

A multifaceted approach to understand highly-identified fans' experiences of sport activism

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Abstract

The pandemic altered the socio-contextual environment. During this time, society was exposed to structural violence experienced by Black individuals at the hands of the police. The subsequent Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests coincided with the return of professional sport in 2020 and became embedded in its programming. This thesis sought to answer how sport activism influences highly-identified fans' lived experiences of sport. As an interpretivist, it was essential to acknowledge the importance of sociohistorical factors contributing to fans' experiences. Therefore, semistructured interviews served to answer how fans restructure their consumption in response to changing needs, motives, and socio-contextual environments to contextualize the guiding research question. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis to make sense of the data.

Chapter 2a utilized U&G and SDT and revealed that participants had difficulties satisfying their needs, especially their relatedness, due to the pandemic-imposed restrictions meant that participants. Sport transformed into a social activity and a means to escape the reality of the pandemic through increased sport consumption. Individuals who increased their sport consumption primarily to socialize and escape did not sustain these habits as the pandemic lessened, whereas autonomously-motivated individuals maintained their elevated consumption levels.

Chapter 2b utilized social identity theory and social identity complexity to examine fans' experiences of sport activism via their social identities. Participants interpreted the BLM protests through their multiple identities, informing their response to the intersection of sport and activism. All participants noted some form of social identity threat resulting from sport activism – either from the sender (i.e., the organization, team, or athlete) and/or the subsequent

conversations that resulted from the demonstrations. Participants with less complex (i.e., less inclusive) structures faced heightened identity threats. Participants with more complex (i.e., more inclusive) group characterizations used sport activism as a vehicle to further action and typically expressed tolerance toward the outgroup.

Chapter 3 synthesized the two studies' findings noting that seeking relatedness increased social identity threats or conformity behavior and that mentions of escape were used by participants as a maintenance tactic to oppose BLM in sports while distancing their white identity from their stance.

Land Acknowledgement

Before continuing to my thesis, I would like to acknowledge the land on which this thesis was written. This work was conceptualized, written, and subsequently re-written on indigenous land. I would like to acknowledge the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people from the now-known “Niagara Region.” Additionally, this acknowledgement extends to the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapeewak people from the “London, Ontario” area. Acknowledging territory is a small step towards reconciliation, but nowhere near the *end*.

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Chapter I:

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 virus as a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). In response, individuals' lives were uprooted and plagued with uncertainty due to the novelty of the pandemic; still, the long-term physical and sociological implications of the coronavirus are unclear. Nationwide lockdowns caused disruptions and evoked fear collectively due to the unprecedented nature of such an event (Giuntella et al., 2021). Uncertainty muddled by public regulations (e.g., international trade, in-store capacity, physical movement), were reinforced as the global economy suffered. The government-imposed physical restrictions emphasized a necessity for organizations to reflect and adapt to the changing needs of consumers (Mastromartino et al., 2020).

While the pandemic stopped in-person attendance, sport struggled as a whole to meet the needs of the remote consumer – i.e., fans limited to mediated forms of consumption (Drape et al., 2020). Each sector of sport – i.e., not-for-profit (NFP), public, and commercial – faced its own challenges as a result of the coronavirus (Elliot et al., 2021; Skinner & Smith, 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021; Washington Post, 2020). Evidently, professional sport's return was prioritized, soon resuming with strict health policies in place, while both NFP and public sport organizations remained closed to assess the risks of COVID-19. The absence of public and community sport affected many individuals' social, mental, and physical health (Guintella et al., 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021). Community and youth sport organizations could not afford to comply with coronavirus protocols (Teare & Taks, 2021). Individuals who sought their "fix" through sport found it increasingly difficult to satisfy these needs and turned to alternative means (Elliot et al., 2021; Olafsen et al., 2021).

Sport is a unifying agent central within society (Chalip, 2006; Melnick, 1993; Segrave, 2000). Huizinga (1949) argued that play, debatably the non-organized form of sport, outdates culture in society; he stated that play is more intrinsic to our human nature than culture. In these instances, we ignore our collective differences in favor of moments of play. This phenomenon extends from participation to spectating. As a member of a sports team or a fan group, humans highlight their similarities rather than placing emphasis on the various different social categories we all belong to (e.g., race, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs; Melnick, 1993; Segrave, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). So, during the pandemic, a time where society was fragmented (Cendrowicz, 2020), the ethos of sport was sorely missed.

For example, governments have leveraged sport to facilitate a sense of national identity and collectiveness among their citizens (Chalip, 2006). The lasting impressions of international sporting competitions (e.g., Olympics and FIFA World Cup) have demonstrated sports' capacity as a unifier (Billings et al., 2013). By supporting their countries, citizens collectively unite under a shared national identity, which includes people of all backgrounds (Billings et al., 2013; Chalip, 2006). Collective differences (e.g., class divisions, ideologies) are ignored in favor of one national identity versus "the other." The national identity that is forged through sport lays the groundwork for nation-building and a sense of national purpose, which are the building blocks for a functional society (Chalip, 2006). Perhaps, for these reasons, the return of professional sport was prioritized over NFP and public sport.

The outcomes of professional sport mimic those of international sport. Instead of a national identity, fans form team identities. Team identities allow individuals to feel a sense of belonging and social bonding with their collective fan group (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1979; Fink et al., 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Segrave, 2000), which is a

closeness individuals lacked during the pandemic (Levine et al., 2022; Olafsen et al., 2021). Despite their absence from stadia, virtual spaces and mediated forms of sport consumption can gratify similar needs for fans (Fenton et al., 2021; Kim & Mao, 2021; Mastromartino et al., 2020; Naraine, 2019). Social media, through fan communities, can replicate experiences for fans similar to outcomes in-person attendance (Fenton et al., 2021; Mastromartino et al., 2020; Naraine, 2019). This made the transition from the physical to the virtual during the pandemic possible for sport organizations.

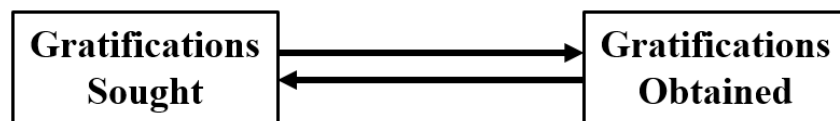
In addition to dealing with fans, sport organization faced several complex challenges in response to COVID-19. Concerns arose surrounding the athletes' health, the financial stability of teams in smaller leagues (e.g., National Women's Soccer League), and the future role of the spectators in sport (Washington Post, 2020). It was not just a matter of moving content online; sport organizations faced several complex issues simultaneously. As a result, the pandemic posed as a critical juncture for the futures of many franchises (Washington Post, 2020).

Luckily, fans wanted and needed sports more than ever (Lindblom, 2020). The pandemic provided individuals with an excess of free time, but with the caveat that they were restricted to their houses. During this time, individuals experienced external stressors resulting from the socio-contextual environment, namely uncertainties surrounding the social, political, and economic landscapes (Levine et al., 2022; Skinner & Smith, 2021). Paradoxically, individuals faced both under- and over-stimulation in the forms of boredom and stress during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Motivation literature defines this phenomenon as a need-thwarting environment (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). In these instances, individuals become frustrated that they were unable to satisfy their needs due to external factors like the social environment. As a response, individuals seek substitutions or diversions to

mitigate feelings of boredom and/or stress (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019; Moskalenko & Heine, 2003; Segrave, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), which supports why 78% of fans reported that sports provided an escape from COVID-19-related stresses (Lefton, 2021). Therefore, if fans' motivations for consuming sport changed, it would be expected that their relationship with the media would change in accordance (Palmgreen et al., 1980). Understanding how sport fans restructure their consumption in response to external influences (e.g., social environment, stress, uncertainty) allows sport managers to provide services that meet fans' altered gratifications sought.

Figure 1.1

Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) relationship with media feedback loop



While the return of professional sport promised optimism and progress as a unifier (Chalip, 2006; Melnick, 1993), instead, sport returned bound to many of the divisive sociopolitical issues on race and politics that fans sought to avoid (Lefton, 2021). The sport activism protests that occurred in the summer of 2020 were in response to George Floyd's murder. For the third time in as many months – to our knowledge – a Black American had been killed at the hands of the police, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor being the other victims (BBC, 2021; Fausset, 2020). George Floyd's murder signaled the tipping point that reignited the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests on a global scale (BBC, 2021). Although Floyd's murder occurred in the US, it was shared and discussed worldwide, with many concluding that the police officer's actions were racially driven (BBC, 2021).

Momentarily, racial discourse became normalized on social media sites (Hu, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Tufekci, 2017). These sites created an opportunity for individuals' voices to be amplified and reach the masses (Jackson et al., 2020). Jackson et al. (2020) emphasized social media's power to reintroduce and reframe news that been ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media. By analyzing the geo-locations of tweets before and after protests, Yan et al. (2018) demonstrated Twitter's roles in disseminate activist discourse on a global scale.

Likewise, many athletes voiced their support of BLM on social media before professional sport returned (Lauletta, 2020). This momentum eventually translated into physical protests once professional sports leagues returned in the summer of 2020. Athletes held both economic and social leverage, which contributed to leagues' lack of resistance (Chen, 2021). Athletes argued that they should be able to use sport as a form of protest and public demonstration, and some even suggested that they may not participate in the league's return otherwise (Mannix, 2020). Athletes did not want the return of sport to overshadow the progress BLM had made in the months prior (Mannix, 2020). As a result, once the NBA reconvened, it had integrated BLM images and messaging into their product. Many players decided to wear jerseys which promoted activist messages in place of their last names. Other leagues followed: the National Football League (NFL) publicly supported the BLM movement through a video statement with league commissioner Roger Goodell (Reimer, 2020); and the English Premier League (EPL) altered their kits, replacing athletes' names on jerseys were replaced with the phrase "Black Lives Matter" and EPL logo on the sleeve was changed to the BLM symbol (Lane, 2020). Historically, professional sports leagues have remained impartial or opposed the intersection of sociopolitical statements within sport (Serazio, 2019), which made these actions quite significant.

