

TITLE: Exploring PERMA in spectator sport: Applying positive psychology to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption

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Abstract

Sport spectating provides numerous benefits for sport organisations and individuals. In this paper we use a positive psychology approach to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption in order to investigate the activation of five domains of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). Using a two-study panel research design, we collected qualitative data from a sample of Australian Rules Football consumers. In the first study, we explored how the PERMA domains were activated during the season. Study two included a follow-up interview with eight initial respondents in the off-season. We found evidence of four PERMA domains that were activated in the sport spectator context by a variety of consumer experiences. The emergence of these domains in both studies suggests sport marketers would benefit from actions including: creating more social spaces within their stadiums, hosting regular off-season events, and creating social-media based competitions which promote fan engagement and interactions throughout the calendar year.

Exploring PERMA in spectator sport: Applying positive psychology to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption

Sport management researchers have traditionally focused on how to leverage the relationship between individuals and sport organisations to benefit sport leagues and teams. Such research contributes to understanding how sport organisations might best connect with customers to reap organisational benefits (Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014). Whilst valuable, this perspective focuses largely on the perspective of sport organisations, which detracts attention from the individual-level benefits of spectating. Inoue, Berg, and Chelladurai (2015) illustrate this oversight, outlining a paucity of research attention dedicated to the relationship between sport consumption, and health and well-being. Furthermore, Inoue et al. (2015) note that only 9% of studies exploring this relationship are located in sport management journals, prompting a call for more research in this emerging area. Thus, in this paper we investigate the wider impacts of sport consumption and how specific domains of well-being are activated through sport spectating (Wann, 2006c).

Research concerning the health and well-being benefits associated with sport has focused mainly on participation; rather than spectatorship. Existing spectator research, however, focuses on health and physical domains of well-being, devoting less attention to psychological states. A review of 135 relevant spectator manuscripts published between 1990 and 2014 demonstrated that health (47%) and physical well-being (24%) are well researched; however, domains of mental (20%) and social well-being (15%) receive much less attention (Inoue et al., 2015). Despite this weakness, researchers have established that sport spectating and psychological health are conceptually (Wann, 2006c) and empirically related (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Theodorakis, Wann, Nassis, & Luellen, 2012; Wann, 2006a; Wann, Dimmock, & Grove, 2003; Wann, Keenan, & Page, 2009; Wann & Pierce, 2005; Wann, Rogers, Dooley, & Foley, 2011; Wann, Waddill, Polk, & Weaver, 2011; Wann &

Weaver, 2009). These contributions demonstrate the capacity of sport consumption to deliver individual-level benefits; however, the specific domains that contribute to well-being are not completely understood. Thus, research in the spectator context has determined that spectatorship has the capacity to influence well-being, but has yet to reveal how this occurs.

We use Seligman's (2011) positive psychology framework with five domains: PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) as guidance to explore the well-being benefits of sport spectatorship. Filo and Coghlan (in press) utilised positive psychology to understand the specific domains that contribute to well-being among sport event participants. They found that participation in charity sport events activated each PERMA domain to varying degrees. Meanwhile, Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2012) provided some evidence of PERMA activation in the spectator context, finding that South African residents believed that the 2010 FIFA World Cup would activate positive emotions amongst community members, provide socialisation opportunities, and create a sense of national solidarity. More recently, Pawlowski, Downward, and Rasciute (2014) demonstrated a link between attending sport events and happiness (e.g., pleasure) using data from individuals in 46 countries. These studies support consideration of positive emotions (P), relationships (R), and meaning (M) from the PERMA framework.

In this paper, we use a two-study research design examining how the five PERMA domains are activated in the spectator context, and how these domains are experienced during the season and in the off-season. This extends efforts in the spectator context, which have called for exploration of the underlying facets linked to the individual-level benefits of sport consumption (e.g., Wann, 2006c; Wann et al., 2003). Consequently, the present research objective is to explore the activation of the PERMA domains within the sport spectator context. Two research questions (RQ) frame our investigation:

RQ1: How does sport spectatorship activate the individual-level PERMA domains?

RQ2: How does the activation of the individual-level PERMA domains vary between in-season and off-season contexts?

Literature Review

Sport spectatorship can influence psychological well-being due to the social nature of the activity (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001; Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). Through consumption, individuals often experience psychological benefits, which include an increased sense of belonging in society and attachment to other spectators (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Lock & Funk, in press). In conceptual work, Wann (2006c) proposed that sport spectating contributes to social-psychological health as it enables the creation of temporary and enduring connections with others. Wann (2006c) explains that temporary or transient connections emerge in environments where an individual's team preference is not likely to expose them to other in-group members on a regular basis (e.g., when a fan resides a long distance from his or her favourite team but encounters other in-group fans at a bar). Enduring connections emanate in more permanent settings, such as when an individual supports a team in the local area and is therefore often surrounded by other in-group members. In this instance, the individual is provided with frequent opportunities to talk to others, form friendships, and engage in team supportive behaviours with likeminded individuals (e.g., Gibson et al., 2002; Katz & Heere, 2013).

