TITLE: 'I was there from the start': The identity maintenance strategies used by fans to combat the threat of losing

*Jason P. Doyle. Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Southport, Australia, 4222. jason.doyle@griffith.edu.au

Dr Daniel Lock Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Talbot Campus, Bournemouth University, Dorset, UK, BH12 5BB. lockd@bournemouth.ac.uk

Kevin R. Filo. Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Southport, Australia, 4222. k.filo@griffith.edu.au

Daniel C. Funk. School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Fox School of Business, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122, U.S. dfunk@temple.edu

Heath McDonald. Swinburne Business School, Hawthorne Campus, Swinburne University, Melbourne, Australia, 3122. heathmcdonald@swin.edu.au

*Corresponding author

Abstract

On-field performances are a key, yet uncontrollable, determinant of team identification. In this research, we explore how fans of a new team, with an overwhelming loss to win ratio, maintain a positive social identity. Qualitative data gathered from 20 semi-structured interviews were used to address this research objective. Our findings indicated fans use social creativity and social mobility strategies to help preserve a positive and distinctive group identity. In the absence of success, fans evaluated the group on dimensions that reflected positively on, and emphasised the distinctiveness of, group membership. Fans also sought to increase their status in the group to increase the positivity of this association. We use these findings to extend understanding of social identity theory and provide recommendations for sport organisations with unfavourable performance records. Recommendations are themed around highlighting the unique nature of the group and favourable status comparisons between members of the in-group.

'I was there from the start': The identity maintenance strategies used by fans to combat the

threat of losing

The success and sustainability of professional sport organisations largely depends on attracting and maintaining a sufficient number of fans (James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002). Fans support teams and leagues via direct and indirect consumption activities, which include attending games, purchasing merchandise and enhancing the organisation's appeal to advertisers (Mason, 1999; McDonald, Karg, & Vocino, 2013). Industry statistics estimate global sport industry revenues now exceed $145 billion, illustrating the impact and cultural prominence of sport in society (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). To leverage the general population's interest in athletic contests, sport organisations invest heavily in programs designed to establish, maintain, and develop identification with their consumers (Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014).

Achieving this objective is difficult for two reasons. First, the emergence of new teams and leagues, coupled with access to overseas leagues and teams via advancements in technology, has created an increasingly competitive sport marketplace (Kim & Trail, 2010; Kim & Trail, 2011; McDonald & Stavros, 2012). Sport organisations, therefore, require a better understanding of the factors that facilitate the attraction, retention, and development of fans (James et al., 2002). Second, in most sport leagues, including the Australian Football League (AFL), only half of the teams involved can retain a winning record. As such, there is a need for sport organisations to develop and maintain team identification during periods of poor performance. This is crucial, as success is an important, yet largely uncontrollable determinant of team identification (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). Furthermore, team identification is shaped by the context in which the team operates (Jones, 1997). Although researchers have started to direct attention to understanding this phenomenon, opportunities remain to better understand how sport consumer behaviour

manifests in challenging and undesirable circumstances (Jones, 2015). Specifically, in this research we examine how fans maintain team identification in the face of ongoing losses.

In the present study, we focus on fans of a new sport team, building on an emergent body of literature (e.g., Grant, Heere, & Dickson, 2011; Harada & Matsuoka, 1999; Lock, Taylor, & Darcy, 2011; Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012; Lock et al. 2014; McDonald, Leckie, Karg, Zubcevic-Basic, & Lock, 2015; Shapiro, Ridinger, & Trail, 2013). In contrast to established teams, which are able to leverage nostalgic moments and past achievements in times of poor performance, new team support is characterised by affiliations with groups that lack established histories, past successes, and strong brand identities. Research in this domain has provided insights into the processes that govern the maintenance and development of identification in the new team context, but has thus far focused on immediately successful teams (Lock et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2012).

In this manuscript we explore how fans, defined as individuals with psychological connections to a sport team (e.g., Funk & James, 2001), maintain a positive group identity in circumstances where the team performs poorly. This addresses a call from the literature to examine contexts where teams are not immediately successful (Lock et al., 2012). To address this opportunity, we sampled fans of a new AFL team with an overwhelming loss to win ratio who remained fans despite the ongoing losses. We specifically examined the image maintenance strategies these fans used to maintain a positive social identity in the absence of success or past achievements. We utilised social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), reviewed next, as the theoretical framework to guide this investigation.

Theoretical framework

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory is used to explain how social group affiliations help individuals understand their place in society and provide sources of positive

self-esteem. In this research, social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Social identity theory posits that individuals seek to join social groups they deem to be equal to, or better than their own self-concept. This raises an important question pertaining to how individuals maintain identification with unsuccessful groups, a phenomenon observed extensively across spectator sport worldwide where even perennially unsuccessful teams maintain large fan bases (e.g., Bristow, Schnieder, & Sebastian, 2010; Bristow & Sebastian, 2001; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman 1997).

Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) outlined three propositions that explain the social identity process and address how an individual may seek to preserve his or her social identity in instances where the status of a group is threatened. First, all individuals strive to achieve and maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, an individual will only join and maintain links with groups that reflect positively on his or her self-concept. Second, a positive in-group identity relies upon perceptions that the group is positively distinct from relevant out-groups. Whereas favourable comparisons seek to reaffirm an individual's group membership, unfavourable comparisons (e.g., group threats) create subjective uncertainty and dissonance, which he or she will seek to reduce (Turner, 1985). Third, and most pertinent to this research, when an individual recognises an unsatisfactory in-group evaluation he or she may leave the group or employ image-maintenance strategies to enhance in-group status (e.g., Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Collectively, these propositions highlight the importance of intergroup comparisons, which guide the individual's group evaluations and status relative to other group members (Tajfel, 1982).

Team Identification

Sport researchers have utilised social identity theory in a number of settings to explain fan attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Madrigal, 1995; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005; Wakefield, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and to examine how and why individuals maintain connections with sport teams (e.g., Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Lock et al., 2012). In this body of research, social identification is commonly referred to as team identification, although sport consumers may develop connections with a range of sport entities, including players, coaches, communities, universities, leagues, and sports (e.g., Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gladden & Funk ,2001; Heere & James, 2007; Katz & Heere, 2013; Kunkel, Funk, & Hill, 2013; Lock & Funk, 2016; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003). In this manuscript, we focus on a fan's identification with a specific team, which we define as the extent to which an individual derives part of his or her identity, and emotional value, from being a team fan (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). A key area of research in this domain seeks to determine the factors that lead to the formation and continuation of identification.

Although a diverse range of factors influence the extent that an individual may identify with a team (c.f., Wann, 2006a), one prominent determinant is a team's level of success. Winning teams offer potential and existing fans a source of vicarious achievement which reflects favourably on individuals and provides a source of positive self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976; Fink et al., 2002). End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, and Jacquemotte (2002) demonstrated the importance of success on team identification, finding individuals were more likely to identify with successful, rather than unsuccessful teams. Wann et al., (1996) illustrated the importance of the team's performances on ongoing identification, finding success was the most influential factor in facilitating continued identification. Importantly, Wann et al., (1996) also found the inverse was true; finding an absence of success was the

most popular reason for deciding to cease identification. Research also highlights that defeats can lead individuals to stop attending team games (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Kim & Trail, 2010; Zhang et al., 1997) and distance themselves from sport teams (Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986) highlighting the importance of victories in sustained identification.

The proliferation of studies supporting the role of team success in shaping identification raises questions in relation to how fans obtain a positively distinctive in-group identity during negative performances. Research has detailed how identification can be sustained in instances where teams or athletes attract negative attention off the field (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Jones, 2015). Here, we specifically focus on the identity threat posed by continual on-field defeats, as End et al. (2002; p.1019) argue for "most sport fans, the most relevant dimension for social comparison is how their team performs relative to their opponent." To do so we consider social identity theory's third proposition and examine three strategies termed social mobility, social creativity and social competition, posited to help group members overcome group threat and maintain a positive group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).

