual-level structural reality strategy of identifying with an individualist group. It is likely that the sport fandom context of the study, which normatively prescribes belonging over individual differentiation, may explain this finding. Hornsey and Jetten (2004) discuss this strategy in terms of Western societies such as the U.S., which "traditionally prioritise the individual and individual rights" (p.256). The authors also suggest that groups such as university students may emphasise freedom of personal expression. The lack of evidence of this strategy may thus be related to the strong community nature of rugby fandom in South Africa.

The findings suggest that a sport fan can seek optimal distinctiveness at an individual level, where the need for belonging is met as a supporter of a chosen team, while the fan is also distinct from other supporters of the same team. This finding broadens the argument of Funk and James (2004), who limit the distinctiveness of a fan to "non-members" (p.13). Through the second level of subgroup identification, the fan can also meet additional needs for belonging by shifting his level of self-categorisation to an informal subgroup of supporters, who are still distinctive from the entire body of team supporters. The third level of optimal distinctiveness observed enables the fan to more explicitly express his belonging to a chosen team and as a result his distinctiveness from other competing teams. These results also provide sport fandom evidence of the "merger" (p.91) structure of multiple in-groups (Roccas and Brewer, 2002), as well as the complementary nature of seeking distinctiveness at multiple self-concept levels (Jin et al., 2013).

The research includes a number of limitations. A challenge of the qualitative research design was the volume of data that needed to be managed. Although using Atlas.ti reduced this difficulty to some extent, some relationships and themes may not have been highlighted in this analysis. Inter-coder reliability analysis was not possible as the study was conducted as part of the first author's doctoral research. An additional limitation of the qualitative telephonic interviews is the lack of observational and nonverbal data, including emotions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010).

The finding that the mechanisms of structural reality and perceptual framing are used to gain psychological distinctiveness raises additional questions. Firstly, future research should investigate whether the mechanisms are employed by fans of other sports, especially in larger sport markets such as the United States, India and China. The development of an appropriate quantitative survey instrument to more accurately measure the use of psychological distinctiveness mechanisms could provide an early operationalisation of psychological distinctiveness within the sport management field. Another question raised by the findings relates to the role of the mechanisms within the changing nature of a fan's attachment to a chosen team.

Sport marketers and managers can employ the findings of this research to create additional avenues for sport teams to nurture fan attachment, thereby enhancing customer profitability and franchise value. Gaining a deeper understanding of a fan's social psychology is expected to assist in acquiring, retaining and growing sport consumers. Firstly, in terms of the optimal distinctiveness strategy of belonging to minority or numerically distinct fan group, our findings suggest that teams can increase identification by encouraging non-local fans to express the minority nature of their fandom. The New Zealand All-Blacks rugby Supporters Club in Cape Town, South Africa, made up of

patriotic South Africans, is one example of this approach. Secondly, sport marketers can deepen the psychological connection between a fan and team by strongly differentiating the brand of the team from the mainstream positioning of alternate team or sport offerings. Supporters of the South African SuperRugby franchise, the Southern Kings, are regarded in the media as distinctive, given the brand's racial transformation-related positioning (Rich, 2013).

Thirdly, in terms of the role differentiation strategy, sport marketers are able to use the position type of distinctiveness, including the special role played by a fan within the supporter group's social relationships. Sponsorship marketers are also able to employ this strategy to achieve corporate or product brand objectives, as demonstrated by telecommunications provider MTN's 'Last Fan Standing' consumer competition, which saw a selected fan ambassador attend 38 FIFA World Cup games over 31 days as part of a Guinness World Record attempt. Marketers are also able to use the status role played by a fan within the supporter group's social relationships. In this way, sport team marketers can promote additional purchase opportunities for fans to display their higher social status (Sutton, 2012).

Fourthly, in terms of the strategy of perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of the group, the research suggests that fans' perception of their and others' knowledge and behaviour can enhance the distinctiveness of their group. This is especially possible through leveraging marketing communication insights related to the needs for optimal distinctiveness being met through consumption, as demonstrated recently by Anheuser-Busch's aspirational Budweiser 'brotherhood' campaign (Logan, 2013).

Fifthly, sport marketers can enhance team identification by facilitating membership of informal subgroups, encouraging the perceptual enhancement of the distinctiveness of the fan group, and assisting fans perceptually to distinguish themselves as an individual level. The findings point to the use of location-based informal subgroups by non-local attached and allegiant fans to balance their needs for belonging and distinctiveness. Over the past decade, the KwaZulu-Natal-based Sharks developed more formal agreements with informal Sharks supporter clubs across South Africa in order to provide more meaningful sport brand experiences. In this way, sport marketers can encourage stronger temporary social connections (Wann et al., 2011) as non-local or displaced fans participate in shared sport consumption experiences.