Despite the widespread support from sport organizations, fans remained divided on the intersection of BLM and sport (Lefton, 2021) – which is typical with controversial topics like social activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Activism occurs when an individual or entity takes a non-neutral position on a contentious topic with no “right” answer (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). The conversations born out of Floyd’s death in isolation were already complex and delicate, but by embedding these conversations into a sport context, the complexity and the fragility only increased. Scholars have speculated that activism threatens individuals’ social identities and their positive outcomes attained through sport – e.g., sense of belonging, socialization, escape (Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019); these are the very factors that contribute to why fans perceive sport as so important (Delia et al., 2022).

As sport and politics continue to be inextricably linked, scholars and practitioners must understand fans’ responses to activism. Fans’ responses to activism in sport may depend on the individual's perception of sport and their motivations for spectating. People consume media for various reasons: (a) surveillance (i.e., to be informed), (b) personal identity (e.g., value reinforcement), (c) personal relationships (e.g., social interactions) and (d) diversion (e.g., escape and emotional release; McQuail et al., 1972). Uses and gratification theory (U&G) would suggest that sport spectatorship should satisfy one or more of these needs (Rubin, 2009). Used complementarily with self-determination theory (SDT), a motivational framework grounded within needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), a more rigorous framework emerges for understanding individuals’ motivations for fulfilling their needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Some may view sport as a vice for escape and entertainment, while others may perceive sport to be “a constitutive site in which...issues are communicated” (Butterworth, 2011, p. 326). So, the

individual's perception of sport in society and their motives for watching sport may factor into their attitudes towards brand activism entering sport.

Further, in line with this thesis' constructivist stance – in which truths are formed through the individual's interactions and experiences within the world (Gray, 2014) – individuals' belief systems are inextricably linked to their social identities. Within social identity theory (SIT), a social identity is a part of an individual's self-concept, derived from their belongingness to a social group to which they attribute meaning (Tajfel, 1974). Individuals hold multiple social identities at any given time; for example, one's intersectional identities (i.e., social categories), team identities, opinion-based identities (i.e., collective identities defined by a shared opinion (e.g., activism); McGarty et al., 2009) all contribute to their attitudes and behaviors in relevant situations. Such identities are evaluated socially through relevant intergroup comparisons and can lead to identity threats if perceived negatively, which is often the case with activism (McGarty et al., 2009; Sanderson et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2020). In particular, opinion-based identities tend to form around contentious issues and are often oppositionally defined (McGarty et al., 2009), creating clear boundaries between the ingroup and outgroup. As a result, it would be expected that individuals' social identities moderate fans' experiences of sport activism.

Past research has repeatedly mentioned that fans' motivations for consuming sport and their multiple social identities are central to fans' experiences and responses to sport activism. This thesis addresses past scholarship by contextualizing past findings with detailed accounts to extend our understanding of fans' interactions with sport activism. This thesis took a dual approach to accomplish this feat. First, it was necessary to understand how and why fans consume sport. While sport spectator scales list several motives (e.g., Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995), chapter 2a improved on past sport motivation research by examining fans'

behaviors through a needs-based motivation approach, recognizing that motivation is fluid and constantly changing. By understanding why participants sought sport, especially in a context as unique as the pandemic, their interpretations and responses to sport activism became more meaningful. Next, chapter 2b assessed the interplay of fans' multiple social identities that contributed to their experiences of sport activism. Coalesced, the two studies formed a complementary framework to frame fans' experiences of sport activism extended past their motives for consumption and social identities alone. Guided by the following questions, this research sought to improve our understanding of sport activism:

RQ1. How does sport activism influence highly-identified fans' lived experiences in relation to sport?

RQ2a. How do fans restructure their consumption habits in response to their changing needs, motives, and socio-contextual environments?

RQ2b. How do highly-identified fans' multiple social identities influence their interpretations of and responses to sport activism?

Overview of Literature and Theoretical Framework

Sport Activism

Traditionally, athletes have used sport as a platform for prosperity. Table 1.1 outlines the multiple eras of activism and characterizes each time period with supplemental accounts of sport activism. Athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Billie Jean King leveraged their notoriety as public figures to comment on and influence acts of social justice. While each athlete had great athletic careers, their activism significantly contributed to their legacies. For instance, Smith and Carlos doubled as activists in helping progress the Civil Rights Movement in America during the 1968 Mexico City Olympics (Edwards, 2018). On the Olympic

Table 1.1***A Timeline of Sport Activism in America***

Eras of Activism	Summary
Civil Rights and Equal Rights Movements (1960s – 1980s)	<p>In this era, marginalized groups (i.e., Black Americans and women) fought for equal rights by utilizing their fame through sport. Perhaps the most well-known activists of this time are Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, and Billie Jean King. The literature review dedicates a detailed recount of their actions. Notable omissions from the literature review include NBA athletes Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Russell, and NFL athlete Jim Brown. Brown organized a panel of top Black American athletes – including the former three and Ali – who spoke at the Negro Industrial and Economic Union in 1967 on whether they would support Ali’s refusal to serve in the Vietnam War (Rabinal, 2021). The collaboration among top athletes was instrumental in ensuring that it was a collective voice rather than one individual’s actions.</p>
Commercialization (1980s – 2000s)	<p>Michael Jordan is the poster child for this time in sport. Famously, Jordan was quoted saying, “Republicans buy sneakers too” (Agyemang, 2011, p. 436). This was Jordan’s response when asked to comment on a publicly racist Republican senator (Bennett, 2020). Athletes from the previous era (i.e., Abdul-Jabbar and Russell) believed that it was Jordan’s responsibility, as a global brand, to be an ambassador for socio-political issues (Serazio, 2019). Instead, Jordan avoided politics and profited immensely. Many future athletes would use Jordan’s apolitical archetype as a “blueprint” for their careers and commercial success (Agyemang, 2011).</p> <p>It is necessary to mention that this era was not devoid of activism. During this time, fellow NBA player Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf would protest the national anthem by staying seated or remaining in the dressing room during its playing (Jackson, 2014). After nearly sixty games of protest, the media questioned Abdul-Rauf’s actions, in which he responded that “the flag is a symbol of oppression, of tyranny. [America] has a long history of that” (Jackson, 2014, p. 91). Abdul-Rauf faced serious backlash from fans and NBA organizations, which virtually killed his playing career (Jackson, 2014).</p>
Return of the “woke” athlete (2012 – 2016)	<p>This return paved the way for the BLM and Kaepernick protests that followed. After a series of wrongful killings of Black Americans, athletes used their public platform to bring awareness to these injustices. LeBron James posted a team photo to Twitter in 2012 demanding justice for Trayvon Martin – an unarmed Black male who was shot and killed (ESPN, 2012; Serazio, 2019). Serazio (2019) dubbed this action as the “return of the woke athlete” (p. 214). It is believed that social media provided athletes with the autonomy and control to feel comfortable making such comments (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015; Serazio, 2019).</p>

Kaepernick/BLM
(2016 – 2018)

The majority of research within sport activism thus far has centered around Kaepernick's actions. Similar to Abdul-Rauf, Kaepernick decided to protest the national anthem. Kaepernick's kneeling was a protest against the oppression of people of color (Boren, 2020). Many NFL colleagues and other athletes, notably Megan Rapinoe, replicated Kaepernick's imagery in their protests (Schmidt et al., 2019). While their statements were perceived as anti-American (Schmidt et al., 2019), their actions should be considered patriotic. While Kaepernick and Rapinoe were critical of the US, the motivation was to make America a better country. That meant acknowledging inadequacies and the treatment of people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Inevitably, one must mention Donald Trump in this discussion. Trump, the Republican candidate at the time, publicly disavowed Kaepernick for his actions. He ignored Kaepernick's rationale, and instead echoed the initial backlash against Kaepernick, labelling the quarterback as anti-American. Trump used these protests to create further divide the US and is partially responsible for the politicization of sport.

Second-wave
(2020 – present)

This thesis intends to focus on the return of the BLM movement to sport. Once sports resumed in the summer of 2020, many leagues incorporated BLM messaging and imagery into their programming following George Floyd's death. The pandemic makes this time period an interesting case study. During the pandemic, many individuals were confined to their homes, leading to a decrease in their social, mental, and physical health (Guintella et al., 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021). As such, one would expect individuals' needs to evolve in conjunction with the changing landscape enforced by the pandemic – e.g., using sport for escape. Simultaneously, the core product of sport changed via the introduction of activism as well as fans' needs likely evolving due to the pandemic. Additionally, conversations of sociopolitical issues may pose social identity threats for fans (Sanderson et al., 2016). Activism messages may not align with fans' personal beliefs (Mudrick et al., 2019; Thorson & Serazio, 2018), and/or threaten the perceived similarity of the fan group – who are formed around intergroup comparisons rather than in-group similarities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is worthwhile to understand the role social identity and motivations play in experience activism in sport.

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podium, the sprinters performed the Black Power salute, and half of a century later, many current NBA and NFL athletes have replicated Smith and Carlos's protests by making a fist and extending their arm towards the sky (Agyemang et al., 2010; Cohen, 2020). Similarly, Billie Jean King used her platform to fight for gender equality in the US through creating the Women's Sport Foundation and advocating for equal pay in Tennis (Ware, 2011). All of these athletes' accomplishments extended outside of sport and created change within the civil rights and gender equality movements in the US. So, while it seems the frequency of activism in sport has recently increased, physical protests in sport are not a new phenomenon.