Identity Maintenance Strategies

Social mobility. The first identity maintenance strategy is social mobility. Of the three identity maintenance strategies we discuss, social mobility represents the only individual level strategy. As such, social mobility involves an individual achieving a positive social identity by changing his or her group membership without affecting the overarching group (Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, & Hodge, 1996). Cialdini et al. (1976) illustrated how individuals can psychologically distance themselves from unsuccessful groups observing that students were more likely to wear apparel that was not representative of their university after the university's football team had lost. Team failure also increased the likelihood that fans

would use detaching pronouns (e.g., 'they') to distance themselves from negative team results after matches (Cialdini et al., 1976). These findings showed that fans can manage a threatened identity by Cutting Off the Reflected Failure (CORF) associated with poor team performances (Snyder et al., 1983; Snyder et al., 1986). Whilst CORFing provides 'fair-weather fans' with a strategy to achieve a positive group identity; highly identified fans are culturally contracted to teams (Giulianotti, 2002) and as such are unlikely to be disloyal (Trail et al., 2012; Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

Wann and Branscombe (1990) argued such 'die-hard' fans do not CORF because team identification fulfils a central role in their self-concept. These individuals display steadfast allegiance in the face of adversity to increase their status in relation to less authentic or loyal members of the in-group (Giulianotti, 2002). Behaving in this manner allows individuals to self-classify as fanatical through the embodiment of loyalty and team knowledge, which differentiates such fans from neophyte or less involved consumers (Holt, 1995). In conceptual research, Campbell et al., (2004) proposed that some fans may even celebrate poor performances and Bask In spite of Reflected Failure (BIRF) to legitimise their team identity and achieve distinction from others who may disassociate with losing teams. Katz and Heere (2013) argued that individuals seek to augment their association with teams via involvement in ancillary events and subgroups as a means to guard against negative team performance; however, these propositions have yet to be empirically investigated.

Social creativity. The second image maintenance strategy, social creativity, is a group-level strategy that involves enhancing the distinctiveness of the in-group in relation to out-groups. Social creativity manifests in three main ways. The first manifestation involves selecting a new dimension of comparison when evaluations of one dimension (i.e., team success) do not favour the in-group. Lalonde (1992) found that players on a losing ice hockey team sustained a positive social identity by shifting the dimension on which they compared to

other teams from on-ice performance to fair play. However, the team studied boasted one of the worst on-ice fair play records, illustrating that social creativity involves subjective, and often biased, comparisons. Other research outlines how a team's associated group identities (e.g., representative university, state or region) may be used to mitigate against identity threats at the team level (e.g., Delia, 2015; Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011). In the social creativity example, individuals may shift the comparative dimension to a higher level to maintain a positive team identity following team failure (e.g., "We lost but our University is still better than yours").

Individuals may also enhance group status through a process known as 'boosting' (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Bernache-Assollant, Laurin, Bouchet, Bodet, and Lacassagne (2010) observed highly identified French rugby fans displayed optimism regarding the team's future games after witnessing the team lose an important match. Similarly, Jones (2000) found that Luton Town Football Club (LTFC) fans displayed unrealistic optimism in relation to future performances. This enabled fans to favourably evaluate their identification with LTFC, despite the team losing matches and playing in an unflattering league. Other research has illustrated how future expectations can influence group behaviour for both successful and unsuccessful groups. In experimental research, Wann, Hamlet, Wilson and Hodges (1995) demonstrated individuals in a successful group, that was unlikely to achieve success in the future, were less likely to announce their affiliation than individuals in an unsuccessful group with a greater chance of upcoming successes. Wann et al. (1995) speculated that in instances where sustained success is unlikely, individuals might be more concerned with protecting their future identity than enhancing their current esteem.

The second option available in social creativity involves downplaying the valence of a negatively perceived dimension, or assigning the attribute a positive value (Jackson et al., 1996). Jones (2015) observed members of the cycling community seeking to downplay or

dismiss the doping allegations directed at Lance Armstrong to preserve their identities as cyclists (e.g., "They were all doping"). In team sport, individuals that identify with rogue teams (e.g., the National Rugby League's (NRL) Manly-Warringah Sea Eagles), often do so based on their outlaw images (e.g., Fink et al., 2009). Fans of such teams, revel in the negativity others attribute to their group (e.g., "We love that we are hated"). This observed behaviour highlights how negative attributes linked to an in-group by others can be redefined in a positive light, which helps individuals define who they are by what they are not (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Foster & Hyatt, 2007; Lock & Filo, 2012).

The third social creativity strategy involves changing the out-group used for comparison. This approach applies to circumstances where an in-group experiences prolonged status inferiority, or when a new out-group presents novel opportunities to achieve a positive team identity. In this instance, members must perceive the new group as inferior to the in-group on one or more characteristic (Wann, 2006a). In this example, the dimension of comparison remains constant, but the salient out-group shifts to favour the in-group. For instance, an Arsenal fan that negatively evaluates the team's recent success in relation to Chelsea may state, "We haven't won as many titles as Chelsea, but we've won more than Tottenham." This example illustrates how altering the dimension or method of comparison can preserve or enhance in-group status in times of group threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social competition. In the third image-maintenance strategy, social competition, in-group members use affirmative actions to enhance in-group status in relation to an out-group on some salient dimension of comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social competition, potentially, represents the least relevant image maintenance strategy to our study, as it is typically associated with the origins of conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, there are sporting examples of social competition. Fans can restore in-group status, while reducing out-group standing through physical (e.g., hooliganism) and verbal actions. Bernache-Assollant et

al. (2010) observed that highly identified fans 'blasted' (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980) opposition teams, players, and supporters to enhance the in-group's image and reduce out-group status. Other researchers contend that members can improve in-group status by derogating the performances and attributes of rivals and displaying hostility towards fans of other teams (Bernache-Assollant, Laurin, & Bodet, 2012; Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007). More recent research has documented how individuals demonstrate Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) when out-groups are unsuccessful, demonstrating that a reduction in the status of a defined out-group, even when a person's team is not playing, can exert a positive influence on his or her team identification (Havard, 2014). Thus, social competition does not directly improve the status of the in-group, but seeks to reduce the standing of other relevant out-groups. In considering the above image maintenance strategies, we now review the context of new and unsuccessful sport teams.

New and Unsuccessful Sport Teams

Extensive literature illustrates that initial and ongoing identification with established teams relies on individuals selecting teams that are currently successful or possess a history of achievements (Cialdini et al. 1976; End et al., 2002; Fink et al., 2002; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998, Wann et al., 1996). Whilst established team identification has been vastly researched, less attention has been dedicated towards understanding the processes relevant to ongoing identification with new sport organisations, which by virtue of being new entities, lack histories and accomplishments (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002). Additionally, new sport organisations tend to project inconsistent brand identities to the marketplace, compounding the difficulty in forming viable fan bases (Grant et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2015).

Greenwood, Canters, and Caspar (2006) found that socialisation agents, identification with the region where the team was based, a need for entertainment and specific players or coaches influenced identification with a new midlevel professional arena football team.

Elsewhere, researchers have found that fans may be initially interested in new sport entities because of curiosity (e.g., Park, Andrew, & Mahony, 2008; Park, Mahony, & Greenwell, 2010), the novelty value attached to such organisations (e.g., James et al., 2002; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002; McDonald et al., 2015), and when the team is introduced to the same geographic region as a team they currently support (Harada & Matsuoka, 1999). Yet understanding how to foster and maintain identification once a relationship has been initiated has not received a great deal of academic attention.