Substantial research supports Wann's (2006c) propositions. Elling, Van Hilvoorde, and Van Den Dool (2014) found that sections of the Dutch population experienced short-term increases in their sense of belonging based upon the country's success at large sport events. Furthermore, evidence suggests the social connections derived from sport spectatorship reduce the likelihood that an individual will experience negative emotions (e.g., depression or social alienation), and increase the likelihood that he or she will experience positive feelings (e.g., belongingness) and social connectedness (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991;

Theodorakis et al., 2012; Wann, 2006a; Wann et al., 2003; Wann et al., 2009; Wann & Pierce, 2005; Wann, Rogers, et al., 2011; Wann, Waddill, et al., 2011; Wann & Weaver, 2009). In this paper, we focus on expanding understanding of the specific domains and processes that influence well-being by utilising a positive psychology approach (e.g., Wann, 2006c).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology refocused mainstream psychology from directing effort towards correcting negative psychological states, to proactively examining the processes of human functioning that enable individuals to thrive and experience flow (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology conceptualises well-being broadly, accounting for both hedonic (e.g., emotional states) and eudemonic (e.g., flow and meaning) elements that help individuals to experience happiness and ultimately, flourish. The state of flourishing is characterised by experiencing “the opposite of mental disorder, rather than its mere absence” (Huppert & So, 2013, p.849). From this perspective, well-being encompasses objective (e.g., quality and standard of living) and subjective factors (e.g., emotional and mental health) that contribute to an individual experiencing an enjoyable and meaningful life which he or she believes is worth living (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this paper, we employ positive psychology to examine sport consumption at the individual-level using a combined hedonic and eudemonic approach.

Well-being Theory

Seligman (2002) initially defined three factors that determine the extent to which an individual obtained a sense of well-being. Originally, he argued that well-being consisted of positive emotions, engagement and meaning, and that increases across these domains enabled flourishing (Forgeard et al., 2011). In accordance with the tenets of positive psychology, well-being theory was later augmented to capture additional hedonic and eudemonic

elements. Seligman (2011) added two conceptual domains to accompany positive emotions, engagement, and meaning: relationships and accomplishment. The five domains of well-being form the current PERMA framework. Whilst Seligman (2011) espoused that each domain can be pursued in isolation, the conceptual interrelationship amongst the domains provides a crucial aspect of well-being. For instance, an individual who builds relationships with others is also likely to possess positive thoughts about his or her future. Similarly, an individual who experiences accomplishments is likely to derive an increased sense of meaning. With this in mind, we now review each PERMA domain, and compare and contrast how previous sport research has uncovered these domains. Additionally, we provide the operational definition of each PERMA domain, adapted from research conducted in the sport participation context (Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Positive Emotions

Research on sport participants has revealed that individuals can experience positive emotions such as pleasure, gratification, and happiness through their event participation (Coghlan & Filo, 2013; Filo & Coghlan, in press; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009; Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2015). Sport spectator researchers have suggested hedonic factors are an important aspect or outcome of sport consumption (e.g., Pawlowski et al., 2014), particularly for less involved consumers who attend or watch sport to have a pleasurable experience (e.g., Doyle, Kunkel & Funk, 2013; Funk & James, 2001, 2006). The sport management literature typically focuses on how spectator emotions are influenced by game outcomes (Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994) and how positive emotions arise from expectancy disconfirmation to influence variables such as satisfaction and loyalty (Harrolle, Trail, Rodriguez, & Jordan, 2010; Madrigal, 1995; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000, 2005; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003). This research focuses on understanding how positive emotions lead to attitudes which enhance consumption.

Well-being theory develops this approach by exploring positive emotions as reaffirming mental states influencing experiences in the past, present, and future (Seligman, 2002). Past emotions include satisfaction and fulfilment; whereas emotions relevant to the future consist of feelings like hope, optimism, and trust. These emotions are pertinent to well-being as they help to enhance the positivity attributed to past memories and guard against negative emotions or illnesses (e.g., depression) in the future (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Neuroscience research outlines that positive emotions influence thoughts of the past, present, and future. Individuals mentally time travel by drawing upon previous experiences to simulate past and future events (e.g., Atance & O'Neill, 2005; Eacott & Easton, 2012; Schacter & Addis, 2007). Neuroscientists also espouse that humans deliberately and unconsciously disconnect from reality to simulate the past and future on a daily basis (Andrews-Hanna, 2012), highlighting the importance of being able to draw upon positive emotions to guard past, present, and future mental states.

For these reasons, positive emotions are a key antecedent to an individual experiencing happiness (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004) and building physical, social, and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 1998). These capabilities broaden the way an individual thinks and builds resilience and well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Tugade and Frederickson (2004) demonstrated this link by showing positive emotions contributed to enhanced recovery from negative mood arousal states, and helped individuals to find more positive meaning in negative circumstances. The current research explores this line of enquiry by examining the activation of positive emotions in spectator sport through a positive psychology lens. Thus, in this research, positive emotions are defined as *affirming mental states experienced by an individual* (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Engagement

Mainstream business research outlines the conceptual confusion surrounding the term engagement, noting that the construct is rarely clearly defined and often confused with other variables (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Hollebeek, 2011). This lack of clarity is also present within the sport management literature where constructs such as commitment, involvement, identification, and attachment are used interchangeably to conceptualise engagement (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014). Recognising this problem, marketing (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011) and sport management scholars (e.g., Yoshida et al., 2014) have conceptualised engagement as a dyadic interaction between a consumer and an organisation, or two or more consumers.

Within the PERMA framework, engagement refers to the degree of immersion and concentration an individual experiences or dedicates to an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Forgeard et al., 2011). Thus, in positive psychology engagement refers to a person's absorption derived from interaction with an object (Seligman, 2011). In the sport spectator context, absorption manifests through an individual becoming captivated and engrossed in supporting their favourite team to the extent that they lose their sense of self when they are engaged in team related activities. Csikszentmihalyi (1997, 2013) argued that individuals who experience high levels of engagement, and are challenged physically or mentally, experience 'flow', a state of mind conducive to harnessing positive consciousness and happiness. Coghlan and Filo (2013) found evidence of engagement for event participants at two charity cycling events. More recent research has uncovered engagement amongst participants of walking, running, and swimming events; however, engagement was found to be the least salient PERMA domain in this study (Filo & Coghlan, in press). This limited evidence suggests further exploration is necessary. In the present research, engagement

represents *instances where individuals find themselves absorbed and immersed as consumers* (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Relationships

Relationships refer to an individual's links with others. Forgeard et al. (2011) proposed that relationships are important in making humans feel loved and valued. Research within the leisure domain indicates that participating in sport and cultural activities helps build relationships, which enhances well-being (Brajsa-Zganec, Merkas, & Sverko, 2011). Similarly, studies in participatory sport contexts have revealed that socialisation can act as a motive to enter charity sport events (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008), enhance the meaning derived from participation (Filo et al., 2009), and provide feelings of companionship which enrich existing friendships and help in the formation of new interpersonal bonds (Coghlan & Filo, 2013). Similarly, Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, and Kaplanidou (2011) found social affiliations drove participation in a mass running event where committed runners, particularly, enjoyed spending time with likeminded people during the event.