Following the 1970s, athlete activism had largely become dormant. The prevailing belief is that endorsers did not want to associate their product with troublesome athlete activists as sport became more commercialized (Cunningham & Regan, 2012). Activism is divisive, controversial, and without a "right" answer (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, sponsors have typically avoided associating themselves with these athletes. Rather an apolitical sporting environment suited commercialist endeavours so that they could appeal to everyone (Serazio, 2019a). As a result, athletes who have taken socio-political stances during this time made sacrifices both socially (Kaufman, 2008) and financially (Agyemang et al., 2010).

After Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan was one of the next great athletes to achieve worldwide popularity. The two differ drastically in their roles as activists; Jordan was often criticized for his aversion towards activism (Agyemang, 2011; Serazio & Thorson, 2020) and rather pursued his own financial interests. While Jordan had no obligation to be an activist, one might argue that as a global brand, Jordan had an intrinsic responsibility to use his platform for creating a better world (Moorman, 2020). As a result, he faced criticism from the era of black activists who preceded him (e.g., Ali, Smith, Carlos, Abdu-Jabbar, Russell; Agyemang, 2011).

Although Jordan received backlash from prior athlete activists during his playing career, this anti-activist legacy influenced future generations enormously (Agyemang, 2011). Jordan earned commercial success through his talent on the court and neutrality off the court. Undoubtedly, Jordan's financial success stemmed from his incredible talent and exciting playstyle, but by avoiding political and social issues, Jordan became more endorsable. Global brands could not risk alienating large segments of their consumers by endorsing a controversial athlete. Ultimately, Jordan's apolitical strategy unknowingly created a blueprint for future Black athletes to follow.

The "return of the woke athlete" (Serazio, 2019, p. 214) was not unprompted. The return of athlete activism in the 21st century stemmed from a pattern of racial injustices in the US. These tragedies include the murder of Trayvon Martin (i.e., the Miami Heat team photo with hoodies), Eric Garner (i.e., "I Can't Breathe" t-shirts), Michael Brown (i.e., St. Louis Rams "don't shoot" pose), and George Floyd (Cohen, 2020; Sanderson et al., 2016; Serazio, 2019). Athletes' protests were not unfounded, but rather in reactive; each injustice signaled a tipping point, which led to athletes' responses.

Another tipping point was reached in 2016. Colin Kaepernick, an NFL quarterback, made the first statement by kneeling during the national anthem, similar to Abdul-Rauf's protest two decades prior (Jackson, 2014). Despite choosing not to stand for the national anthem, Kaepernick's message stood to acknowledge the oppression of people of color in America (Mudrick et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2018; Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020; Thorson & Serazio, 2018). Yet, some media outlets misconstrued his actions, labelling him unpatriotic and anti-military (Park et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2018; Serazio & Thorson, 2020). Despite communicating his intentions, Kaepernick received immense backlash

for his actions from NFL owners, fans, news outlets, and politicians (Boren, 2020; Serazio, 2019).

For instance, Kaepernick stated that his actions were not anti-American, “I love America. I love people. That’s why I’m doing this. I want to help make America better,” but public opinions on the protest had already been formed (Boren, 2020; Park et al., 2020). Critics burned his jersey, attacked his intelligence and reputation (Schmidt et al., 2019), and even blamed his protests for the decline in NFL TV ratings (Serazio, 2019). Despite the backlash, Kaepernick’s efforts inspired other athletes to follow. Brandon Marshall, an NFL wide receiver, protests led to two of his sponsors terminating their contracts with him (Schmidt et al., 2018; Serazio, 2019). Megan Rapinoe, US soccer star, followed Kaepernick’s actions, instead kneeling for the equality of marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community. She was also labelled anti-American and was subjected to criticism (Schmidt et al., 2019).

Schmidt et al. (2019) conducted a thematic analysis on the Facebook pages of both Kaepernick and Rapinoe to inquire whether the narratives between the two athletes would differ. Both athletes used the same form of protest, but their intersectional identities differed (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation; Schmidt et al., 2019). Kaepernick, a Black straight cis-gendered male, received comments degrading his skin color and gender (Schmidt et al., 2019). Conversely, Rapinoe, a White lesbian cis-gendered female, faced messages related to the athlete’s role in activism (Schmidt et al., 2019). These findings aligned with past literature’s conclusions that the athlete’s race affects the response to their activism (Agyemang et al., 2010; Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Kaufman, 2008). Further, Schmidt et al. (2019) acknowledged that the divergence in discourse may have resulted from the ideologies associated with NFL football culture (e.g.,

pro-nationalistic, militaristic, and conservative ideologies; Butterworth, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio, 2019; Thorson & Serazio, 2018).

Evidently, not all sport activism evokes the same response. While Sarkar and Kotler (2018) segregated forms of activism into six dimensions (i.e., workplace, economic, legal activism, environmental, social, and political), it is also necessary to acknowledge the perceived riskiness and effort levels of said message (Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2018). For example, an athlete taking a stance on childhood obesity does not elicit the same responses as an athlete who is anti-war or is fighting for racial equality (Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2018). Cunningham and Regan (2012) theorized that speaking out on controversial matters may label the athlete as “less trustworthy” (p. 660), though this was refuted in their findings. Both studies confirmed that “risky” athlete activism resulted in negative fan attitudes and behaviors towards the athlete’s sponsor, although it is not entirely understood why this is the case. Scholars must question if safe activism is tolerable, yet risky activism is met with resistance, where is the line? Understanding fan’s tolerance of types of activism and their levels of riskiness would have significant practical implications.

The simplest explanation is that fans’ aversions to sport activism stem from incompatibilities between the message and their belief system. To test this assumption, Mudrick et al. (2019) conducted a pre-test post-test experiment of fans’ attitudes and behaviors toward their favorite athlete and team to detect change. Here, they measured identification levels and purchase intentions. Next, they asked participants to select a US President from their lifetime who they either did or did not support, depending on the condition. Finally, respondents were asked to imagine a scenario in which their favorite player either supported or critiqued the US President whom they did or did not like. Altogether there were four conditions: (1) support

President, supportive message (alignment), (2) support President, critical message (misalignment), (3) against President, supportive message (misalignment), and (4) against President, critical message (alignment; Mudrick et al., 2019). Three notable findings emerged: (a) fan's attitudes and behaviors only changed in relation to their favorite athlete, not their teams, (b) fan's attitudes altered negatively in cases of misalignment; yet in cases of alignment, perceptions remained equal to the pre-test, and (c) consumption intentions changed in all conditions in accordance with the alignment type (i.e., misalignment equals negative, and alignment equals positive; Mudrick et al., 2019).

Mudrick et al.'s (2019) findings demonstrated how risky activism affected consumers' attitudes and behaviors, especially when it conflicted with their own beliefs. These findings reaffirmed Agyemang et al.'s (2010) conclusion that athletes were wise to avoid activism to protect their wealth. The magnitude of change was greater in conditions of misalignment than in alignment (Mudrick et al., 2019), showcasing how risky activism often does more harm than good to the athlete. By fans not knowing an athlete's beliefs, athletes can remain a part of a fan's ingroup (Fink et al., 2009). In cases where ideologies misalign, a fan's perception of their favorite athletes may be adversely affected.

Fink et al. (2009) theorized that fans turn against athletes to protect their greater identity with the team. They looked at cases where an athlete's actions misaligned with a fan's self-concept. Fink et al. (2009) broadly defined these actions as unscrupulous activities, i.e., doping, cheating, scandals, and perhaps activism (Sanderson et al., 2016). To maintain their self-concept and identity with the team, fans disidentified with that individual or developed an in-group bias (Fink et al., 2009; Mudrick et al., 2019). This meant that fans distanced themselves from a troublesome athlete, and thus, the "black sheep" effect occurred. The "black sheep" effect

happens when fans label the individual as different from the in-group, to maintain esteem (Fink et al., 2009). Similarly, in-group bias served to protect the fan's identity by downplaying the athlete's actions. It is theorized these consequences derive from social identity threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and/or states of imbalance (Fink et al., 2009; Heider, 1958). Meaning that highly-identified fans used these strategies as coping mechanisms to protect their own identity. This might help explain why Mudrick et al. (2019) found changes in attitudes and behaviors towards players, but not teams.

Due to the strategies outlined in Fink et al. (2009), it is rare that fans experience identity threats on an organizational level (i.e., teams). Although, the two cases where this occurred were in response to the St. Louis Rams "don't shoot" protests (Sanderson et al., 2016) and the University of Missouri football team refusing to play (Frederick et al., 2017). In most cases, fans protect their identity through disidentification or in-group bias (Fink et al., 2009), but complications occurred when multiple athletes from the same team were involved. Fans responses included denouncing their fandom alongside racial or punishment-specific commentary (Frederick et al., 2017; Sanderson et al., 2016). These responses aligned with previous literature. Specifically, Kaufman (2008) and Agyemang (2012) noted that race plays a role in response to activism, as Black athletes tend to face more scrutiny. Also, the call for punishment aligned with Fink et al.'s (2009) use of balance theory. They found that if team management disciplined athletes for breaking guidelines, that fan identity towards the team was maintained. Unscrupulous behavior causes a state of imbalance that must be addressed; essentially, there must be consequences for an athlete's actions. Although, activism is not objectively wrong, even if it may be controversial (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al.,

2020), whereas the scenarios proposed in Fink et al.'s (2009) study were more consensually wrong.