Recognising this gap in the literature, Lock et al. (2011) examined the formation of identification with respect to a new Australian professional soccer team. Here, fans identified due to pre-existing social identifications with the sport of soccer, the team's representative city and as a means to participate in game day activities and events. Follow-up research exploring the development of team identification highlighted how fans of the same team were able to maintain and develop their identification with the team through positive team-based experiences, leading to an increased sense that the team was an internal, central, and meaningful part of fans' lives (Lock et al., 2012). Although these findings enhance our understanding of new sport consumers drastically, the sole team investigated by Lock et al. (2012) was successful, winning the league in their first year of competition.

To date, no research has examined how fans maintain a positive social identification with a new team that is unsuccessful and thus, in a scenario where group members face an obvious identity threat from the start (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Research has however indicated that team identification can be maintained in instances where teams are not successful (e.g., Lock et al., 2014). Building upon this research, we answer the call from Lock et al. (2012) by exploring the identity maintenance strategies employed by fans of a new, unsuccessful sport team. The following research question guides this investigation:

What image maintenance strategies do sport consumers use to maintain a positive social identity in the absence of success or past achievements?

Method

We conducted a cross-sectional, in-depth qualitative study with fans of a new Australian Rules football team – the Gold Coast Suns (GCS). The GCS entered the AFL in 2011 as part of an expansion strategy which aimed to increase the appeal and reach of the competition (McDonald & Stavros, 2012). Illustrative of this collaboration, the AFL and the GCS strategically communicated that the team were unlikely to be successful in the short-term and that decisions on player recruitment were made with the objective of being competitive in the long-term (Lock et al., 2014).

At the time of the research, the team in question had played one full season (finishing bottom of the ladder with three wins and nineteen losses) and were in their second season with no wins from the first 14 rounds of competition. Thus, at the time of data collection, the team had won only 3 out of 36 games experiencing a winning percentage of just 8.33%. This was well below the average win percentage of 52.27% collectively experienced by the other 15 AFL teams in the 2011 season. Given the above, we determined the team satisfied the conditions of this research in that they were: 1) new and 2) unsuccessful in comparison to other AFL teams, and the team studied in prior research (Lock et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2012).

Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 GCS fans during the middle of the 2012 AFL season. Interviewees were aged between 19 and 66 years old ($M = 43.0$). Fourteen males (70%) and six females (30%) were interviewed. Sixteen interviewees held a team membership or season ticket. The interviews were conducted as part of a larger research project and thus ranged between 18 and 48 minutes in length, resulting in a total of nine hours and 21 minutes of audio data. Utilising the constant comparison method, we determined that

after the twentieth interview no new themes, findings or conceptual thoughts were emerging

and thus, data saturation had been reached (e.g., Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1977).

Materials

Materials included an information sheet, a digital voice recorder and an interview

guide to lead the discussions. The interview guide was used to structure the discussion, but

allowed flexibility to include probing questions, which were used when an individual's

statements required exploration (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2009). To address our central

research question, interviewees were asked "Why are you a GCS fan?" and "What

experiences have impacted your identification with the team?" Additional questions such as

"How do the team's performances and results impact on you as a fan?" were included to

encourage participants to elaborate upon their responses. Probing questions such as "What is

it that sustains your support for the team?" were asked when participants alluded to the

team's poor performance record.

Procedures

Interviewees were recruited at the team's home ground on game days. The lead

researcher approached individuals dressed in GCS clothing during scheduled intervals (e.g.,

half-time) and asked if they would be willing to discuss their experiences as a GCS fan.

Individuals wearing team merchandise were approached as this indicated that they identified

with the team (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976). An information sheet containing further details of

the research was provided to interested individuals, who were subsequently invited to

participate. All interviews were conducted at private and comfortable venues to ensure open

and easily interpretable data were collected (Bryman, 2012). Nineteen interviews were

conducted in the participant's home, with the remaining interview completed at a café close

to the interviewee's workplace. The lead researcher recorded each interview in its entirety

and took field notes to assist with the analysis phase. Each interviewee was reminded to

contact the lead researcher if they wished to obtain a copy of the results and given a $20
supermarket gift voucher at the conclusion of the interview as a token of appreciation.

Analysis

The data analysis procedure we employed was guided by Creswell's (2009) three-step
process. First, we downloaded all interview data from the digital recorder as audio files and
transcribed each interview verbatim to create interview transcripts. The transcripts were
analysed in conjunction with the field notes taken during the interviews to uncover concepts
emerging in the data. Concepts were identified when specific phrases used by multiple
participants characterised a shared response (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure we were
accurately interpreting participant responses, a summary of key points emerging from
individual interviews was also developed. This information was then provided to the relevant
interviewees for feedback in a process known as "member checking" (Creswell, 2009. p.
191). The participants provided some minor comments that helped clarify and corroborate
that the emergent concepts were representative of their experiences (e.g., Miles & Huberman,
1994). After completing this process with four interviewees, we felt comfortable that the data
were being interpreted appropriately and that thematic analysis could commence.

In the second step, the transcripts were reanalysed to identify broader themes which
grouped the concepts identified in step one. Here, we regularly reflected upon and discussed
our allocation of concepts to themes with each other and with colleagues who were not
involved in the research. This was done to ensure the themes were trustworthy and
conceptually sound, and this process is consistent with the standards applied in other recent
sport management enquiries (e.g., Delia, 2015; Filo, Cuskelly, & Wicker, 2015). The third
step involved condensing the themes so that they were organised into primary and sub-
themes which allowed the major findings, discussed next, to be easily presented.

Results and Discussion

Our analyses revealed participants used two processes to maintain a positive social identity in the absence of a performance history and team success. First, we unearthed a current and experienced frame of reference selected by respondents to maintain a positive social identity. Through identification with the GCS from the team's inception, participants obtained in-group status relative to other consumers. Second, we provide evidence that participants elaborated using a future frame of reference that allowed them to make sense of current failures as a necessary path to future success. These processes reflected the simultaneous use of social mobility and social creativity consistent with the tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Additionally, the processes outlined the importance of superordinate group membership in the maintenance of a positive and distinct social identity, which supported existing work (e.g., Katz & Heere, 2013; Lock & Funk, 2016). We structure our results and discussion section around two main conceptual themes: *Owning Our Identity* and *Framing the Future.* Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual links that exist between these themes, their sub-themes, and the overarching maintenance processes described by social identity theory.

=====================INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE====================

Owning our Identity

The first theme: Owning our identity, collated participant responses describing how the team's status as a new organisation provided (1) rare consumption opportunities, (2) a sense of ownership, and (3) participation in the cultivation of a team identity, all of which mitigated against team failure. These sub-themes draw upon both social creativity and social mobility as identity maintenance strategies. All three findings in this theme are interrelated and concerned with participants' existing experiences of supporting the GCS. As such, they represent processes of image maintenance based on the past or present frame of reference.

Participants described how consuming a new team provided a rare and distinctive consumption experience, which offset the impact of losing. Lois discussed how she enjoyed the rare experience of supporting the GCS from its inception stating: "To be there from the start is more fun I think… I don't know it's just because they're from the start and you're from the start it's pretty awesome. It's just, you're growing with them." This finding is in line with previous research examining the introduction of a new Japanese football team (Harada & Matsuoka, 1999). Nick further explained how the team's new status was crucial in sustaining his support in the face of repeated losses. He stated "If they weren't new: I think it would be harder to [continue to support]… it's hard to say if you would be a member and if you would support them, but I would say it would be more unlikely than likely." Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009) found evidence that a team's new status was selected as a socially creative dimension of evaluation to differentiate fans of a relatively new ice-hockey team from individuals who supported longer established teams. Our analysis revealed how the neophyte status of the GCS played a role in the manner in which participants evaluated the failures of the new team. Specifically, participants explained how the team's new status lowered performance expectations and, thus, reduced identity threat in the face of ongoing losses. In contrast to both previous studies (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Harada & Matsuoka, 1999), consuming the GCS from its inception also provided participants with a source of self-classification and distinctiveness in relation to other in-group members that came to support the club later (Holt, 1995). This provided an example of participants using individual mobility to maintain a positive self-concept in the face of team failure (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).