Socialisation represents a key motive in sport spectator pursuits that enables teams to establish and develop psychological connections with consumers (Funk & James, 2001). Socialisation agents (e.g., family members and friends) are important in introducing individuals to specific sports or teams (James, 2001), and in building relationships by connecting likeminded individuals who bond over shared experiences (e.g., Gibson et al., 2002; Harrolle et al., 2010; Katz & Heere, 2013; Trail et al., 2000, 2005; Trail et al., 2003; Trail & James, 2001; Wann & Weaver, 2009). Research has illustrated that relationships can be both an antecedent and an outcome of sport spectating, demonstrating the ongoing interaction between sport consumption and the connections built through spectating (Wann, 2006c). Research has demonstrated that a heightened sense of camaraderie at an event can influence perceptions of the social impact of the event and the purchasing behaviour of

attendees in relation to the event and the event sponsor's products (Inoue & Havard, 2014). Elsewhere, Lock et al. (2012) found that relationships formed around a new team were important in the development of identification towards the team, and that ongoing consumption led to fans spruiking the team to others. Wann (2006a) empirically supported this proposition using a cross-lagged panel model design to demonstrate that team identification levels were positively correlated with a measure of social-psychological health taken three months later. Thus, relationships within PERMA outline connections with others that influence well-being. In line with this approach, we identify relationships as *experiencing togetherness and belonging with others* (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Meaning

Meaning is a eudemonic element of well-being describing the derivation of significance from, and belief that, an individual's life has purpose (Seligman, 2011). Business research highlights that meaning helps individuals understand who they are, thus improving individual and organisational performance (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). Sport research has revealed that meaning contributes to participation in charity sport events, documenting evidence of individuals deriving emotional, functional, and symbolic meaning from their participatory experiences (Coghlan & Filo, 2013; Filo et al., 2008, 2009). These charity-linked events provided participants with functional and symbolic meaning as they provided a sense of purpose related to the requirements of the event (e.g., training) and towards the particular cause that the charity sport event was supporting (Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Sport spectator literature that conceptualises meaning in line with PERMA is limited, with researchers preferring to focus on how sport organisations can communicate a brand image with which individuals can identify (Funk & James, 2001, 2006). Lock, Darcy, and Taylor (2011) found symbolic reasons such as supporting the team's home city and

representative sport were influential in the activation of identification. A number of factors that build meaning in this sense have been identified in the literature (cf. Wann, 2006b) including the sport object's performance history (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002), the preferences of the individual's socialisation agents (James, 2001) and his or her existing social affiliations (Heere & James, 2007). Whilst valuable, such research has not yet examined meaning as it is conceptualised within well-being research. Thus, the current research defines meaning as *the sense of purpose individuals derive from feeling a part of something larger than their self* (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press).

Accomplishment

The final PERMA domain, accomplishment, represents a person's realisation that he or she has achieved a specific goal or target (Forgeard et al., 2011). Seligman (2011) highlighted the importance of accomplishment in enabling an individual to flourish and improve his or her well-being. Accomplishment can provide individuals with positive reinforcement and help to satisfy basic human needs such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, it influences both hedonic and eudemonic elements of well-being (Seligman, 2011). To date, however, sport researchers have focussed on the pleasure and self-image benefits derived from supporting successful teams.

Extensive research has documented the importance of vicarious achievement as a motive to sport spectatorship (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; Elling et al., 2014; Wann & Branscombe, 1990), which influences a range of team-related attitudes and behaviours (e.g., End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, & Jacquemotte, 2002; Fink et al., 2002; Trail et al., 2003; Wann, 2006b; Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995). Whilst valuable, prior research does not position achievement within a broader well-being framework. Research has demonstrated that sport event participants may derive well-being benefits from achieving specific event related goals or meeting personal targets during their involvement in the event (Filo &

Coghlan, in press; Filo et al., 2009). Du, Jordan and Funk (2015) reported that participants of a long distance running event that achieved their predicted time goal were more positive about their event experience than those who failed to accomplish the time goal. Extending this perspective to the spectator context, we examine how experiencing accomplishment through a sport team is related to well-being and define accomplishment as *the sense of achievement derived from vicarious association with a group* (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press).

The review of well-being research positions the PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011) as a holistic lens useful for examining sport spectator well-being. The review shows that positive psychology explains why well-being benefits may emerge for individuals through sport participation. The review also illustrates that well-being has been largely overlooked in sport spectator contexts, providing an opportunity to extend knowledge in this area. Thus, in this paper, we extend existing knowledge by examining how sport spectatorship experiences may impact specific domains of well-being. Two research questions framed our investigation:

RQ1: How does sport spectatorship activate the individual-level PERMA domains?

RQ2: How does the activation of the individual-level PERMA domains vary between in-season and off-season contexts?

Method

To address these research questions, we used a two-study panel research design (e.g., Bryman, 2012) to gather qualitative data from Australian Rules Football spectators. Due to the sparse empirical evidence of PERMA in sport spectatorship, we adopted an interpretivist approach to our data collection. As per research focused on sport participant experiences (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press), we collected in-depth qualitative data to provide rich and deep insights into the spectator experiences that led to the activation of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Collecting qualitative data was deemed suitable to best address the exploratory research questions, rather than quantitatively

testing for its presence or absence. We also collected our data via in-depth interviews in response to research calls emanating from the observation that only 5% of studies exploring the health benefits of sport consumption use qualitative methods (Inoue et al., 2015).