Sixthly, in terms of the strategy of seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist, the findings caution sport marketers from excluding more conservative, and loyal supporters from sport consumption experiences. Lastly, in terms of the strategy of seeing the self to be more normative that other fans, sport marketers can deepen loyalty to the team by recognising variances within supporter group behaviours, including creating opportunities for fans to publicly demonstrate staking and badging practices (Schau et al., 2009). Social media platforms and mobile applications may provide a useful avenue to facilitate these practices. Creating multiple spaces within a broader stadium "sensoryscape" (Lee, Lee, Seo & Green, 2012) may allow fans to use both these individual-level perceptual framing strategies. In these ways, sport managers can employ the mechanisms of structural reality and perceptual framing, and seven of their resultant identity management strategies, to help fans develop stronger team identification by 'standing out' from the crowd.

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Table 1. Strategies for balancing needs to belong and to be different

	Mechanism for achieving distinctiveness	
Level of distinctiveness	Structural reality	Perceptual framing
Group distinctiveness	1. Identifying with numerically distinct groups	5. Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of the group
	2. Identifying with groups that are strongly differentiated from the mainstream	6. Subgroup identification
Individual distinctiveness	3. Role differentiation	7. Seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist
	4. Identifying with an individualist group	8. Seeing the self to be more normative than other group members

Note: Adapted from "The Individual Within the Group: Balancing the Need to Belong With the Need to Be Different," by M.J. Hornsey and J. Jetten, 2004, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp.248-264. Copyright 2004 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

Table 2. Interviewees

Pseudonym	Team (team home ground in parenthesis)	Age	Gender	Race	Language
Alex	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	25-34	Male	White	Afrikaans
Carla	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	35-44	Female	Colored	English
Tina	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	25-34	Female	White	English
Corne	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	50-54	Male	White	English
Rob	Sharks (Durban)	55-69	Male	White	English
Sean	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	65+	Male	White	English
Ian	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	35-44	Male	White	Afrikaans
Gary	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	55-64	Male	White	English
Anita	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	65+	Female	White	English
Jake	Free State Cheetahs (Bloemfontein)	50-54	Male	White	Afrikaans
Bob	Golden Lions (Johannesburg)	65+	Male	White	Afrikaans

Chris	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	20-24	Male	White	Afrikaans
Howard	Free State Cheetahs (Bloemfontein)	50-54	Male	White	Afrikaans
Kale	Sharks (Durban)	35-44	Male	White	English
Ryan	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	55-64	Male	White	English
Mike	Boland Cavaliers Wellington	50-54	Male	White	Afrikaans
Mary	Sharks (Durban)	20-24	Female	Black	Sesotho
Dan	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	25-34	Male	White	Afrikaans
Simon	Golden Lions (Johannesburg)	35-44	Male	Indian	English
Dirk	Sharks (Durban)	25-34	Male	White	English
Iraj	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	35-44	Male	White	Afrikaans
Greg	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	50-54	Male	Colored	Afrikaans
Tarryn	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	20-24	Female	Colored	Setswana
Charles	Sharks (Durban)	55-64	Male	White	English
Veronica	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	35-44	Female	White	Afrikaans
Lisa	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	25-34	Female	White	Afrikaans
Jackson	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	50-54	Male	White	English
Abby	Blue Bulls (Pretoria)	20-24	Female	White	Afrikaans
Brian	Western Province/Stormers (Cape Town)	45-49	Male	Colored	English

Table 3. Summary of findings

Structural reality mechanism strategies	Illustrative quotations
Identifying with numerically distinct groups	So although you are in the minority you still support the team… 'Cos then the satisfaction in winning is just bigger when you do it! (Howard)
Identifying with groups that are	I am a black person and I live in Soweto, so you must understand that soccer is the type of sport that everybody

strongly differentiated from the mainstream	loves. So when you like rugby it is a bit weird! (Mary)
Role differentiation	So you know you have got the previously disadvantaged, currently disadvantaged, you've got everybody!... And maybe I am a snob, I mean I am quite prepared to admit it. (Corne)
Perceptual framing mechanism strategies	*Illustrative quotations*
Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of the group	I think we are probably a better supported side by our local fans than any other franchise... I think we have the biggest crowd attendance of any of the local teams last year! (Sean)
Subgroup identification	They are completely different. They will go and sit and be having a beer, clapping hands: where the supporters I sit with will shout and I am more like those kind of supporters. (Greg)
Seeing oneself as loyal but non-conformist	I think a lot of people have gotten behind the change in strip band and all the fancy that is not typical rugby. Um, but ja, I don't go for that type of thing. (Iraj)
Seeing the self to be more normative than other group members	That is where the rest of the supporters must... must get on to the boat. Um, it is two different franchises, or let's call it teams, using the same home stadium. (Alex)