Other participants emphasised how their participation as foundation members provided them with an enhanced sense of ownership over the club and its identity. This manifested in an increased sense of team ownership, which helped individuals cement and

improve their status within the group (e.g., social mobility) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).

Rich explained how identifying with the team provided him with the unique opportunity "to be involved in a local club from day dot… [which is] a once in a lifetime opportunity and not one of those things that's going to come around very often." For Vanessa, the ability to support a team in her host community and do this from the beginning was more important to her than the immediacy of successful performances. She said:

> When [the team] came along it felt like a great opportunity to have my own team, a team where I could be a foundation member, a team that I could follow from the same town that I was living in from its infancy, it just felt right… I finally had a team that I could call my own.

> Despite ongoing team failures, the sense of ownership described by participants represented a major reason supporters managed to evaluate their team identification positively in the early stages of the GCS history. Peter explained:

> Being a part of something new [is] definitely obviously fresh and exciting. Just the fact that you can be there from the beginning… It's just the whole excitement and ownership of being involved with a club, especially a foundation club, and being a foundation member? I mean that's such an honour, even to be a foundation member is an honour in itself.

Vanessa and Peter's sentiments encapsulate the sense of ownership and enjoyment associated with their support, and also described the 'honour' of being a foundation supporter. This unique ability to consume the new team from the start conferred status which was unavailable to supporters that joined the club later, and thus helped our sample to positively differentiate themselves from other in-group members.

The final factor which contributed to the ownership and honour of consuming the new team concerned participants actively helping the GCS to develop its identity. Grant et al.

(2011) explored how complex shaping the identity of a new team can be, illustrating the difficulties associated with portraying a consistent brand image from an organisational standpoint. The GCS involved supporters in the development of the team identity, branding and symbols early in the development of the club. Peter discussed how his attendance at a question and answer session with the GCS CEO impacted his identification. Extensively using the associative pronoun "we" (Cialdini et al., 1976), Peter explained:

> We met him [CEO] for the first time basically he introduced himself and went through a whole heap of different things and it was just really good… You know *we* didn't even have a name or anything, *we* had no jersey, *we* had nothing! *We* hardly had any players you know (laughs), *we* didn't really know much about anything, it was just like 'okay here *we* are, this is what *we* believe, this is what *we're* going to do, this is what *we're* trying to achieve' and that was really exciting. That was really, really exciting.

Rich explained how participating in the shaping of the club's identity and experiencing milestone team moments enhanced his team identification and created clear expectations of team performance. Experiencing milestones and shaping the club's identity aligned with supporters starting to learn about and identify with specific players. Echoing previous work, which found that consumers of new sport teams develop familiarity with players and team temporally (Lock et al., 2012), interviewees explained how their continued support was influenced by participation in, and knowledge about, the evolution of the club identity and its primary embodiment: the playing group. Peter referenced developments in the playing roster, recalling how he started supporting the team "when the boys were boys, [who are] becoming men now." Ken added "They're a full team of kids with a few adults there that are experienced players so it's just going to be really interesting and a lot of fun for me to watch these kids evolve into really good players which they are starting to already."

These quotations illustrate how establishing rare consumption opportunities, a sense of ownership, and participation in the emergence of a team identity mitigated against ongoing team failures. These processes provided a basis for distinctiveness from other consumers and preferential position within the in-group (e.g., Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Holt, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). These sentiments extend previous work showing how identification with a team from the very beginning provides individuals with an identity unique from fans of other teams (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). Our findings extend such work and illustrate how fans can differentiate themselves from others in the in-group who have not supported the team from the start. In this instance, fans like Peter will be able to positively differentiate themselves from other GCS fans who are not 'foundation members' and those who begin supporting the team in the future or when their on-field performances improve.

Framing the Future

The second theme: Framing the Future collated responses describing a focus on the GCS' future performance potential, in lieu of present on-field failures. This theme represented a form of social creativity, which individuals used to manage their identities in the face of immediate group threat. To compensate for the lack of an established history and past successes, GCS fans shifted the frame of reference from current failure to future success. Evidence of such optimism (e.g., Jones, 2000) contributes empirical support to suggestions fans can retain a positive group identity in spite of reflected failure (Campbell et al., 2004) and outlines how fans are able to protect their current identity by shifting comparisons to the likelihood of future success.

When forecasting future successes, respondents consistently used distancing pronouns (e.g., "they"), but used 'we' and 'us' when describing their evaluations in the current frame of reference. The shift to the future frame of reference indicated that participants used future successes to balance initial team failures. However, as they did not have direct experiences of

the forecasted successes, participants used dissociative pronouns to describe future

performances. Martin's evaluation of the in-group remained positive as he accepted the long-

term performance plan communicated by the GCS and the AFL, which positioned initial

failure as a necessary path to future success. He stated, "*they* haven't yet established

themselves, but *they* will. You just need a bit of time." Tamara held a similar view, which

helped to negate threats posed to her identity and explained "obviously you've got to accept

that it's going to take some time for *them* to turn into a great club." Andrew negated the GCS

current ladder position by explaining "*they* are going to be something special" and would

become "the next big thing in the league… and prove the critics wrong" in the long term.

Respondent's also explained how the team's current performances drew derisory

remarks from fans of other clubs. Switching to a future frame of reference allowed in-group

members to experience team losses and derogation as a necessary pathway to future triumphs.

This stoic response supports the work of Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) who found that

individuals with positive private evaluations of an in-group viewed negatively by others are

more inclined to participate in behaviours that support its development. Expanding on this

notion Rich stated:

> The wins will come over time and as I said, *they're* going to be building a strong club
>
> and the members need patience which unfortunately a lot of *them* don't have… To
>
> watch the club expand and build and become a powerhouse of the AFL would be
>
> fantastic but that's going to take time.

Respondents explained how they reacted in situations when non-fans brought up the

team's unsuccessful record in conversation, emphasising how they used socially creative

means to retain a positive team identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ken noted "when [others]

start saying: "when are GCS going to win a game?" I just sort of make it quite clear that

when *they* do start winning *they* won't stop." On a similar note, Justine explained how

conversations with fans of other AFL teams led her to "spruik", or promote, her excitement

for the GCS' future potential (cf. Lock et al., 2012):

> In a couple of years, we are going to be there… Even when we're in church people
>
> will say 'Oh we wiped the Suns out' and I go 'Well in a couple of years *they're* going
>
> to wipe you out' so I mean that's in church and afterwards when we're having a
>
> coffee or something we'll be talking about it and I say 'Don't worry about [how] *they*
>
> played. In a couple of years, you'll be saying 'Damn Suns, they beat us.'

Ken's and Justine's statements outline a use of social creativity in preserving in-group status

by boosting the team's future prospects immediately after poor performances, supporting

existing work (e.g., Bernache-Assollant et al., 2010).