Participants

Participants were spectators of the Gold Coast Suns, who participate in the elite level Australian Rules Football competition – the Australian Football League (AFL). Study 1 collected data from 20 interviewees, whilst Study 2 followed up and gathered data from eight interviewees. Respondents in Study 1 were aged between 19 and 66 years old, of which 14 were male (70%) and 6 female (30%). Sixteen of the interviewees (80%) held a team membership, or season ticket. The interviews ranged from 18 to 48 minutes in length.

Each subject in Study 2 was interviewed during Study 1 and thus, Study 2 participants had a similar demographic profile. The panel reduced from 20 interviewees in Study 1 to eight in Study 2, due to attrition. Respondents were aged between 19 and 61 years old, with six males (75%) and two females (25%) interviewed. All interviewees planned to, or had already, renewed their membership for the following season, except one person who suggested he would attend selectively due to family commitments. The interviews ranged in length from 23 to 72 minutes respectively.

Materials

The interview guide contained questions developed to explore how the PERMA domains are activated in the spectator sport context. The guide provided space to include probing questions which explored each individual's subjective account of personal experiences (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2009). To explore the research questions central to this investigation, respondents were asked to explain broadly "How has following the Gold Coast Suns impacted your life?" More specific questions were asked when responses related to the PERMA domains. This probing involved asking respondents to detail the experiences

relevant to the specific domains (e.g., “How has supporting the Gold Coast Suns influenced your relationships with others?”).

Procedures

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews during the season (Study 1), and at the beginning of the post-season (Study 2) with an interval of five months between studies. Interviewees were invited to participate in Study 1 during matches played in the first month of the season, following an approach from the lead researcher inside the team’s stadium. Using a purposive method, individuals identified as Suns’ supporters (e.g., through their clothing) were approached and asked if they were interested in discussing their experiences. Those who indicated interest were provided with a detailed information sheet and then asked if they would be willing to participate. The lead researcher exchanged contact details and then arranged suitable venues and times for the interviews. All interviews took place in private venues, such as the respondent’s home, to ensure the subjects felt comfortable sharing their experiences (Bryman, 2012). The lead researcher constantly compared the data collected and determined after the 20th interview that no new findings or concepts were emerging and thus, ceased data collection (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1977).

Each respondent was thanked for his or her time and given a \$20 gift voucher as a token of appreciation. Then the lead researcher asked interviewees if they would be interested in speaking again post-season. All interviewees indicated a willingness to do so, and provided the researcher with appropriate contact details, which were used for recruitment in Study 2. Invitations to participate in Study 2 were distributed via email shortly after the end of the AFL season, approximately five months after Study 1. In Study 2, we used a convenience sampling approach to interview eight individuals during a two-week period in the off-season. This additional study enabled the research team to determine how the activation of the PERMA domains may have differed from observations made during the season. This

approach empowered respondents to speak about their experiences holistically and in relation to the time that had elapsed since Study 1, enabling the research team to identify variations which characterised the on-season and off-season contexts.

Data Analysis

Creswell's (2009) three-step analysis approach was used to ensure consistent and reliable procedures were employed across both studies. The first step consisted of thoroughly reading the interview transcripts and relevant field notes to uncover themes emerging in the data. Themes were comprised of specific words, concepts, and phrases used by multiple respondents, indicating a common response (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes were uncovered deductively, using the operational definitions of the PERMA domain stated earlier as guiding frameworks. To ensure the themes emerging were accurate and indicative of the interviewees' responses, the lead researcher regularly consulted with the research team and respondents themselves. These mechanisms were designed to achieve a high level of data trustworthiness (e.g., Leitz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994), and have been employed in other qualitative sport management studies (Filo, Cuskelly, & Wicker, 2015). Reflexivity was established through exchanges between the research team after the completion of interviews and transcription. Meanwhile, a summary of key points from individual interviews was collated by the lead researcher immediately following the interviews. This summary was provided to the selected interviewees for feedback, in a process known as "member checking" (Creswell, 2009. p. 191).

The second step involved inspecting the data again and looking for any themes not identified in the first step. At this point, the themes were allocated to specific sections of the text and data extracts were collated by way of gathering responses that were particularly representative of the PERMA domains. The third step involved condensing the themes by determining which domain specific quotes best explained. These results are discussed next

using the respondents' words to build a narrative of how the PERMA domains manifest and vary through an assortment of spectator experiences.

Results

We found evidence that positive emotions, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment domains were activated to some degree by a variety of sport spectator experiences, which addressed Research Question 1. The engagement domain was not evidenced and as such, we do not present results for this domain. The two-study approach uncovered variations in the salience of some domains between studies and also in the experiences that activated the specific domains, addressing Research Question 2. We discuss the results in relation to positive emotions, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, next.

Positive Emotions

Respondents described how a range of on-field and off-field experiences led to the activation of emotions such as happiness, fulfilment and optimism. These emotions were activated by experiences including: hearing about the team's establishment, attending the team's games, witnessing victories and improvements in the team's performances, receiving correspondence from the team, involvement with events promoted by the team, and interactions with the team's community engagement programs. In respect to Research Question 2, respondents explained how the activation of positive emotions during the season largely related to on-field performances, whereas during the off-season, positive emotions were activated by broader community and personal interactions with the team.