Table 4. Team supporter group level and individual supporter level distinctiveness

	Structural reality mechanisms	*Perceptual framing mechanism*
Group level distinctiveness	We are distinctive because the fan group I belong to is in the minority. We are distinctive because the fan group I belong to doesn't follow the rest.	We are distinctive because we perceive the fan group I belong to to be better. We are distinctive because we see the fan group I belong to as a subgroup within our team support group that behaves differently.
Individual level distinctiveness	I am distinctive because I play a specific social role in the fan group I belong to.	I am distinctive because I am loyal to my team, but don't conform to everything other supporters do. I am distinctive because I am a real fan of my team, as one should be.

Appendix 1: Code families

Code Family: In-group I: am a different race
Code Family: In-group I: am more active
Code Family: In-group I: am more moderate
Code Family: In-group I: am more refined
Code Family: In-group I: am more traditional
Code Family: In-group I: am non-local
Code Family: In-group I: speak a different language
Code Family: In-group others: are a different class
Code Family: In-group others: are badly behaved
Code Family: In-group others: are fake fans
Code Family: In-group others: are less knowledgeable
Code Family: In-group others: are less loyal
Code Family: In-group others: are negative
Code Family: In-group others: are over the top
Code Family: In-group others: are too quiet
Code Family: In-group others: speak different language
Code Family: In-group we: are backing winners
Code Family: In-group we: are better behaved
Code Family: In-group we: are in the minority
Code Family: In-group we: are more about the game
Code Family: In-group we: are more active
Code Family: In-group we: speak the same language
Code Family: Out-group: are badly behaved
Code Family: Out-group: are over the top
Code Family: Out-group: know less about rugby
Code Family: Out-group: speak another language
Code Family: Parent relationship through team

Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. How long have you been a supporter of []?
2. What is the earliest memory you have of supporting the []?
3. Can you help me understand what being a [] supporter means to you?
4. How does your support for the [] fit into the rest of your life?
5. How important is being a [] supporter to you?
6. What do your friends and family think about your support for the []?
7. How do you think your support for the [] may have changed over the past few years?
   a. Have you ever doubted the team or questioned your support for the []?
   b. At which times were you more of a supporter or less of a supporter?
8. If you were to describe yourself in a sentence or two, what would you say?
9. What do you think is most special about being a [] supporter?

a. What do you get out of being a [] supporter?
b. If you couldn't support the [], what other activity do you think would give you the same thing?
10. What kinds of things do you do to support the []?
11. When you think about supporting the [], who are the people you see yourself doing this with?
    a. Why them?
12. When you think about supporting the [], who are the people you do not see yourself doing this with?
    a. Why not them?
13. How do you prefer to watch [] games?
    a. What do you enjoy most about watching [] games?
    b. What do you enjoy least about watching [] games?
14. Can you tell me more about other [] supporters?
    a. How would you describe them?
    b. What do you like about them?
    c. Why?
    d. What do you not like about them?
    e. Why not?
    f. Which [] supporters are you most similar to?
    g. Which [] supporters are you most different from?
15. What do you enjoy most about watching games with fellow [] supporters?
    a. Can you tell me more about that?
16. What do you enjoy least about watching games with fellow [] supporters?
    a. Can you tell me more about that?
17. What is it like being a [] supporter when the team wins?
18. What is it like being a [] supporter when the team loses?
    a. How do you deal with that?
19. Can you tell me more about supporters of other teams?
    a. How would you describe them?
    b. What do you like about them?
    c. What do you not like about them?
20. Can you tell me about the experience of watching [] games with supporters of others teams?

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[i] Repucom is a global market research, media evaluation and commercial auditing firm serving the sport, entertainment and events industry.
[ii] Super Rugby is a professional rugby franchise tournament played between 15 teams across South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.
[iii] Some Blue Bulls fans wear oversized blue testicles to express their fandom.