The second element of the Framing the Future theme was underpinned by speculation

of how enduring losses would add significance to future team successes. This supports the

work of Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009) who found non-local hockey fans placed importance on

distancing themselves from accusations of fair-weather fandom. Steven explained how he felt

sustaining identification during unsuccessful times would allow him to feel like he earned the

right to extract a sense of vicarious achievement from the team's future successes. Steven

explained: "Twenty years down the track I can say I was part of the first home game, the first

home win and I was there right from the start." Nick shared this sentiment and explained that

experiencing a lack of success in the formative years would legitimise his group membership

and add meaning to successes. Nick stated:

> I understand that it's going to be a few tough years before the tide turns but I think it
>
> just means if you're involved from day one as opposed to just jumping on the
>
> bandwagon, when *they* start winning then the good results you might appreciate them
>
> more so than just jumping on when the going is good.

Finally, this perspective was shared by Ken who stated: "*They* haven't won any games this season but it will happen. It definitely will happen and when it does I'll probably take pride in I was there at the beginning." Collectively, these comments outline how fans of unsuccessful teams can legitimise their group membership and distance themselves from accusations of 'fair-weather' fandom by switching from a current to a future frame of reference. Such behaviours align with research revealing that highly identified group members blast other in-group members that display disloyalty following poor performances and explains how this may happen with regard to future performance expectations (Branscombe et al., 1993).

Theoretical Contribution

Social Creativity and Social Mobility

Through this research, we have contributed to understanding the strategies supporters of a new, unsuccessful team use to achieve positive associations using current and future frames of reference. Sport fans typically select success as the dominant marker for intergroup evaluations (End et al., 2002). However, in this paper, the focal organisation was not successful on the field, had no prior trophies or championships, and no developed traditions. To compensate for this lack of history and tradition, fans maintained a positive team identity by evaluating the group on domains broader than current success. Our results also outlined how being there from the start and experiencing a lack of success helped to legitimise the individual's status within the group. This preferential group position further enabled our respondents to positively differentiate their group memberships from other in-group members (e.g., those who did not join at the start and those who will join in the future) and from individuals who supported other teams.

Within the Owning our Identity theme, our analysis revealed how individuals negated the threat of repeated losses by focussing on the rarity of belonging to a new team from its foundation and by assigning heightened value to their position in the group. Individuals spoke

at length about the importance of 'being there from the start' and participating in the creation

of the team's identity, placing a greater importance on these factors than the immediacy of

team success. This emphasis enabled individuals to positively differentiate themselves from

other members of the in-group who were not 'there from the start' and from individuals

attached to other teams who were not new. Consequently, we observed evidence of social

mobility, and to a lesser degree, social creativity within this theme (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

These findings demonstrate how unique consumption experiences can positively

differentiate a group membership from other groups (Holt, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Such behaviours also highlight how fans can reaffirm their identity in the face of adversity

(e.g., Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Campbell et al., 2004; Jones, 2015; Luhtanen & Crocker,

1992) by becoming the best fan they can be; rather than simply becoming a fan of the best

team (Norris et al., 2015; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Additionally, our findings

demonstrate how foundation fans can attain a positive perception of in-group status through

comparisons with others who join the group later. This finding confirms previous speculation

that individuals may seek to preserve a positive identity by utilising intragroup, rather than

intergroup, comparisons (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Branscombe et al., 1993; Campbell et al.,

2004).

Within the Framing the Future theme, our analysis revealed how fans shifted the

frame of reference from present results to the likelihood that the team would experience

future glory (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). This belief enabled respondents to maintain a

positive team identity by legitimising and enhancing their status in the group (Wann &

Branscombe, 1990). Our findings build on previous quantitative work that revealed a

statistical correlation between identification and future performance expectations of a

recently defeated rugby team (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2010). We contribute qualitative

insights, which indicate that supporters make sense of their team identification using current

and future frames of reference. Therefore, to manage current failures, fans retained a level of optimism about future performances.

Retaining optimistic expectations in the face of group threats aligned with communications from the AFL and GCS that informed supporters of a long-term team development plan (Lock et al., 2014). That is, managers forecasted that the team would be initially unsuccessful and improve as the talented young squad matured. Through this theme, we advance Wann et al.'s (1995) finding that individuals seek to Cut off Future Failure (COFF) in instances where the group is currently successful, but is unlikely to be successful in the future. We extend this work in to the sport context by revealing that fans of unsuccessful teams may retain optimistic perceptions of the team's future performance as a means to positively evaluate their current memberships. Here we also validate past work that shows fans may possess unrealistic levels of optimism to protect their team identity (Jones, 2015).

The explicit and consistent use of distancing pronouns (e.g., "*they*") in participant responses talking about future successes illustrated how supporters sought to both preserve their current esteem, and enhance it in the future, providing a contribution to existing work. The use of the distancing pronoun coupled with the enhancement of the team's future prospects enabled the individuals to protect their current identities, whilst maintaining a link with anticipated future successes. The use of the distancing pronoun observed here may have also been due to a perception that the team would enjoy successes in the medium to long term, rather than the immediate future. This perspective is likely given the performances of the GCS during the research, and is supported by construal level theory research in social psychology demonstrating current identities are impacted more by subjectively close future self-perceptions, than those that are distant (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Wilson, Buehler, Lawford, Schmidt, & Yong, 2012). Additionally, the use of the distancing pronouns here may

also be attributed to fact that these experiences were anticipated, rather than having already

been experienced by our participants.

Identification with New Sport Teams

The second contribution relates to the identification of factors important to

establishing and maintaining identification with new sport teams (James et al., 2002).

Previous research demonstrates that individuals can remain identified supporters of losing

teams by drawing upon histories and past successes (e.g., Bristow et al., 2010; Bristow &

Sebastian, 2001; Campbell et al., 2004; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gladden & Funk, 2001;

Sutton et al., 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). New team research has thus far explored the

sources of identification and developmental processes that underpin membership with an

immediately successful entity (Lock et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2012). In the present research,

we extended prior research by showing how the distinctiveness associated with the new team

(Owning our Identity) and perceptions of the team's future performance potential (Framing

the Future) influenced ongoing team identification.

One unique opportunity afforded to individuals involved with new teams is the chance

to share in the creation of facets of a team's identity (Grant et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2014).

Through the Owning our Identity theme, we outline how enabling fans to feel like they are

participating in the journey and providing them with a sense of ownership can sustain

identification, even when a team's performances are poor. This contributes knowledge

concerning how new organisations can adopt a relationship marketing approach and

encourage co-creation from fans (Kim & Trail, 2011). The Owning our Identity theme also

revealed how some individuals considered the role of the community important to their

sustained identification, consistent with other research showing the importance of external

groups on team identification (Delia, 2015; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011a; Heere

et al., 2011b; McDonald et al., 2015). Consequently, we extend new team research that has

shown regional identification impacts team identification (Harada & Matsuoka, 1999; Lock et al., 2011) by demonstrating how team identification can affect integration within the representative city.

The contextual bounds of this study may also explain why the group distinctiveness of new teams has not emerged as a prominent factor in previous new team research. Research demonstrates the importance of the league (Kunkel et al., 2013) and salient out-group teams in fostering in-group identification (e.g., Delia, 2015; Havard, 2014). However, as Lock et al. (2011) examined fans of a new team in a new league; every team started the season as an entirely new entity in a competition without any performance history. It is unsurprising that respondents in Lock et al.'s (2011) research did not view their group's new status as a positive and unique group attribute for differentiation. Instead, subjects in Lock et al.'s (2011) research derived identification from other points of attachment, which differentiated their group from others, such as the host city the team represented. In the present research, the team's status as a new team positioned group membership as distinct as they had joined a league comprised of established teams.