In the case of the St. Louis Rams fans, the proportion of comments renouncing fandom differed on Facebook (i.e., 24.44%) and Twitter (i.e., 1.33%) in response to threat (Sanderson et al., 2016). This could point towards “cyberbalkanization” – an echo-chamber effect occurs, promoting homogenized discourse, thus excluding opposing views (Coles & West, 2016). As Facebook promotes comments with the greatest number of “likes,” the top comments would reflect popular discourse rather than all discourse. Thus, the prevailing theme of renouncing fandom would be viewed by more individuals, and it may encourage said behavior or discourage conflicting opinions. While denouncing a fandom may seem like an exaggerated response, it makes logical sense when applying Fink et al.'s (2009) findings. As it is a team protest, fans cannot disidentify with an individual to protect their team identification. Instead, fans may disidentify with the entire team to protect their threatened identity; threatened individuals tend to seek to leave that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

It may also be possible for fans to develop in-group bias. For instance, when the New England Patriots were found guilty of deflating footballs, highly-identified fans defended their team's involvement (Macur, 2017). Despite there being evidence, Patriots fans' allegiance to the franchise clouded their rationality and led to an extreme form of in-group bias to maintain their social identity (Funk & James, 2001). Although this behavior was not visible amongst fans' responses to the St. Louis Rams and University of Missouri football teams; instead, negative commentary was much more pronounced. Activism may evoke more intense reactions than other forms of social identity threats. Perhaps the substantial meaning given to one's political and team identity causes such an intense response.

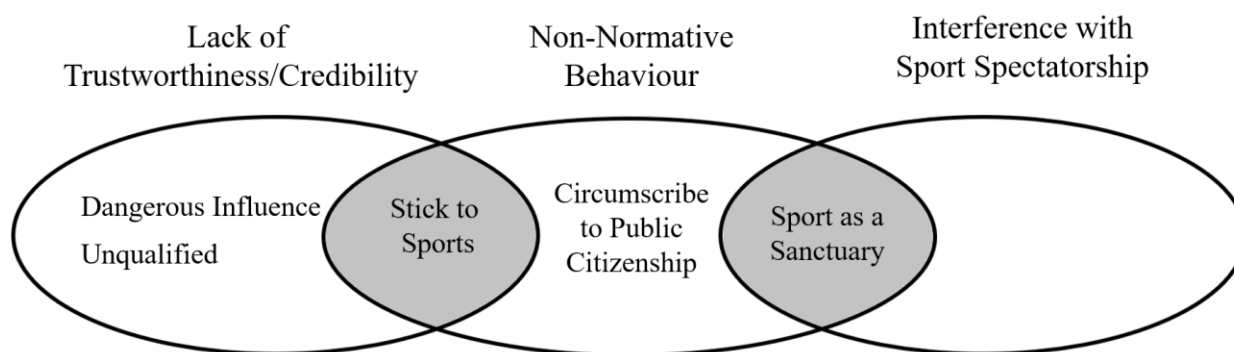
Thorson and Serazio (2018) found evidence to support this hypothesis. They found that individuals who identified as conservatives would more likely oppose the politicization of sport (Thorson & Serazio, 2018). As sport activism has typically been liberal-oriented – e.g., the BLM movement and Kaepernick and Rapinoe kneeling during the national anthem against the oppression of certain populations – there may be a misalignment among conservative fans, similar to the findings on Presidential support in Mudrick et al. (2019). So, perhaps the findings in Mudrick et al. (2019) can be generalized to political affiliation and the classification of the activism (i.e., liberal or conservative).

Serazio and Thorson (2020) built on their previous study (i.e., Thorson & Serazio, 2018) by including the open-ended question: “what do you think is good and/or bad about politics mixing with sport?” (p. 156). Seven themes emerged from the responses, two in support and five against the intersection of sport and politics. Fans in support acknowledged athletes had the right to free speech (22%) and that their comments could be constructive (6%; Serazio & Thorson, 2020). In many responses, fans mentioned the US’s First Amendment – which protects free speech – yet fans still relucted to completely support the athlete. For example, one respondent said, “Just because they are an athlete does not take away their right of free speech. Athletes just need to be cognizant of how they do it, because of who it affects” (Serazio & Thorson, 2020, p. 161). Due to Serazio and Thorson's (2020) coding technique, this participant’s comment was coded as supporting the right to free speech. Comments were coded by what the participant mentioned first, which could be problematic as the prior comment contains elements of athletes being a dangerous influence politically – which was one of the negative themes found. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this coding technique.

Opposingly, the five negative themes discovered in Serazio and Thorson (2020) ranged from athletes being a dangerous influence politically (11%), are unqualified (6%), should stick to sports (4%), should circumscribe to public citizenship (6%; i.e., remaining apolitical publicly like the rest of us), and that sport should be a sanctuary separate from politics (6%; i.e., escape). Sport as a sanctuary is unique among the developed themes. Where other claims argued against the athlete's role, influence, and duty as an American – all on social levels – “sport as a sanctuary” is a psychosocial-driven response. For many, sport serves as a distraction from the real world, politics included (Lindholm, 2020; Segrave, 2000; Serazio & Thorson, 2020). Thus, activism entering a fan's “sanctuary” would interfere with their ability to escape. Schmidt et al. (2019) acknowledged that escape may be the missing piece in fans' aversion to sport activism. Expanding on this finding more broadly, it may be helpful to understand how fans' motives for consuming sport influences their perception of activism in sport. Especially when coupled with the physical restrictions which resulted from the COVID-19 lockdown, it is worth exploring whether fans' motives for consuming sport changed during this time.

Figure 1.2

Categorizing Serazio and Thorson's (2020) “Perils of Politicizing Sport”



Note. Adapted from Serazio & Thorson (2020, p. 158-161). “Sport as a sanctuary” is unique in that it interferes with fan's consumption of sport

Sport Consumer Motives

Sport Management researchers (e.g., Funk et al., 2003; Haugh & Watkin, 2016; Seo & Green, 2008; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995; Xiao, 2020) have long strived to answer what motivates fans to consume sport. Both academics and practitioners would benefit from understanding consumers' motives. Studying sport consumer motives improves our understanding of fan behavior. Practically, managers can tailor their marketing campaigns to meet the needs of fans – e.g., offsetting operational costs (James & Ross, 2004). By understanding the consumer-specific motives for being a fan, marketers essentially hold the ingredient list of a recipe for a successful promotion. While the purpose of this thesis is not to create a list of spectator motives, understanding fans' motives during COVID-19 adds important contextual information about sports meaning to fans. Additionally, Serazio and Thorson's (2020) findings highlighted that motivation may guide fans' experiences of activism in sport for those who used sport as a sanctuary. So, fans' motives for watching sports may influence their perception and experience of said activism event.

Much of the current sport consumer motive research is quantitative and scale-based. In this vein, Wann (1995) operationalized theorized motives for sport fandom – borrowing heavily from Gantz (1981), Sloan (1989), and Zillman et al. (1989) – to create the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS). Wann (1995) intended to focus on fans rather than organizations; past sport psychology and sociology journals rarely focused on the fan. Altogether, Wann (1995) presented eight underlying factors that contributed to consumers' fandoms: entertainment, eustress (i.e., drama), group affiliation (i.e., socializing), self-esteem, aesthetics, escape, family, and economics. Despite having its limitations, Wann's (1995) SFMS created a baseline for future sport spectatorship measures (e.g., Trail & James, 2001).

Trail and James' (2001) Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) improved on Wann's (1995) SFMS. Trail and James (2001) included aspects of Milne and McDonald's (1999) and Kahle et al.'s (1996) spectator scales for further guidelines in addition to Wann's SFMS. Trail and James' (2001) scale consisted of two additions and one subtraction from Wann's (1995) SFMS – they included physical attraction and skill levels of the athletes to their scale and removed economics. The MSSC has served as a standard tool for measuring fan motives (e.g., Stander, 2016) and even a resource for future scales (e.g., Haugh & Watkin, 2016; Seo & Green, 2008; Xiao, 2020).

As media shifted online, Seo and Green (2008) developed the Motivation Scale for Sport Online consumption (MSSOC). The purpose was to understand fan's motivations for using sports team's websites. Seo and Green (2008) refined their scale to include ten motives. New factors included fanship (i.e., level of fandom), interpersonal communication, technical knowledge (i.e., related to technical aspects, like strategy in the sport), passing time, and fan expression (Seo & Green, 2008). While Seo and Green (2008) created the MSSOC in relation to sports team's websites, Haugh and Watkin (2016) found that the MSSOC's dimensions extended to sport social media consumption across multiple platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat).

Seo and Green's (2008) MSSOC is particularly relevant in this case due to the mediated-nature of the scale reflects the state of sport consumption during the pandemic. Mediated sport consumption occurs outside of live attendance such as television, streaming, sports bars, and social media (Kim & Mao, 2021; Raney, 2007). Researchers (e.g., Fairley & Tyler, 2012; Kim & Mao, 2021; Raney, 2007; Seo & Green, 2008; Weed, 2007) found that sport fans' motives differ slightly within mediated forms of sport consumption compared to live attendance. For example,

Qian et al.'s (2019) Motivation Scale of Esports Spectatorship (MSES) discovered two unique motives in the online consumption of esports: vicarious sensation and skill improvement. Further, Kim and Mao (2021) conducted qualitative interviews with fans, discovering 14 motives. Kim and Mao (2021) found eight unique themes of mediated consumption that differed from live attendance (i.e., multi-game access, multitasking, economic consideration, emotional hedge, convenience, programming and storytelling, sociability, and ownership). Although, it is important to note that the interviews were conducted prior to the pandemic. The differences among motives found across various contexts seem to indicate that fans' motives are contextually constructed and perhaps fluid. If this is the case, the pandemic would likely alter fans' needs and motives.