Justine (S1) described how she felt when she attended the team's matches stating: "As soon as you walk in your whole body just feels so good (laughs), it does." Andrew (S1) also experienced happiness when the team was performing well, stating: "I'm definitely happy when they are playing well... I don't expect wins but if they're playing well and they are within twenty points of the other team then yeah, I am really happy." Commenting on the

team's on-field performances, Justine (S1) explained how she felt when the team won a game, stating: "I was over the moon... I was that excited I had sore hands from clapping, my voice [pauses] - I was just so excited". Tamara (S2) recalled her happiness after witnessing the team beat a rival and explained how other fans appeared to experience similar feelings: "Everyone was just so excited and grabbing strangers and kissing and hugging them and all that sort of stuff. It was weird, but it was good. It was really, really good... Everybody was excited, everybody was happy." Referring to an off-field experience, Nick (S1) explained how he and his family experienced positive emotions when they received a letter from the team thanking them for being members. He explained, "The kids love it and put it on their little desks with the rest of their cards and I think - if they're happy, we're happy."

Positive emotions also emerged in the off-season. Ken (S2) recalled how winning the final home game of the season formed a memorable moment and gave him an increased sense of optimism for the upcoming season stating: "For us to beat them and to beat them quite convincingly was fantastic. It was a great moment to be there... I'm optimistic for the guys." Ken (S2) also discussed the team's community involvement, stating: "They're helping a lot of the community by raising money and so on so that does make me feel good." For Lois (S2) her team support activated positive emotions based around pleasurable experiences she had with the Suns' promotional activities. She recalled how a promotional campaign on Facebook had led her to participate in a hotdog eating competition at the stadium, during an international exhibition match that did not involve the team. She explained her participation in this event created:

My happiest memory ever. Facebook advertised a hotdog eating competition and straightaway I put my hand up... It did create one of my happiest memories because there's 12,000 people there, my head is on this massive screen with a hotdog shoved down my throat and all I remember is my three kids just jumping up and down and

cheering for me. I don't think I would have done that had it not been for the Suns and it did create me having one of my happiest memories.

Relationships

Respondents provided numerous statements in both studies supporting the relationships domain, explaining how their team-related experiences activated feelings of belongingness and togetherness. Addressing Research Question 1, respondents explained how spectating gave them something they could do with their family and friends that afforded them opportunities to strengthen interpersonal relationships through spending quality time together. Additionally, respondents recalled how experiences like meeting new people at the team's games or in the community activated the creation of new relationships. Over the course of the season, respondents explained how these relationships became stronger and developed even during the off-season, providing insights for Research Question 2.

In both S1 and S2, respondents explained how their team affiliations had afforded opportunities to further their existing interpersonal relationships and facilitated the establishment of new connections. Discussing the role of existing relationships, Emma (S1) explained that her interest as a spectator originated "through my partner and through friends." Similarly, Nick's (S1) involvement represented "something our family could do together." In respect to new connections, Mark (S1) and Andrew (S1) both indicated they had made "a lot of friends" through the Suns, whilst Matt (S1) gained "five good, good friends and about fifteen in total that I sort of know generally" via his team consumption. The activation of new relationships was particularly important for Lois (S1) who explained how her support enabled her to develop interpersonal relationships and helped her assimilate into the community. Lois stated her interest in the team was initially based on a desire to:

Do something that was community [based] and with my children. Because we've moved here, we're new, we don't know anyone. We wanted to make friends... I've

made heaps [of friends] and I've never had that happen ever so because of that as well it's made me feel that the Gold Coast is home.

The interviewees provided further evidence of the relationships domain during Study 2. Lois (S2) was able to articulate how her "Suns family" had expanded to ten people. These individuals now helped Lois with babysitting, stayed in her home, and sent her Mother's Day cards, illustrating the strength of these bonds. Elsewhere, support of relationship activation emerged from interviews with individuals who did not provide evidence of the relationships domain in Study 1. Tamara (S2) stated she had "made a lot of friendships and very good friendships" from a mutual team interest in the latter half of the season explaining:

When we saw you last, I'm pretty sure we said 'no we wouldn't socialise with people outside' but we do now socialise. There's a group of 12 of us [who have] booked a Christmas dinner that we'll go to so, yes, that's probably the biggest benefit out of it. We've met some really nice people.

Similarly, Graham (S2) described establishing relationships with "probably a dozen" new friends who he socialised with and helped with business dealings. Graham described how relationships were activated through his team support stating his experiences spectating: "certainly opened doors to meeting good people and having relationships."

Other individuals discussed how their relationships helped to make them feel a sense of belonging with the broader community. Mark (S2) explained that his attendance at games as well as his activity on the team's social media pages led to the establishment of many relationships, which represented "something that made me feel more connected to the Gold Coast and the community... It's through the Suns I have met the locals" Nick (S2) shared a similar perspective and explained how the desire to experience togetherness influenced his family's decision to move to the region. Nick explained:

The reason why we joined the Suns was [to find] something that we could do as a family together. It was new, it was one of the reasons why we moved to the Gold Coast because where we were living was where I grew up and not where my wife grew up and our friends were my friends so it was a kind of a bit of a fresh start and the Suns were part of that.

Meaning

Respondents explained how meaning was activated as supporting the team helped them feel like part of something larger than themselves. Providing insights for Research Question 1, specific experiences that fostered a sense of meaning included supporting the hometown team, having lunch with the team's coach and CEO, receiving a tour of the stadium, being interviewed at the team's games, providing feedback on marketing decisions, and being included on supporter photographs displayed inside the team's home stadium. These experiences activated a sense of team ownership as well as a sense that the individual's support of the team served a purpose larger than their self. This sense of service and feelings of ownership did not markedly vary from the in-season to the off-season, informing Research Question 2. Peter (S1) explained how his support provided a sense of ownership stating:

The main thing is that basically you feel like you're a part of them. You really do. Living on the Coast not being down here for long, I suppose you want to really put your roots in somewhere as well. We've moved a few times [and] now where we are, doing what we do now, we sort of feel still a little bit transient. But, to me that was one thing that would sort of cement me to the Gold Coast. It made me feel like 'Okay, I've got something of ownership on the Gold Coast, and that's the Suns.'