The Framing the Future theme observed in this research also advance understandings of the role of success in relation to new teams. Whilst Lock et al. (2011) failed to find that vicarious achievement was a driver of identification, it is important to note that their team of interest was immediately successful, winning the championship in the team's first year. In the present research, the prominent discussion about the team's propositions of future successes may have been influenced by a lack of success to date. It is likely that the team's strategic marketing program also contributed to fans possessing realistic expectations for the first few seasons, and more optimistic goals for future seasons. The GCS were careful not to promise fans instant success; instead, preferring to adopt a strategy of community engagement to connect with fans (Lock et al., 2014; McDonald & Stavros, 2012). This approach illustrates

how communicating realistic performance goals to fans may help organisations to meet fan expectations and foster positive group evaluations (e.g., Lock et al., 2014; Wann, 1996).

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, losses and hardships may serve to encourage continued identification with new sport teams amongst some consumers. Previous work has outlined how losses act as a barrier to repeat patronage (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Kim & Trail, 2010; Zhang et al., 1997) and as identity threats (Snyder et al., 1983; Snyder et al., 1986), yet our respondents articulated how enduring losses helped to foster their identification with the team. The sustained losses observed here appear to have helped facilitate a level of allegiance amongst some of these early consumers, which may not have occurred had the team been immediately successful. Thus, we reveal how enduring losses can serve to strengthen a sport consumer's team identification when doing so enables him or her to join a group distinct from others, or occupy a preferable group position.

Managerial Implications

Although an absence of success can represent a challenge for sport marketers, our findings demonstrate that it is not an insurmountable challenge (e.g., Kim & Trail, 2010). Sport managers can use these results to augment their marketing to better facilitate the attraction, retention and development of fans in four main ways (James et al., 2002). First, new sport organisations should promote the unique opportunities that are afforded to their fans and encourage participation in activities which shape the team's identity. Adopting a marketing focus whereby interactions from fans are engaged in two-way communication and actively involved in co-creating the team's identity would be effective in this regard (e.g., Kim & Trail, 2011; Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan, & Leeming, 2007; Uhrich, 2014). New teams like the Gold Coast Suns and Brooklyn Nets have enabled fans to co-create and design elements related to the team's nickname, branding, mascot and song. Our findings support this approach by highlighting how such actions impact identification and safeguard against

fair weather fan accusations when the team enjoys success in the future (e.g., Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Norris et al., 2015; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). For this reason, encouraging fans to co-create in this manner across all physical (e.g., at the stadium) and virtual spheres (e.g., team-operated social media accounts) is encouraged (Uhrich, 2014).

Second, research indicates that individuals who join groups in their formative stages extract increased affect from their membership (Campbell et al., 2004) and thus possess favourable attitudinal and behavioural responses (Funk & James, 2001). Our findings demonstrated individuals derived significance from being foundation members (Owning our Identity) and felt that they would reap more affective significance from their group membership because of this when the team became successful in the future (Framing the Future). Thus, teams should recognise early adopters and focus on ways to acknowledge and leverage their position within the fan community. One way to do so would be creating subgroups within supporter bases built around foundation members (Katz & Heere, 2013). These groups may be created by identifying individuals who display loyalty or by providing support to fan driven initiatives and subgroups that emerge organically. Team-driven segmentation can be implemented via databasing attendance information. This method could be used to identify foundation members who have attended every home game and reward them with commemorative merchandise. A similar initiative to reward individuals who have been there from the start would be to give foundation members preferential access to tickets when the team qualifies for the finals. Fan communities (e.g., Katz & Heere, 2013) that emerge on their own should be supported and granted access to game day perks not available to others (e.g., inside news and access to the players after the game).

Third, teams should focus on communicating the broader benefits associated with sport fandom which extend past on-field performances (e.g., Sutton et al., 1997). We revealed evidence that following a new team enabled individuals to derive a sense of ownership in the

region, and helped those new to the area integrate into the city. This outlines some of the possible well-being benefits associated with sport fandom (e.g., Wann, 2006b) and provides an opportunity to market to non-fans whom may know little about a team but have a desire to connect with others in the region. Promotion at airports encouraging fans with statements like "Become a part of the Gold Coast, by becoming a part of the Gold Coast Suns" may be effective in this regard. To market to existing fans, efforts themed around intragroup competition, which encourages existing fans to demonstrate they are "true fans" may be effective during times of poor performance (Campbell et al., 2004; Norris et al., 2015). Embracing gamification by utilising applications enabling fans to compete against each other in team related trivia, score prediction games, and stadium check-ins is also encouraged.

Finally, new sport organisations should place an increased focus on building messaging strategies which seek to reaffirm the positive elements of group membership whenever possible. In instances where teams are not immediately successful, this messaging should be themed around encouraging supporters to remain loyal and to remind them of the unique opportunities they have access to through the new team (e.g., Owning Our Identity). Rewarding fans who display loyalty through consistent losses with unique experiences like exclusive stadium tours may assist in galvanising their support and in converting some early consumers into die-hard fans. Distributing information reminding fans about the team's likely successes in the future, if they endure losses in the now (e.g., Framing the Future) would also be effective here. Additionally, new teams may benefit by creating messaging which focuses less on results and more on the social aspects of sport consumption to differentiate the group. Professional (e.g., Chicago Cubs) and collegiate (e.g., Kansas University) team fans have adopted slogans like "Win or Lose, We Still Booze" to accentuate the social benefits linked with their respective group memberships. Thus, promoting similar messages which focus on the broader elements of team support (e.g., "We might not win but we cheer the loudest")

would enable fans to retain positive and unique social identities irrespective of the team's on-field performances.

Limitations and Future Research

Our findings provide direction to stimulate further work in this area in four broad ways. First, our findings relate to an instance where the team was overwhelmingly unsuccessful during the observed period, and consequently, the identity maintenance strategies employed in other contexts may differ. Future research should seek to observe contexts with less extreme degrees of threat (e.g., 40% win percentages). Subsequent research should also observe fans in different sport environments and in a range of countries. Such research could investigate new and rebranded US franchises, emerging formats of sports such as cricket, and leagues employing promotion and relegation where there are serious consequences for sustained periods of poor performances.

Second, the present research focused on a timeframe that coincided with the team's first season and a half only. It is possible that observations over longer periods may yield differing results, especially in instances where the strategies observed here are unsuccessful. For example, an individual who employs social creativity by anticipating future successes may seek alternate strategies (e.g., leave the group or change the evaluation to another dimension) if the team endured season after season of losses. Likewise, an individual whom places importance on the distinctiveness of the new group may begin to view the group as more homogenous to other teams over time or if newer teams emerge. How long do fans of new teams such as New York City FC consider their team unique by virtue of being a new entity? Will individuals whom place importance on the distinctiveness of the team Cut-Off Reflected-Success (CORS) when the team becomes successful (e.g., Campbell et al., 2004; Hyatt & Foster, 2015)? Future research should endeavour to observe sport consumer

behaviour over longer periods to answer these questions and gain a broader understanding of how fans preserve and enhance the positivity of group memberships.

Third, the research design used here collected snapshot data. Thus, results provide only preliminary insight into sport consumer behaviour and how identity maintenance processes manifest in this context. Future research should use panel research designs, collecting longitudinal data to provide more insights into the specific mechanisms employed in the face of identity threat. Further investigations in this area should also seek to collect mixed methods data to build on the single method approaches used thus far. It is likely that diverse cohorts of fans will utilise the strategies identified here dissimilarly and certain segments may employ other identity maintenance strategies that did not emerge here (e.g., social competition).

Last, the effect of the specific media messaging strategy utilised by the team warrants further investigation. In this instance, communications leading into the team's inaugural seasons were careful not to promise success, instead focusing on the long-term prospects of the team (e.g., Lock et al., 2014; McDonald & Stavros, 2012). It is likely that this cautious approach helped fans to develop realistic expectations (e.g., Wann, 1996) and thus influenced the manner in which they perceived and managed the threat of losing. Future research should quantify the effect of particular messaging to empirically test how media communications from official (e.g., league and team) and unofficial (e.g., fan supporter forums) sources may influence the selection of specific identity maintenance strategies.