For instance, the pandemic caused individuals' social, mental, and physical health to suffer (Levine et al., 2022; Olafsen et al., 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021). As such, individuals' motivations for consuming sport during the pandemic may have differed before, during, and after pandemic. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), environments are a crucial aspect contributing to an individuals' motivations. In moments of stress and tension – i.e., the pandemic – individuals become more externally motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Funk et al., 2012). So, activities that were once the means *and* the end become a means *to* an end. In this scenario, the “end” shifts from watching sport for their own sake to watching sport in order to satisfy ulterior needs (e.g., socializing, escape; Funk et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2020). If this is the case, and fans during the pandemic watched sport for a means to an end, activism may interfere with satisfying that need.

Paek et al. (2021) found that fans' motives influence relationship quality and consumption intention – presenting evidence that affectual and behavioral outcomes may stem from an individuals' motivation for consumption. In particular, emotional motives (i.e., escape,

eustress, entertainment, esteem) were discovered to influence fans' attitudes and behaviors significantly compared to cognitive and behavioral motives (Paek et al., 2021). Paek et al. (2021) recommended future research use SDT to address the underlying synergy between motivations and these attitudinal changes. As a result, it is relevant to assess whether individuals' motivations for watching sport changed during the pandemic and further, whether their motivations influenced their experience of sport activism.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

U&G emerged in response to increased consumer engagement with media (Rubin, 2009). Scholars wanted to understand why individuals were attracted to media and how it might satisfy their social and psychological needs (Rubin, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). Katz et al. (1973) initially encouraged empirical research to examine (a) how media consumption gratifies needs, (b) what are consumers' motives, and (c) what are the outcomes resulting from these needs, motives, and behavior. In response, Blumler (1979) hypothesized that individuals consume media for information gain, diversion or escape, and personal identity reinforcement – although, this is not an exhaustive list of motivations. As consumers use media in attempt to satisfy their social and psychological needs, their motives may evolve in response to a variety of contextual factors (e.g., COVID-19, stress, the individual; Rubin, 2009). Liberated by an excess of media available, individuals can consume specific media to satisfy more apparent and appropriate needs (Massey, 1995; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Whiting & Williams, 2013). As past research identified sport consumers' motives (e.g., Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995), scholars must address Katz et al.'s (1973) two remaining questions, “how does media consumption gratify fans' needs?” and “what are the outcomes that fans experience through media consumption?”

More recently, Sundar and Limperos (2013) reassessed U&G within the context of new media. Earlier researchers (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983) predicted that certain gratifications and needs are unique to different technologies and contexts, which researchers discovered to be especially the case with social media (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Now, social media allows for greater levels of interactivity between the users and the producers, an ability non-existent within previous forms of media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Zimmer et al., 2018). As technology has evolved, the gratifications users seek and obtain become more specific and tailored to their needs (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). This behavior is comparable to how consumers seek socio-politically congruent brands in saturated markets (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Users can selectively choose media to gratify their needs (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Typically, the outcomes identified in sport consumer motive research have related to affective (e.g., team identification, team loyalty) and behavioral variables (i.e., purchase intention, media consumption; Funk et al., 2003; Trail & James, 2001). This research looks to uncover the antecedents to fans' motivations for consumption and their influence on behaviors.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT can assist U&G in understanding how media consumption gratifies needs (Katz et al., 1973). SDT purports that one must consider humans' innate psychological needs in the process of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008). Within SDT, needs are necessities rather than acquired motives (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Humans innately strive for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being through three core needs that underpin human behavior: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Autonomy refers to acting with a sense of volition that is consistent with the individual's self-concept (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Often, autonomy is conflated with independence or individualism; whereas, in SDT, the central premise of autonomy is the need to act freely and congruently with the self (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Competence involves the individual feeling effective through their actions while possessing the ability to grow and learn (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Both autonomy and competence are typically more psychological and intrinsic needs compared to relatedness. Relatedness deals with the need to experience a sense of belonging and connection with others. Ultimately, it is the need to feel loved and cared for by others and vice versa (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In many ways, sport can fulfill these three innate psychological needs (Funk et al., 2012). SDT would suggest that fans' motives to consume sport (e.g., excitement, drama, escape, socialization) contribute to satisfying our needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness).

Although, it is necessary to consider the orientation of the individual's motivation. Deci and Ryan (2008) outline that within SDT "the most central distinction...is between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation" (p. 182). According to Deci and Ryan (2008), motivation occurs on a spectrum of extrinsic-intrinsic motives, which are known as causality orientations. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are synonymous with controlled and autonomous motivations (which differs from autonomy as a need). To identify the origins of the motivation, one must identify the driver of the action: is it internally driven (e.g., play, curiosity, exploration), or is it more socially motivated (e.g., shame, approval-seeking, guilt; Deci & Ryan, 2008)? Human motivations are rarely completely controlled or autonomous – rather they tend to be a combination of the two along the extrinsic-intrinsic spectrum.

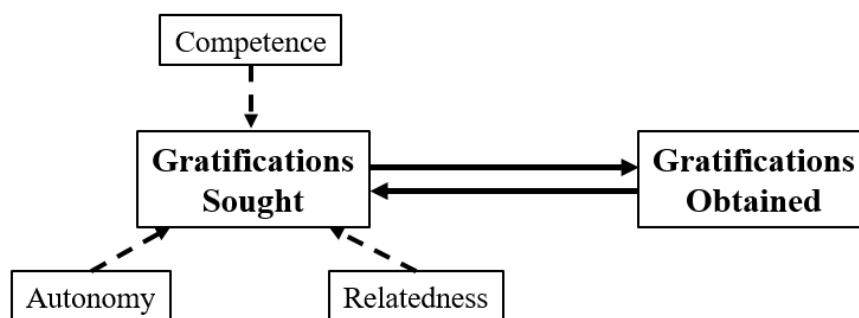
By applying SDT to the current archive of sport consumption motives, inferences can be made to understand “the why?” For instance, Funk et al. (2012) classified excitement and aesthetics as autonomous-oriented motives because they are the *end* (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Funk et al., 2012). Conversely, Funk et al. (2012) defined escape and socialization as controlled-oriented, a *means* to the end. In this case, individuals use sport as a vehicle to satisfy their innate needs (e.g., socializing and relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2020; Funk et al., 2012).

By deciphering how sport satisfies fans’ innate psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness), researchers can better understand the antecedents to fans’ behaviors. As a result, sport activism may interfere with individuals’ abilities to satisfy their needs. Palmgreen et al. (1980) proposed that consumers’ interactions with media occur via a feedback loop between their gratification sought and obtained (Palmgreen et al., 1980; Zimmer et al., 2018). If the event satisfies these needs, then the relationship is reinforced (Palmgreen et al., 1980; Zimmer et al., 2018). SDT can modify Palmgreen et al.’s (1980) media feedback loop to include humans’ three innate psychological needs as antecedents to gratifications sought (i.e., motivation). Therefore, it would be expected that highly-identified sport fans’ needs are satisfied through sport – or why would they continue to watch? Introducing sport activism into this relationship may alter fans’ media feedback loop and, subsequently, their gratifications obtained. If this is the case, then it is likely that fans’ experiences of sport would change during this time period.

Additionally, SDT details how socio-contextual events can affect motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020), therefore, the pandemic’s influence must be considered. Individuals experienced a decrease in their social, mental, and physical health, during the pandemic, and SDT asserts that their motivations would evolve accordingly (Levine et al., 2022;

Figure 1.3

Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) relationship with media feedback loop revised



Note. The needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) would be driven by intrinsic (i.e., autonomous) and extrinsic (i.e., controlled) motives.

Olafsen et al., 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021). For example, individuals craved social interactions as the pandemic frustrated their relatedness (Levine et al., 2022). Sport spectatorship could satisfy this need by providing opportunities for socializing – which is ubiquitous to both live- and mediated-forms of consumption (Funk et al., 2012; Kim & Mao, 2021; Seo & Green, 2008; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Although, needs are dependent on the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013), so fans' needs and motivations – which influence behavior – must be considered individually.

Using SDT and U&G in combination provides many advantages for this research. First, it addresses Funk et al.'s (2012) caution against atheoretical sport motivation research. Together, SDT and U&G allow for a greater understanding of fan behavior by assessing fans' changing needs and how new media can gratify them (Zimmer et al., 2018). Further, Zimmer et al. (2018) reasoned that since U&G observes consumers' needs and how they are gratified by media and vice versa (i.e., observing gratifications and identifying needs; Katz et al., 1973) – it becomes necessary to understand why these needs are formed, which SDT can assess. This is evidenced in Qian et al. (2019), which took the same dual-framework approach when constructing the MSEs.

Using these two theories establishes a more rigorous understanding of consumers' motives (i.e., autonomous and controlled) for satisfying their needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, and relatedness; Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000). When assessing controlled-oriented motives, SIT provides an excellent framework for understanding how individuals are influenced in social settings like groups (Kim et al., 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social Identity Theory

SIT provides an explanation for intergroup behaviors (i.e., conflict) and individuals' motivations for joining and belonging to groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Within SIT, personal identities exist, but the emphasis is on social identities (Fink et al., 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel (1974) defined a social identity "as that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge or his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69). SIT is psychologically driven but sociologically influenced. Tajfel and Turner (1979) identified three central tenets that drive behavior: (1) individuals join groups to improve or maintain social identity, (2) positive social identity is made based on relevant intergroup comparisons, and (3) when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will alter their social identity through disidentification or developing in-group bias.

Separate groups function differently; there are multiple group formations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) acknowledged two continuums that dictate group classification: individual mobility-social change belief systems and interpersonal-intergroup behavior. As individuals have multiple social identities, belief systems are contextual to certain groups rather than being all-governing. Individual mobility refers to a person's belief that society is flexible. Here, individuals are able move among group memberships due to their own efforts

to improve or maintain their social identity (Ellemers et al., 1990; Tajfel & Turner 1979).