Further evidence emerged from responses gathered during Study 2. Ken (S2) described how his experiences of meeting the coach and CEO and taking a stadium tour made him feel he was "a part of the family, a part of the actual fandom." On another note, Steven

(S2) recalled how he felt after being invited onto the field by the team following a victory for a commemorative photograph. For Steven, being in the photograph with other fans and the players made him “feel [like] part of the team.” Peter (S2) held a belief that as a member, he was a part of the organisation itself, stating “if you are a member you are part of the club. If you put your time or your resources into anything, you just become part of it.” Peter best summarised these feelings with the following passage:

You do feel like you own it because you do. I own the seat in this place; I own \$548 worth of the Suns. Without me there they're \$548 shorter this year coming and they're not going to be able to do as much as they would probably be able to do otherwise... Everything is a little building block towards making the place what it is. We give our little bit and it all comes together and makes it what it is.

Accomplishment

The final PERMA domain, accomplishment, emerged when individuals spoke of feelings of achievement linked to their spectator experiences. In regards to Research Question 1, respondents explained how feelings that they helped influence the AFL's decision to establish the team, experiencing the team's first game, and witnessing milestone moments activated a sense of accomplishment. In regards to Research Question 2, respondents explained how their involvement in the early stages of the team's development activated feelings of accomplishment when recalling positive team moments.

Mark (S1) derived a sense of purpose through his activities helping the team establish themselves in the region. Mark was involved in getting people to pledge support towards the team prior to their founding as required by the AFL, and continued to help promote the team after their creation. He said: “I do a lot with them, I volunteer for them and I do support them a lot and I've actually signed up a lot of members. I've spread the word pretty well... I have tried to help the club in every way.” Peter (S1) also spoke about his involvement in

supporting the team before they were granted a licence to compete in the AFL, and how he felt like he played a role in ensuring the team was successful. Commenting on how he personally helped the team via signing up and in spruiking the team to others, Peter stated:

We needed the support and needed like ten thousand to twenty thousand [supporters] and we ended up with about forty thousand people that were keen to get on board...I think that was, you know for me, signing up, signing up was the beginning; it was right towards the beginning that I signed up you know I just felt like 'yep'. That was probably the key thing for me was pretty much just getting on that computer and signing up and saying 'yep, I'm a member' you know 'I want to do this.'

Interviewees provided evidence of accomplishment during Study 2, recalling how the team's relatively successful end to the 2012 season was something they could share.

Importantly, here, respondents commented on how results and good crowds made them feel like their efforts in helping promote the team were paying off. For Lois (S2), experiencing the team's first home win provided a memorable highlight from which she derived a feeling of accomplishment. Lois remarked that the victory was "obviously special because it was the first at home... That's what you're there for I guess, to see that happen." For Mark, the team's on-field achievements and growing crowds were personally relevant as it made him feel like he had served a purpose in establishing the team. Mark again referred to his involvement helping the team in their initial stage stating:

I was there when they were first trying to get 10,000 members and building Metricon [Stadium]... On game days, I handed stuff out, handed out membership things, spread the word a lot basically to everyone I knew. I got my friends signed up so I did a lot for building the membership in the first two years... I wanted football here and I didn't want it to fail, I was living here and I think the city needed it to be honest. I wanted it to be here and I thought it was important if I didn't help and other people

didn't help then it was the difference between a few thousand memberships and that's the difference between them being successful, or even being able to start up.

Discussion

In the current research, we explored the applicability of PERMA to the spectator context and, subsequently, provided insights into the specific spectator experiences that can help an individual pursue well-being. This contributes knowledge towards an emergent area of research concerned with the health and wellness implications of sport spectatorship (Inoue et al., 2015), and supports propositions made in spectator-based literature advancing PERMA as a valuable framework for understanding the specific factors which contribute to positive life states and flow (Wann, 2006c; Wann et al., 2003). Our findings highlight how four of the five PERMA domains were activated by specific sport spectator experiences, which supports prior evidence that sport consumption can enable individuals to achieve positive well-being and flourish (e.g., Seligman, 2011). Evidence for the activation of the positive emotions, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment domains emerged both during the season, and in the off-season. The degree to which each of these domains emerged varied, which aligns with research on sport participants (Filo & Coghlan, in press). Table 1 summarises the experiences leading to the activation of each relevant PERMA domain, and outlines the experiences that activated each domain between the in-season and off-season contexts.

=====INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE=====

Our findings show that a range of team-related experiences during the season and in the off-season activated positive emotions, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These experiences related to attending games and other contexts at home or in the community. In respect to Study 1, positive emotions were activated through a variety of team-related experiences such as witnessing encouraging team performances and victories,

receiving correspondence from the team, and participating in halftime events. Respondents associated positive emotions such as pleasure and happiness with their past and present team experiences and outlined how emotions like optimism related to their thoughts of the future. In respect to how such activation varied during the season and in the off-season, we found that the team's involvement with community initiatives assumed greater importance and activated positive emotions during the off-season. Collectively, these results identify a broad range of spectator experiences that contributed towards the individual's hedonic state, which represents an important determinant of sport consumer behaviour (Doyle et al., 2013; Funk & James, 2001, 2006) and satisfaction (Harrolle et al., 2010; Madrigal, 1995; Trail et al., 2000, 2005; Trail, et al., 2003). The results corroborate, and extend, research in the participatory sport context (Coghlan & Filo, 2013; Filo & Coghlan, in press) showing how sport consumption can activate feelings of pleasure and optimism for the future, helping individuals to pursue well-being (Powlowski et al., 2014; Seligman, 2011).