Conclusion

We investigated how sport consumers managed their team identification in the face of poor on-field performances. Consistent with social identity theory, the current research identified that sport consumers whom identified with a new, unsuccessful sport team sought to protect their social identities by enacting socially creative and socially mobile maintenance

strategies. First, individuals sought to change the dimensions upon which the team was

evaluated. In this instance, individuals tended to highlight the team were unique from salient

outgroups and emphasised the team's chances of future success rather than the lack of current

achievements. Second, individuals displayed evaluations consistent with the social mobility

mechanism. This manifestation was underpinned by a desire to achieve a level of

differentiation from other in-group members, who had not supported the team from the

beginning (e.g., non-foundation members) and those who will join the group in the future.

Collectively, findings highlight how team identifications are evaluated on domains broader

than the successes and failures of the group. Our findings suggest individuals can sustain

memberships with unsuccessful groups as long as they derive meaning from their position in

respect to others in the group (e.g., intragroup comparison) or perceive their group is distinct

from salient out-groups (e.g., intergroup comparison). Further, our findings demonstrate how

losses can serve to strengthen the sense of identification early sport consumers derive from

their group memberships.

References

Andrijiw, A. M., & Hyatt, C. G. (2009). Using optimal distinctiveness theory to understand

identification with a nonlocal professional hockey team. *Journal of Sport Management,*

23, 156-181.

Baade, R. A., & Tiehen, L. A. (1990). An analysis of major league baseball attendance.

Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 14, 14–32.

Bernache-Assollant, I., Laurin, R., & Bodet, G., (2012). Casual spectators and die-hard fans'

reactions to their team defeat: A look at the role of territorial identification in elite

French rugby. *International Journal of Psychological Research, 5*, 122-132.

Bernache-Assollant, I., Laurin, R., Bouchet, P., Bodet, G., & Lacassagne, M. (2010).

Refining the relationship between ingroup identification and identity management

strategies in the sport context: The moderating role of gender and the mediating role of

negative mood. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 13*, 639-652.

Branscombe, N. R., & Wann, D. L. (1991). The positive social and self-concept

consequences of sports team identification. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 15*, 115-

127.

Branscombe, N. R., Wann, D. L., Noel, J. G., & Coleman, J. (1993). In-group or out-group

extremity: Importance of the threatened social identity. *Personality and Social*

Psychology Bulletin, 19, 381-388.

Bristow, D., Schneider, K., & Sebastian, R., (2010). Thirty games out and sold out for

months! An empirical examination of fan loyalty to two Major League Baseball teams.

Journal of Management Research, 2, 1-14.

Bristow, D., & Sebastian, R. (2001). Holy cow! Wait 'til next year! A closer look at the brand

loyalty of Chicago Cubs baseball fans. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 18*, 256-275.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, R. M., Aiken, D., & Kent, A. (2004). Beyond BIRGing and CORFing: Continuing the exploration of fan behaviour. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 13,* 151-157.

Cialdini, R. B., Borden, R. J., Thorne, A., Walker, M. R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L. R. (1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31*, 366-375.

Cialdini, R. B., & Richardson, K. D. (1980). Two indirect tactics of image management: Basking and Blasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*, 406-415.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage Publications.

Crisp, R. J., Heuston, S., Farr, M. J., & Turner, R. N. (2007). Seeing red or feeling blue: Differentiated intergroup emotions and ingroup identification in soccer fans. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 10*, 9-26.

Delia, E. B. (2015). The exclusiveness of group identity in celebrations of team success. *Sport Management Review, 18,* 396-406.

Elsbach, K., & Bhattacharya, C. (2001). Defining who you are by what you're not: Organizational disidentification and the National Rifle Association. *Organization Science, 12*, 393–413.

End, C. M., Dietz-Uhler, B., Harrick, E. A., & Jacquemotte, L. (2002). Identifying with winners: A re-examination of sport fans' tendency to BIRG. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 32*, 1017-1030.

Filo, K., Cuskelly, G., & Wicker, P. (2015). Resource utilisation and power relations of community sport clubs in the aftermath of natural disasters. *Sport Management Review, 18,* 555-569.

Fink, J. S., Trail, G. T., & Anderson, D. F. (2002). An examination of team identification: Which motives are most salient to its existence? *International Sports Journal, 6*, 195-207.

Fink, J. S., Parker, H. M., Brett, M., & Higgins, J. (2009). Off-field behavior of athletes and team identification: Using social identity theory and balance theory to explain fan reactions. *Journal of Sport Management, 23*, 142-155.

Fisher, R. J. (1998). Group-derived consumption: The role of similarity and attractiveness in identification with a favorite sports team. *Advances in Consumer Research, 25*, 283-288.

Fisher, R. J., & Wakefield, K. (1998). Factors leading to group identification: A field study of winners and losers. *Psychology and Marketing, 15*, 23-40.

Foster, W. M., & Hyatt, C. (2007). I despise them! I detest them! Franchise relocation and the expanded model of organizational identification. *Journal of Sport Management, 21*, 194-208.

Funk, D. C., & James, J. D. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological commitment to sport. *Sport Management Review, 4*, 119-150.

Funk, D. C., Mahony, D. F., & Ridinger, L. L. (2002). Characterizing consumer motivation as individual difference factors: Augmenting the sport interest inventory (SII) to explain level of spectator support. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 11*, 33-43.

Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2001). Understanding brand loyalty in professional sport: Examining the link between brand associations and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, 3*, 67-94.

Glaser, B. G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems, 12*, 436-445.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1977). Grounded theory. In N. Denzin (Ed.), *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. New York, USA: McGraw Hill.

Giulianotti, R. (2002). Supporters, followers, fans, and flaneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities in football. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 26*, 25-46.

Grant, N., Heere, B., & Dickson, G. (2011). New sport teams and the development of brand community. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 11*, 35-54.

Greenwood, B., Kanters, M. A., & Casper, J. M. (2006). Sport fan team identification formation in mid-level professional sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 6*, 253-265.

Harada, M., & Matsuoka, H. (1999). The influence of new team entry upon brand switching in the J-League. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 8*, 21-30.

Havard, C. T. (2014). Glory out of reflected failure: The examination of how rivalry affects sport fans. *Sport Management Review, 17*, 243-253.

Heere, B., & James, J. D. (2007). Sports teams and their communities: Examining the influence of external group identities on team identity. *Journal of Sport Management, 21,* 319-337.

Heere, B., James, J. D., Yoshida, M., & Scremin, G. (2011a). The effect of associated group identities on team identity. *Journal of Sport Management, 25*, 606–621.

Heere, B., Walker, M., Yoshida, M., Ko, Y., Jordan, J. S., & James, J. D. (2011b). Brand community development through associated communities: Grounding community measurement within social identity theory. *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 19*, 407-422.

Holt, D. B. (1995). How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *22,* 1-16.

Hyatt, C., & Foster, W. M. (2015). Using identity work theory to understand the de-

escalation of fandom: A study of former fans of National Hockey League teams.

Journal of Sport Management, 29, 443-460.

James, J. D., Kolbe, R. H., & Trail, G. T. (2002). Psychological connection to a new sport

team: Building or maintaining the consumer base? *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 11,* 215-

225.

Jones, I. (1997). Further examination of the factors influencing current identification with a

sports team, a response to Wann et al. (1996). *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 85*, 257-

258.

Jones, I. (2000). A model of serious leisure identification: The case of football

fandom. *Leisure Studies, 19*, 283-298.