Generally, they are dependent on the social categories attributed to the group and whether the individual believes they can leave these social categories.

On the other continuum, interpersonal groups are formed around the individual's personality, relationship, and characteristics (Ellemers et al., 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Examples of such groups would include the relationship between a married couple or long-term friend groups. Interpersonal groups tend to hold uniform attitudes and beliefs as their formation stemmed from personal relationships. In contrast, intergroup formations are determined by social categories and comparisons to relevant out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Team fandom is a fitting example of strong intergroup membership; interpersonally, members may appear homogeneous, but their connectedness stems from a shared relationship with their favorite team (Fink et al., 2009).

Due to fans' loyalty to their favorite teams, sport fandom is characterized as skewing towards the social change belief system and intergroup behavior. Funk and James' (2001) in their psychological continuum model (PCM) elucidated that once fandom is internalized it is unlikely for fans to alter or discontinue their affiliation. Highly identified are more likely to believe that they cannot leave their group (Funk & James, 2001), which aligns with the social change belief system. Additionally, as noted in the earlier literature (e.g., Chalip, 2006; Melnick, 1993; Segrave, 2000; Serazio, 2019), sport unites people of all intersectionalities into a collective superordinate group (i.e., all fans of that particular team; Lock & Funk, 2016). During a match, interindividual differences are overlooked and it becomes "us" versus "them." This phenomenon of "us" versus "them" is explained through the social change and the intergroup extremes of the continuum (i.e., cannot alter and dissimilar personalities). Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained

that in these cases, the in-group will act uniformly towards and see the out-group as one “unified social category” instead of as individuals (p. 36). So, these groups do not exist without a relevant comparison group (Tajfel, 1974).

Due to the prevalence of SIT-behavior in sport, Cialdini et al. (1976) used sport as the context for their seminal research on basking in reflected glory (BIRGing). Individuals will alter their associations with a group dependent on its perception. As such, there are several links between BIRGing and SIT, which were found in Cialdini et al.’s (1976) three-experiment study. First, they learned that students were more likely to wear school apparel after a win than a loss. This relates to Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) theoretical principle that individuals are motivated to maintain or achieve a positive social identity. So, individuals will BIRG when it improves their image. Next, they found individuals were more likely to the term “we” after a win than a loss (i.e., Cutting off reflected glory (CORF); Cialdini et al., 1976). *We* won, *they* lost. Here, individuals only want to associate themselves with a positively viewed social group. Wann and Branscombe (1993) would later discover that CORFing occurs more frequently among less-identified fans. Those with less loyalty would hold a social mobility belief system, thus, “flip-flop” advantageously between association and disassociation. Further, CORFing relates to the tenet of SIT where fans disidentify or develop in-group bias when their social identity is threatened (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Cialdini et al.’s (1976) third experiment found that fans are more likely to BIRG with out-groups, connecting with the final guiding principle of SIT, that social identity is based on relevant intergroup comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

While BIRGing and CORFing ultimately differ from SIT, there are many similarities between the two theories. While neither theory was created to explain sport fan behavior, academics have noticed that sport accentuates BIRGing- and SIT-behaviors among individuals.

As a result, SIT has been used frequently in sport consumer behavior research to better understand sport fan behavior. Research that has utilized SIT as a framework includes team identification (cf. Wann), rivalry (e.g., Berendt & Uhrich, 2016; Tyler & Cobbs, 2017), relocation (e.g., Foster & Hyatt, 2007; Wegner et al., 2019), and identity threats (e.g., Fink et al., 2009; Sanderson et al., 2016). SIT has enabled researchers to explain why these phenomena occur. For example, Berendt and Uhrich (2016) deduced that rivalries reinforce positive social identity outcomes. Through relevant intergroup comparisons, fans additionally, disidentify with their rival. By defining the “what we are not,” fans experience increased perceived group cohesion, distinctiveness, and collective esteem (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016). SIT is a useful tool to analyze psychological motivations for social responses. Extending SIT to sport activism can frame how social identity threats occur and fans subsequent behaviors.

Social Identity Threats

Social identity threats occur when social identity is unsatisfactory. At this stage, “individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 40). Within sport, social identity threats have been studied in response to poor performance, unscrupulous off-field behavior, relocation, and now, sport activism. For instance, following a loss or unsatisfactory performance, fans will try to shift the blame to preserve their own identity and esteem – e.g., blaming the referee (Cialdini et al., 1976; Sanderson & Traux, 2014). Likewise, Fink et al. (2009) found that fans did the same where athletes on their favorite team acted erroneously. Since the athlete is a member of their in-group (through the team), such behavior negatively impacts the collective group’s social identity (Fink et al., 2009).

Social identity threats can also extend from the points of attachments fans form with their teams. For example, fans whose identities stem from regionality (i.e., place-based attachment) experienced identity crises when their team relocated (Hyatt, 2007; Wegner et al., 2020). Although this was not the case for all fans, as Wegner et al. (2020) found that fans with franchise-focused team identities were less affected by the team's relocation. So, despite sharing a superordinate identity, threats varied based on the individual's subgroup classification (i.e., local versus satellite fans; Wegner et al., 2020).

Finally, in relation to sport activism, Sanderson et al. (2016) found that social identity threats were present in online fan discussions about the St. Louis Rams' racial protest. To manage these threats, and legitimize their responses, fans argued that sport is an inappropriate setting for activism (Sanderson et al., 2016). It is thought that fans use this reasoning to justify their actions for being anti-activist and a technique to protect their social identity (Sanderson et al., 2016). This response shares similarities to Serazio and Thorson's (2020) finding that fans believe "sport is a sanctuary" and politics do not belong in that space. Additionally, it may mean that those fans perceived activism as "unscrupulous behavior" if it did not align with their beliefs (Fink et al., 2009). Sanderson et al.'s (2016) other emergent theme was that law enforcement should not be questioned. Such ideologies may be linked to topics of national and political identity and may have the inverse effect of team identity by accentuating intragroup differences instead of similarities (Sanderson et al., 2016; Thorson & Serazio, 2018). Evidently, an individual's social identities can be threatened by sport activism in multiple ways.

Mudrick et al.'s (2019) offered a similar suggestion, that fans' sociopolitical ideologies determine their responses to sport activism. For instance, if the activism aligned with their values, then social identity would be maintained and if challenged, then a social identity threat

would occur. Fan groups and political affiliations may hold conflicting group classifications. Seemingly, both skew towards the extreme of the social change continuum, meaning that supporters feel like they cannot leave either social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hobsbawn (1996) explained this phenomenon by saying: “people choose to belong to an identity group, but it is a choice predicated on the strongly held, intensely conceived belief that the individual has absolutely no choice but to belong to that specific group” (p. 42). Here, there may be a clash between their fan and political identification – both of which the individual feels like they cannot leave. As athlete activism has historically promoted liberal ideologies (e.g., Ali, King, Kaepernick, Rapinoe), a conservative fan may feel more threatened by sport activism than a liberal supporter. Thorson and Serazio (2018) validated this hypothesis; conservative fans were substantially more likely to oppose the politicization of sport. This state of imbalance may be partially responsible for aversion to sport activism.

Another factor may be due to the group formation. Fan groups at the superordinate level are formed through relevant intergroup comparisons rather than interpersonal relationships (Lock & Funk, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). The superordinate level of identification encompasses all fans who support a specific organization or team (Lock & Funk, 2016). When individuals join a group, the process of deindividuation occurs (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Turner et al., 1987). Hornsey (2008) defined this phenomenon as “a shift in identity from the personal to the social level” (p. 210). The aim is to accentuate in-group similarities and out-group differences (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Therefore, groups formed around intergroup comparisons, like sport fanbases, may purposely ignore controversial topics to maintain social harmony. This may help explain the narrative that politics and sports should not mix. Sport activism may “re-personalize” individuals and highlight their dissimilarities, ultimately,

threatening the group's status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A social identity approach demonstrates how the construction and classifications of these groups may play a role in how individuals respond to threats.

More apparent issues – outside of the nuances of group formation – may stem from the loss of escape resulting from activism entering sport (Serazio & Thorson, 2020). For instance, Moskalenko and Heine (2003) acknowledged how distractions, like watching TV, can improve positive feelings about the self. Sport spectatorship, which enables escape, may promote similar outcomes tethered to one's self-concept. This was confirmed by Stander (2016) who found the escapism motive to be a significant predictor of meaning in life. This relationship was mediated through psychological ownership (i.e., the emotional attachment from belonging to a group; Segrave, 2000; Stander, 2016). emphasizing its link to SIT. Interference with an individuals' escape may have adverse impacts on their attachment to a group and positive feelings of the self. This may partially explain how fans motives can influence their attitudes and behaviors – in this case, being against the intersection of politics and sport.

While fans used maintenance techniques (i.e., in-group bias, disidentification) to protect their threatened social identity, Fink and colleagues (2009) found that the leadership's response (e.g., coach, general manager, owner) could restore a state of balance in accordance with Heider's (1958) balance theory. In conditions where athletes acted wrongfully, and the management reacted strongly in their punishment, fans maintained their team identifications (Fink et al., 2009). The fictional athletes in Fink et al. (2009) were charged with serious offences, like drunk driving and assault. The complication is that sport activism is not inherently wrong (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). For example, if the leadership condemned an activist athlete, anti-activist fans' team identities may be maintained, at the expense of pro-

activist fans. Responses to such events must be measured, as some fans may believe that the organization is virtue signaling (i.e., woke-washing), creating further threats to the relationship between fan and team.