Alongside positive emotions, relationships were the most prominently discussed PERMA domain across both studies, supporting research on the social-psychological benefits of sport consumption (Wann, 2006c; Wann & Weaver, 2009). Respondents explained how interactions with others at games and in the community enabled them to develop existing, and create new, interpersonal connections. Our observations of the new relationships continuing to evolve in the off-season and permeating into broader areas of life (e.g., business and family) supports the notion that relationships provide enduring benefits (Wann, 2006c) and highlights the significance of relationships as a well-being domain (Seligman, 2011). The importance of building relationships with others has been reported extensively in participatory settings (Coghlan & Filo, 2013) as well as in spectator research demonstrating how sport entities can act as a social catalyst facilitating the development of connections with specific communities and likeminded individuals (Gibson et al., 2002; Harrolle, et al., 2010;

Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011; Inoue & Havard, 2014; Katz & Heere, 2013; Lock & Funk, in press; Trail et al., 2000, 2005; Trail et al., 2003; Wann & Weaver, 2009). Perhaps most importantly, the results support Wann's (2006c) TISPH model and provide insights into the specific actions that enhance social interaction and social-psychological health (Wann & Weaver, 2009). The activation of relationships in this research supports the TISPH as a prominent framework for future work on the link between sport consumption and well-being.

The meaning domain emerged in instances where spectators felt a sense of team ownership and thus, felt that their experiences gave them a sense of purpose. Respondents described how they derived meaning from: simply being a member, direct experiences with team personnel, contributing financially, and through the team's representation of a specific geographic location. Respondents also noted how the team interacted favourably with external communities, such as the Gold Coast region, that provided meaning in the individual's life (Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011). Our findings indicated that meaning continued to be activated in the off-season and how personal experiences played a key role here. These results showed the importance of including the consumer in the decision-making process through a variety of actions that solicit investment (e.g., Dwyer, Mudrick, Greenhalgh, LeCrom, & Drayer, 2015). We extend this research by highlighting a range of activities which enabled fans to co-create and experience a sense of ownership from their team support (Yoshida et al., 2014).

Our sample of spectators explained how their team support helped them to experience accomplishment, when they sensed they had a role in assisting the team achieve its objectives. Findings illustrated that a sense of accomplishment was derived from actions where individuals perceived that they helped the team become established and when they were present at milestone team moments (e.g., the first game) (Seligman, 2004). In Study 2, interviewees described various experiences through which they derived a sense of

achievement from the team's on-field accomplishments (e.g., player performances and wins), despite not playing an active part in the successes (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). This sense of accomplishment was most prevalent amongst the team's longest serving consumers, outlining the role of status passage in feelings of accomplishment from sport spectating (Crawford, 2003; Gibson et al., 2002). Thus, it appears that consumers not only extract self-esteem benefits from their support (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann & Branscombe, 1990), but that achievement can impact well-being, leading to more long term impacts on the individual's life quality and satisfaction.

Evidence of the engagement domain did not emerge in either study. This may be due to three main reasons. First, engagement may not have emerged in our research as it was not experienced or was too difficult for our sample of spectators to recall. Filo and Coghlan (in press) found engagement was the least salient PERMA dimension to emerge in their research on charity sport event participants. As engagement represents absorption and immersion in an active pursuit (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013), it is perhaps unsurprising that participants, who are actively involved in the event taking place, are better able to recall experiencing flow than spectators who are more passive in their consumption. The second reason could be the specific questions that we asked surrounding engagement were inadequately constructed or that respondents did not clearly understand them. Engagement is difficult to capture in reflective research and using real-time research tools may better capture instances of spectators being absorbed and immersed in their experiences (e.g., Buckley, 2015; Hoerber & Kerwin, 2013). Finally, it is possible that engagement, as per the PERMA framework, may not emerge in the spectator context. The physical and mental challenges associated with participatory sport (e.g., running a marathon) lend themselves to absorption in the activity and are more salient than in the spectator context. Thus, the spectator context would appear to

present less of a mental and physical challenge, which may explain our lack of support for engagement within the PERMA framework (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2013).

Managerial Implications

Results forward PERMA as an appropriate overarching framework that can be used by sport organisations to coordinate engaging and meaningful spectator activities. Actions targeted towards the PERMA domains may augment and enrich the spectator experience during the regular season and in the off-season in a number of ways. To highlight the relationships fostered through team-related experiences, initiatives to help spectators establish new and develop existing connections should be prioritised. Providing discounted group tickets and incentivising individuals who refer others to become season-ticket holders (e.g., with exclusive team merchandise and stadium tours) may be effective in this regard. Sport managers can also foster the relationships domain by augmenting the stadium and the game-day experience. Stadiums should be designed so that individuals can move freely around them and meet new people, and contain communal areas that spectators can utilise before, during, and after games. For instance, initiatives such as the Pepsi Fan Deck implemented at Levi's Stadium can be replicated and extended to create a social space for fans to mix, gather, and network. Reserving a specific section of the stadium for individuals who are single and / or new to a community and wish to meet new people would also effectively activate the relationships domain. During natural game breaks (e.g., half-time), teams should encourage spectators to leave their seats and to engage in group tasks (e.g., trivia or physical challenges) in these areas. These initiatives would deliver additional pleasurable experiences, help the attendees establish and develop relationships with each other, and reduce the disruption to their game day experience, also potentially improving their sense of flow.

Sport organisations should also design initiatives around PERMA during the off-season. Examples include developing television ads which highlight the fun and communal

benefits associated with spectating, hosting meet and greet events at official team venues (e.g., free movies at the stadium during the off-season), running social days where fans can meet players and other fans at community locations, and coordinating special deals for fans to attend community and charity events. These initiatives would extend the opportunities for fans to connect with each other and provide additional ways to express support during this period. Focusing on building fan communities who interact at charity based events and support community causes will also be effective in helping foster a sense of belonging to the broader community (e.g., Elling et al., 2014), thus leveraging the meaning domain. It is also likely that aligning the sport organisation with community causes and enabling fans to support these causes may also empower the spectator and demonstrate that their team support impacts positively on others, activating a sense of accomplishment.