Jones, I. (2015). 'He's still the winner in my mind': Maintaining the collective identity in

sport through social creativity and group affirmation. *Journal of Consumer Culture*,

doi: 10.1177/1469540515590479

Katz, M., & Heere, B. (2013). Leaders and followers: An exploration of the notion of scale-

free networks within a new brand community. *Journal of Sport Management, 27*, 271-

287.

Kim, Y. K., & Trail, G. (2010). Constraints and motivators: A new model to explain sport

consumer behavior. *Journal of Sport Management, 24*, 190-210.

Kim, Y. K., & Trail, G. (2011). A conceptual framework for understanding relationships

between sport consumers and sport organizations: A relationship quality

approach. *Journal of Sport Management, 25*, 57-69.

Kunkel, T., Funk, D. C., & Hill, B. (2013). Brand architecture, drivers of consumer

involvement, and brand loyalty with professional sport leagues and teams. *Journal of

Sport Management, 27*, 177-192.

Lock, D., & Filo, K. (2012). The downside of being irrelevant and aloof: Exploring why

    individuals do not attend sport. *Sport Management Review, 15,* 187-199.

Lock, D., & Funk, D. C. (2016). The Multiple In-group Identity Framework. *Sport*

    Management Review, *19,* 85-96.

Lock, D., Funk, D. C., Doyle, J. P, & McDonald, H. (2014). Examining the longitudinal

    structure, stability, and dimensional interrelationships of team identification. *Journal of*

    Sport Management, 28, 119-135.

Lock, D., Taylor, T., & Darcy, S. (2011). In the absence of achievement: The formation of

    new team identification. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 11*, 171-192.

Lock, D., Taylor, T., Funk, D. C., & Darcy, S. (2012). Exploring the development of team

    identification. *Journal of Sport Management, 26*, 283-294.

Mahony, D. F., & Nakazawa, M., Funk, D. C., James, J. D., & Gladden, J. M. (2002).

    Motivational factors influencing the behaviour of J. League spectators. *Sport*

    Management Review, 5, 1-24.

Mason, D. S. (1999). What is the sports product and who buys it? The marketing of

    professional sport leagues. *European Journal of Marketing, 33*, 402-418.

McDonald, H., Karg, A. J., & Vocino, A. (2013). Measuring season ticket holder satisfaction:

    Rationale, scale development and longitudinal validation. *Sport Management Review,*

    16, 41-53.

McDonald, H., Leckie, C., Karg, A. J., Zubcevic-Basic, N., & Lock, D. (2015). Segmenting

    initial fans of a new team: A taxonomy of sport early adopters. *Journal of Consumer*

    Behaviour, doi: 10.1002/cb.1558

McDonald, H., & Stavros, C. (2012). Entrepreneurial market leaders: Australian football

    league expansion through new team development. In S. Chadwick & D. Ciletti (Eds.),

Sports entrepreneurship: Theory and practice (pp. 65-79). London: Fitness Information Technology.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, USA: Sage.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (6th ed.). Boston, USA: Pearson Education.

Norris, J. I., Wann, D. L., & Zapalac, R. K. (2015). Sport fan maximizing: following the best team or being the best fan? *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 32*, 157-166.

Park, S. H., Andrew, D. P. S., & Mahony, D. F. (2008). Exploring the relationship between trait curiosity and initial interest in sport spectatorship. *International Journal of Sport Management, 9*, 286-301.

Park, S. H., Mahony, D. F., & Greenwell, T. C. (2010). The measurement of sport fan exploratory curiosity. *Journal of Sport Management, 24,* 434-455.

PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2011). *Changing the game: Outlook for the global sports market to 2015.* Retrieved from http://www.pwc.com/en_gx/gx/hospitality-leisure/pdf/changing-the-game-outlook-for-the-global-sports-market-to-2015.pdf

Robinson, M. J., & Trail, G. T. (2005). Relationships among spectator gender, motives, points of attachment, and sport preference. *Journal of Sport Management, 19*, 58-80.

Rowley, J., Kupiec-Teahan, B., & Leeming, E. (2007). Customer community and co-creation: a case study. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 25*, 136-146.

Shapiro, S. L., Ridinger, L. L., & Trail, G. T. (2013). An analysis of multiple spectator consumption behaviors, identification, and future behavioral intentions within the context of a new college football program. *Journal of Sport Management, 27*, 130-145.

Snyder, C. R., Higgins, R. L., & Stucky, R. J. (1983). *Excuses: Masquerades in search of grace.* New York, USA: Wiley-Interscience.

Snyder, C. R., Lassegard, M., & Ford, C. E. (1986). Distancing after group success and

    failure: Basking in reflected glory and cutting off reflected failure. *Journal of*

    Personality and Social Psychology, 51, 382-388.

Sutton, W. A., McDonald, M. A., Milne, G. R. & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and

    fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 6*, 15-22.

Tajfel, H. (1978). Social categorisation, social identity and social comparison. In H. Tajfel

    (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of*

    intergroup relations (pp. 61-76). London, UK: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G.

    Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-

    47). Monterey, USA: Brooks-Cole.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity of intergroup behavior. In S. Worschel

    & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup relations* (2nd Ed). Chicago, USA:

    Nelson-Hall.

Trail, G. T., Anderson, D. F., & Fink, J. S. (2005). Consumer satisfaction and identity theory:

    a model of sport spectator conative loyalty. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 14*, 98-111.

Trail, G. T., Fink, J. S., & Anderson, D. F. (2003). Sport spectator consumption

    behavior. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 12*, 8-17.

Trail, G. T., Kim, Y. K., Kwon, H. H., Harrolle, M. G., Braunstein-Minkove, J. R., & Dick,

    R. (2012). The effects of vicarious achievement on BIRGing and CORFing: Testing

    moderating and mediating effects of team identification. *Sport Management Review,*

    15, 345–354.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal level theory of psychological distance.

    Psychological Review, 117, 440-463.

Uhrich, S. (2014). Exploring customer-to-customer value co-creation platforms and practices in team sports. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 14*, 25-49.

Wann, D. L. (1996). Seasonal changes in spectators' identification and involvement with and evaluations of college basketball and football teams. *The Psychological Record, 46,* 201-215.

Wann, D. L. (2006a). The causes and consequences of sport team identification. In A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of sports and media* (pp. 331-352). New Jersey, USA: Erlbaum.

Wann, D. L. (2006b). Understanding the positive social psychological benefits of sport team identification: The Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 10*, 272-296.

Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1990). Die-hard and fair-weather fans: Effects of identification on BIRGing and CORFing tendencies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 14*, 103-117.

Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N.R. (1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of identification with their team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology 24*, 1-17.

Wann, D. L., Hamlet, M. A., Wilson, T. M., & Hodges, J. A. (1995). Basking in reflected glory, cutting off reflected failure and cutting off future failure: The importance of group identification. *Social Behavior and Personality, 23*, 377-388.

Wann, D. L., Melnick, M., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. (2001). *Sport fans: The psychology and social image of spectators.* New York, USA: Routledge.

Wann, D. L., Tucker, K. B., & Schrader, M. P. (1996). An exploratory examination of the factors influencing the origination, continuation, and cessation of identification with sports teams. *Perceptual and Motor Skill, 82*, 995-1001.

Wilson, A. E., Buehler, R., Lawford, H., Schmidt, C., & Yong, A. G. (2012). Basking in

   projected glory: The role of subjective temporal distance in future self-appraisal.

   European Journal of Social Psychology, 42, 342–353.

Zhang, J. J., Pease, D. G., Smith, D. W., Lee, J. T., Lam, E. T. C., & Jambor, E. A. (1997).

   Factors affecting the decision making of spectators to attend minor league hockey

   games. *International Sports Journal, 1*, 39–49.