Waldon et al. (2013) attributed this effect to the pressures placed on participating in activism. Often times, these organizations' reputations are harmed and/or further identity threats formed among their employees. Members of the attacked organization may experience confusion and harm to their self-concept, which is tethered to their group membership (Tajfel, 1974; Waldon et al., 2013). By extension, fans' relationships with their teams can be an equally important part of one's social identity. Thus, if they are labelled negatively or insulted for holding an opposing or minority view, fans may experience the same destabilization in social identity as members of an organization, which reflects Sanderson et al.'s (2016) findings.

On a broader scope, SIT can help explain the nuances of how group formations and social categories (sociological motives) influence perceptions of activism. Fans' attitudes and behaviors may change due to sport activism interference with escape among other sport consumption motives. The strengths of SIT in this context stems from its origins within social psychology. Allport (1962) explains social psychology as the attempt to discover a more satisfactory paradigm for "the group and individual" (p. 7, as cited in Turner et al., 1987). Within SIT, assumptions can be made about the social group and the individual's motivations within the group. SIT, as a social psychological framework, allows for flexibility within inductive research. Here, while the emphasis is on the group, SIT allows sociological and psychological lenses to frame elements of this research.

Further, SDT and SIT are complementary theoretical frameworks. Kim et al. (2013) suggested that in conjunction the frameworks can help explain controlled-oriented motivations

via relatedness. Initially, Deci and Ryan (2000) believed relatedness to be more distal, although Vallerand (2000) countered this claim. Vallerand (2000) contended that relatedness is “an important predictor of self-determined motivation in contexts in which the social aspect is important such as team sports” (p. 318). Vallerand (2000) supported his viewpoint by referring to the phenomenon of value transmission. Value transmission occurs when the beliefs and values held by individuals and groups over time become internalized by related members (Vallerand, 2000). In these instances, relatedness would be the primary need and likely a controlled-oriented motivation. SIT can assist our understanding of this phenomenon by recognizing that value transmission most likely occurs to accentuate intragroup similarities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Value transmission may even take place in cases of activism in sport – e.g., fans replicating the behavior of other fans to feel relatedness. Altogether, there is harmony between the three theoretical frameworks (i.e., SIT, SDT, U&G) to better understand social motivations from a psychological perspective.

Overall Methodology

Within qualitative research, academics (e.g., Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014; Tracy, 2013) suggested an inductive process for method selection. This process entails understanding how your epistemology and paradigm inform your methodology and methods. Despite being distinct elements, the terms are often conflated improperly (Crotty, 1998). Research articles tend to use this technical language interchangeably (e.g., paradigm and theoretical perspective) and similar technical jargon (e.g., methodology and method; Crotty, 1998). In an attempt to define my theoretical positionality clearly, I will first explain my epistemological approach, which will then lend credence to my theoretical perspective. Next, I will demonstrate how my research objectives inform my methodology (or lack thereof) and method.

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) defined epistemology as “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective [i.e., paradigm] and thereby in the methodology” (p. 3) or, simply put, “how we know what we know” (p. 8). There are three main epistemologies: objectivism, constructivism, and subjectivism (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014). Each epistemology governs our relationship with the truth. It is helpful to view the epistemologies as a continuum. An objectivist believes that reality exists external to our consciousness, and that there is one objective truth (Gray, 2014). At the other end of the spectrum, a subjectivist would view the world as holding no single truth, but rather meaning is created through the subject’s “collective unconsciousness” (Gray, 2014, p. 20). Constructivism lies somewhere in the middle. Here, truths are formed through the individual’s interactions and experiences within the world; thus, multiple equally valid truths can co-exist (Gray, 2014). Constructivism is the epistemological lens that I hold.

I believe a constructivist stance aligns well with sport consumer behavior. There is not one set reality that all sport fans experience. Instead, phenomena are embedded within social interactions and “meaning-making activities” (Lincoln et al., 2017, p. 219). The world of sport fandom is socially constructed. As such, sport fandom is governed by its own set of unwritten rules and norms – e.g., if you switch allegiances, you are labelled a traitor. Additionally, fan experiences differ based on a multitude of characteristics such as gender (e.g., Hoeber & Kerwin, 2015; Hoeber & Sveinson, 2016), team identification (e.g., Wann, 1995), and group classification (e.g., Lock & Funk, 2016). One would expect a highly-identified, female fan's experience would differ from a casual, male fan attending with family. Despite attending the same match, presumably, the two fans would have different, but equally valid truths.

Academics (e.g., Mudrick et al., 2019; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018; Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020; Thorson & Serazio, 2018; Yan et al., 2018) have already found that fans experience activism in many different ways, which supports the use of a constructivist lens – as there are multiple socially constructed realities. For example, Thorson and Serazio (2018) found that politically conservative fans were more likely to oppose the intersection of politics and sport than liberals. This discovery aligns with Mudrick et al.'s (2019) finding that aversion to sport activism stemmed from misalignments between personal beliefs and the political ideology behind the communicated stance. So, one would expect fans' intersectional identities (e.g., race, gender, sex, class, sexuality, disability, age), social group, and their lived experiences to play a role in how they experience activism in sport.

Applying this logic to my personal identity, I, a straight, White, cis-gender male, may perceive and interact differently with sport than those with who hold other intersection identities or motives for watching sport. Thus, I could only strive for empathetic understanding (Tracy, 2013). As such, I took an interpretive approach, which Gray (2014) defined as “to explore peoples' experiences and their views or perspectives of these experiences” (p. 22). I believed it is necessary to hear individuals' stories in order to challenge my individual perspective, which resulted in a more robust understanding of this phenomenon.

I would not be an interpretivist without acknowledging the social and historical contexts that factored into this study (Tracy, 2013). The pandemic undoubtedly influenced the findings within this study. As a result, mostly everyone had experienced additional stress, among a litany of other unforeseen factors. As such, this thesis used the pandemic as a delimiter to explore how and why consumers' motives for sport consumption changed during the pandemic (Skinner & Smith, 2021). For example, scholars (e.g., Segrave, 2000; Serazio & Thorson, 2020; Stander,

2016) found that individuals consume sport to escape from real-world stressors. Additionally, in stressful scenarios (i.e., the pandemic), individuals' motivations typically shift from autonomous-oriented to more controlled-oriented (Martela et al., 2021; Weinstein & Ryan, 2011). One would expect that shift to extend to sport, with sport becoming the means to other ends (e.g., socializing, escape; Funk et al., 2012). Therefore, the pandemic can be leveraged to explore whether sport activism interferes with fans' expected gratifications (Palmgreen et al., 1980).

As addressed above, the role of the interpretivist is to be aware of the cultural and historical contexts that shape experiences (Tracy, 2013). Additionally, the interpretivist's choice of methodology stems from ethical considerations (Lincoln et al., 2017; Tracy, 2013). Methodology is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). As such, this study was absent of an in-person methodology. I could not, in good faith, conduct in-person research during a pandemic. As a result, I resorted to interviewing through video platforms (Lobe et al., 2020). I ensured to create an environment where the participants could tell their stories in a way that made sense to them (Tracy, 2013). Individuals experience their sport fandom personally and uniquely, so stories aided in the construction of understanding the fan's experience of sport activism through their social identities and motives. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to make sense of the data.

Data Recruitment

Participant recruitment began following ethics clearance from the Brock University Health Sciences research ethics board (HS-REB) on August 17, 2021 (see Appendix A). Included in the HS-REB ethics clearance were recruitment materials, specifically a recruitment poster (see Appendix B) and a letter of invitation (see Appendix C). All recruitment information

was posted online via social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Reddit, LinkedIn) due the volatility of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment on Reddit required a specific procedure, which only commenced after gaining access from subreddit moderators (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021). I sent a message to the moderators of relevant sport subreddits outlining who I am (i.e., a master's student from Brock University), what my research entails (i.e., talking to individuals about their experiences during COVID-19), and how my research is ethical (e.g., ethics clearance, letter of invitation, and informed consent form). Multiple subreddits ignored or rejected my request; in the latter case, moderators typically explained that my request went against their subreddit rule of no self-promotion. Once consent was gained, individuals were incentivized to participate in the study by having the chance to win one of five \$20 Amazon gift cards. Interested individuals typically contacted me via e-mail, but I provided my phone number for accessibility purposes. Interested participants received a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) and an informed consent form (Appendix E). If they qualified for the study based on their demographic characteristics – e.g., limiting the number of white men under 30 to prioritize a heterogeneous sample – an interview was scheduled.

The target population for this research was a heterogeneous group of self-reported highly-identified Ontario sports fans who followed at least one team in the top five North American professional sporting leagues (i.e., NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, MLS) closely during the pandemic. Heterogenous sampling – also known as maximum variation sampling – involved recruiting a diverse range of participants to get a full spectrum of responses (Delia et al., 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Kim and Mao (2021) utilized this sampling technique for their qualitative research on sport consumer motives. As this research took an interpretive approach, I was less concerned about generalizing the findings to a specific population. Rather, this research explored

how social identities and motives influenced fans' experiences of activism in sport, providing prompts for future research. The diverse range of participants assisted in understanding the role intersectional identities play in interpretations, responses, and experiences of sport activism.

Eight men and eight women were interviewed, and their ages ranged from 18 to 75 (i.e., the median was 32). Eight participants self-identified as White, five as Asian, and three as Black.