Sport organisations can also use this information to activate the PERMA domains using technology, both during and in the off-season. To foster a sense of accomplishment, technology can be leveraged to reward spectators for attending regularly and used to invite these individuals to celebrate with the players in the locker room after wins. Innovative social media programs which provide special offers for supporters that complete tasks in groups (e.g., team-related Instagram photo challenges) may also be effective in fostering relationships and serve to activate a sense of accomplishment and engagement with the task at hand. Ensuring that supporters are consulted over important team decisions, such as branding changes, is likely to foster a sense of meaning and can be executed using social media and mobile applications. Developing team-specific applications that can be downloaded by fans should also be encouraged and used as a means to connect fans with one another, increase their knowledge about the team, provide their opinions on team-related issues, and to complete team-related competitions, challenges, and games. Further development of the interaction with fans could facilitate increased positive emotions, an

improved sense of engagement, strengthened relationships, deeper meaning and an improved sense of accomplishment of activities.

Limitations and Future Research

Future research should build on our preliminary findings using quantitative methods to empirically examine the PERMA domains. One specific need is to develop a sound measurement tool that captures the PERMA domains. Scale development work would enable the PERMA domains to be modelled as antecedents to well-being indicators established in the literature. Such efforts would enable statistical tests to empirically examine the theoretical link between PERMA and Wann's (2006c) TISPH model, furthering this area of research. Additionally, scale development of this type would also allow researchers to determine the influence of the PERMA domains on other attitudinal variables such as loyalty and commitment, potentially providing a raft of theoretical and managerial contributions.

To build on our research, additional qualitative enquiries are encouraged to use auto-ethnographic and self-ethnographic methods to limit sources of subjectivity involved in reflective qualitative research (Buckley, 2015; Coghlan & Filo, 2013; Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). Using these designs may help to provide better distinction between the domains, and could potentially capture evidence of the engagement domain as individuals can be studied whilst they are absorbed and immersed in the contest. This type of research would be well positioned to help determine if engagement did not emerge here due to our sample, the construction of our questioning, or the applicability of the domain in the spectator context. Conducting workshops with professional sport teams may also be useful in determining the extent they consider PERMA, and to determine if and how they may currently attempt to improve domains of well-being.

Finally, future attempts should build upon the convenience sampling approach adopted in this investigation. Although convenience sampling is appropriate in exploratory

contexts and has been used in participatory research (e.g., Filo & Coghlan, in press), future research should seek to employ more rigorous recruitment processes which carefully select and track a sample of interest over time to build on this research and enhance its generalisability (e.g., Inoue et al., 2015). Similarly, future research should consider examining PERMA activation within dissimilar segments of sport consumers. One area would be to examine PERMA activation differences of those who are league, rather than team consumers (e.g., Kunkel, Funk & Hill, 2013; Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2013). Mixed-methods research categorising individuals with differing involvement levels (e.g., Doyle et al., 2013) complemented by qualitative research should prove effective in determining how PERMA domains are activated across diverse spectator cohorts. For purposes of increased generalisability, further research in this area should also seek to compare consumers of a range of teams building upon the single team approach used here.

Conclusion

This research provided a preliminary investigation of PERMA activation through sport fandom, uncovering how four of the five PERMA domains of well-being are activated by sport spectator experiences. Findings highlighted a range of experiences surrounding the team and the broader sport organisation influenced PERMA, with evidence demonstrating activation of positive emotions and relationships in particular. The multi-study panel research approach used here revealed that PERMA domains can be activated during the season and in the off-season, providing insights into how sport organisations can influence well-being year-round. The findings provide direction for existing well-being research and outline how an individual-level focus adopted by sport managers may benefit fans and the organisation. Finally, the results provide an impetus for further research which aims to understand the relationship between sport fandom and human happiness and flourishing. We hope that this

research encourages future attempts to integrate a positive psychological perspective into the sport literature, and the sport spectator domain in particular.

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Table 1

Factors activating the PERMA domains in Study 1 and Study 2

| | Study 1 | Study 2 | Variation in Activation Processes |
|-------------------|--|---|---|
| Positive Emotions | The team's creation, Attending matches, Team victories, Encouraging performances, Team marketing communications. | Promotional events, Community engagement initiatives. | Predominantly activated by the team's on-field performances. Some evidence of team marketing communications and announcements impacting positive emotions. In lieu of on-field activities, positive emotions were activated by exposure to the team's community engagement initiatives promotional activities. |
| Relationships | Bonding with family and friends, Establishing friendships, Community integration. | Establishing friendships, Progression of friendships, Business relationships, Community integration. | Existing relationships with family members and friends fostered by a common interest in the team. This interest also provided opportunities for individuals to form new friendships with others and feel closer to the community. There was some hesitance to form relationships with others initially. Evidence of existing relationships strengthening and new personal and business relationships becoming activated by team support. Respondents reported bonds became 'family-like' and explained how the intensity and frequency of interactions with others in personal, community and business settings increased. |
| Meaning | Being a member, Supporting the hometown team, Inclusion in marketing decisions. | Contributing financially, Interactions with key personnel, Inclusion in team photographs, Stadium tours. | Activation by experiences which made the individual feel a sense of ownership including signing up, supporting the hometown and being involved in decision making by the team. Activation of meaning extending to the off-season through personal interactions with the team. These experiences again reaffirmed the individual felt a sense of ownership and purpose in terms of contributing to the team. |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Accomplishment | Petitioning for inclusion, Attending team meetings, Volunteering, Spruiking. | Team performances, Spruiking. | Accomplishment activated by the sense of the achievement that the individual had a role in the team's creation by promoting or contributing resources to the team. Individuals were able to derive accomplishment from the team's performances and the sense they had played a role in these. Milestone moments such as team wins became salient here as the team won games towards the end of the season. |
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