Table 1.2 Participant Profile Table

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Education	Household Income (\$'000)	Children	Occupation
Mickey	Male	75	White	SCU	25-49	2	Retired
Sofia	Female	23	White	C/UG	N/A	0	N/A
Joe	Male	47	Black	SCU	50-99	2	Unemployed
Zach	Male	18	White	SCU	100-199	0	Student
Elizabeth	Female	56	White	PD	N/A	2	Unemployed
Freddie	Male	24	Asian	C/UG	100-199	0	Digital Media Specialist
Evan	Male	23	White	C/UG	<25	0	Graduate Student
Julian	Male	29	Black	C/UG	50-99	0	Articling Student
David	Male	24	Asian	SCU	N/A	0	Student
Shannon	Female	42	White	C/UG	100-199	1	Freelance Writer
Jessica	Female	26	Black	C/UG	100-199	0	Lawyer
Mayra	Female	35	Asian	PD	>200	0	Health Policy
Camila	Female	24	Asian	C/UG	50-99	0	Gov't Employee
Raikor	Male	62	White	PD	100-199	4	Research Director
Sue	Female	48	White	CUG	50-99	5	Nurse
Hannah	Female	45	Asian	PD	100-199	0	Marketing

Note. SCU = Some College/University, C/UG = College/University graduate, PD = Postgraduate degree

While heterogeneous sampling appears to be convenient, it involved careful consideration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For instance, to recruit a diverse population of consumers I declined 11 interested individuals because of their intersectional identities. Respondents were sent the demographic questionnaire (appendix C) to collect information about their intersectional identities. If individuals qualified – based on heterogeneity guidelines – they received a demographic questionnaire and a letter of invitation. Those who did not qualify for the study had their demographic information permanently deleted and received an email notifying them that their interest was appreciated, but not needed. Demographic information was then compiled into a Microsoft Excel document to keep track of the diversity of the participants. After a few interviews, I started to tailor my postings accordingly to account for diversity – e.g., changing “Ontario sports fans who followed sports closely during the pandemic” to “Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) sports fans from Ontario who followed sports closely during the pandemic” or “sports fans over 40 from Ontario who followed sports closely during the pandemic” to satisfy heterogeneity. I recruited and interviewed 16 participants to achieve data saturation. At this point, interviews revealed no new themes (Tracy, 2019b).

I had participants self-report their level of fandom during the interview rather than using a scale (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1993) due to the evolving definition of what it means to be a fan. Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) and others have utilized this approach; participants were asked to provide “their own definition” of what it meant to be a highly identified fan (p. 11). Additionally, Hyatt et al. (2018) asked, “how big a sports fan are you?” (p. 544) to assess the participant’s identification level. Both studies utilized pre-existing knowledge from earlier research (i.e., Funk & James, 2001; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) to verify that the participant’s

attitudes and behaviors aligned with being a highly-identified fan (Hyatt et al., 2018; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). I emulated this technique as each participant must be a highly-identified fan.

Highly-identified fans were important for this research to assess the convergence of multiple strong identities. If fans had not internalized their fandom, then it is likely their other social identities – e.g., political identification and national identification – would supersede their team identification, as individuals tend to rank their social identities hierarchically (Turner et al., 1987). By recruiting highly-identified fans, it was thought that they would likely experience greater social identity threats from activism entering sport (Sanderson et al., 2016; Serazio & Thorson, 2020) and in cases of misalignment (Mudrick et al., 2019).

Likewise, following sport “closely,” was self-reported by the participant. Wann and Branscombe (1993) asked a similar question of “how closely do you follow the [team name] via ANY of the following [forms of media]?” (p. 5) in their team identification study. As “closely” is an ambiguous term, in this study “closely” meant having watched roughly 10 sporting matches during the pandemic as well as consistent (i.e., nearly every day) auxiliary forms of sport media consumption, which was communicated in the recruitment material. Alternative forms of media consumption included following teams/athletes on social media, presence on forum-based websites, reading news articles, watching sports broadcasts outside of the match. Including supplementary forms of media consumption in the definition of “closely” ensured that the participant is an active user while interacting with media (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2011). Thus, if they consistently seek media, it is likely that media satisfies their needs and gratifications (Palmgreen et al., 1980; Zimmer et al., 2018). Additionally, “following sport closely” during the pandemic meant that the participant is familiar with the activism that occurred in the summer of 2020 and that they would have formed an opinion on the matter.

Finally, limiting the sample to the top-five professional North American leagues ensured that sport consumption was available during the pandemic. For instance, highly-identified Canadian Football League (CFL) fans would not qualify as the 2020 season was cancelled due to COVID-19 (Sousa, 2020).

This research initially sought to provide a different and valuable perspective from past sport activism studies by limiting the sample to Ontarians. While similar, Canadians' experienced would have differed from Americans. Canadians had to wait longer for the return of live sports, and faced a stricter initial response to COVID than Americans (Coletta, 2020). Not to mention, the US has had a quicker vaccine rollout (Coletta, 2020), meaning that they could likely satisfy their frustrated needs more readily than Canadians. Due to the harsher restrictions and longer vaccination period, it was believed that Canadians would have experienced a greater change in their consumption habits than their American counterparts. Therefore, studying Canadian sport fans served multiple purposes: (a) a new perspective, (b) a better fit for this study, and (c) are familiar with activism in North American professional leagues. Despite these considerations, due to the contextual implications on perceptions of sport activism (see chapter 2b), past findings on Americans may be outdated due to constantly changing perspectives on activism. Therefore, chapter 2b describes participants as North American sport fans.

Semistructured fan interviews were the missing piece in current sport activism research. Previous qualitative researchers had either collected and analyzed social media comments (e.g., Frederick et al., 2017; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019) or utilized a critical theory approach (e.g., Rugg, 2020; Serazio, 2019). Past findings showed that fans' social identities (Mudrick et al., 2019; Sanderson et al., 2016; Thorson & Serazio, 2018) and motives (Serazio & Thorson, 2020) influence their experience of activism in sport. Directly interviewing fans

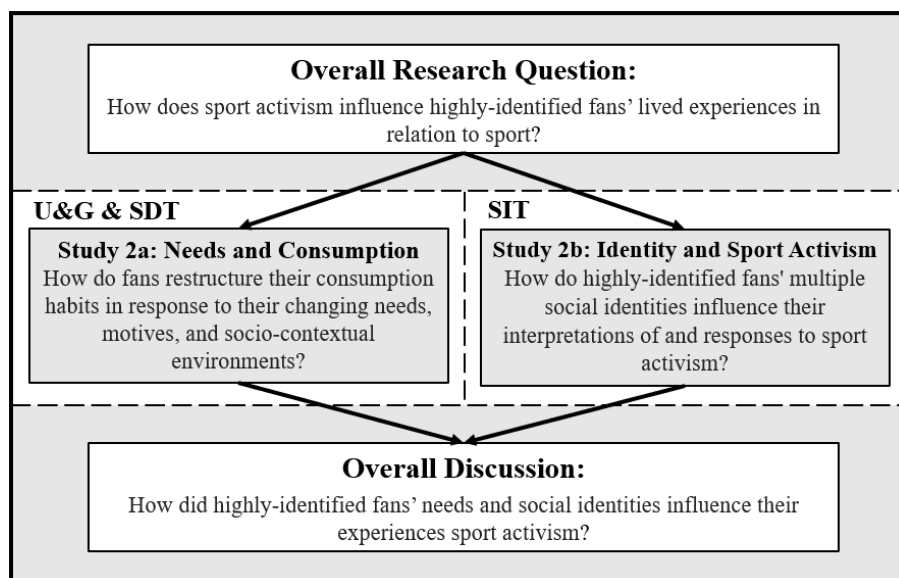
allowed for specific and focused questioning to further our understanding of this phenomenon. The data produced from the interviews was analyzed utilizing SIT, U&G, and SDT to understand the role social identity and consumption motivations play in fans' experiences of activism in sport. These three frameworks will provide a more rigorous and complete understanding of this phenomenon than using SIT, U&G, and SDT independently of each.

Data Collection

As this thesis contains two independent articles (i.e., integrated article-based thesis), it is necessary to outline this format within the overall thesis. Figure 1.4 illustrates how the overall research question was answered through a two-study approach. The main objective was to understand how fans experience activism in relation to their social identities and motives. Chapter 2a focused on whether fans' motives for consuming sport influence their perception of activism in sport. For example, Serazio and Thorson (2020) discovered that some fans oppose politics in sport as it interferes with their motivation to escape. So, perhaps the individuals' motivations for watching sport (e.g., entertainment, group affiliation, escape; Wann, 1995) may

Figure 1.4

Visualization of the thesis-by-paper structure



affect their views and experiences of activism in sport. Here, it was necessary to be aware of the contextual factors present due to COVID-19 (Tracy, 2013). As a result of the pandemic, sport consumption was primarily virtual (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Skinner & Smith, 2021). So, fans' motives for consuming sport had already altered, and that change contributed to fans' experience of sport activism.

Chapter 2b used SIT and social identity complexity as a foundational background to unpack individuals' motivational responses related to their social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Further examination investigated how an individual interacted with the three central tenets of SIT – i.e., improving or maintaining status, relevant comparisons, and threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) – in response to activism in sport. Additionally, social identity complexity helped unpack how multiple social identities coexist and interact to form behavioral responses such as tolerance to the outgroup and responses to threat (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). While each study (i.e., chapter 2a and chapter 2b) are self-contained, the overall discussion incorporated the findings from both studies to answer the overall research question (i.e., chapter 3).

In Preparation

I conducted a pilot study to test the structure, quality, and clarity of questions before interviewing any participants to build trustworthiness in the method (Eckert, 2020; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Tracy, 2019b). Eckert (2020) acknowledged the importance of rigorous pre-testing. In Eckert's (2020) pilot study, their emphasis was solely on meso-level issues (e.g., reducing the number and/or changing the order of question); as a result, they ran into issues related to comprehension and clarity of questions with their participants. I conducted three pilot interviews: two of which were with other sport management master's students, and one was on a highly-identified sport fan, who happened to be a friend of mine. The preliminary interview questions

can be found in Appendix F. Interviewing my peers resulted in constructive feedback related to the structure, the order, and the purpose of questioning. Changes were then made for the final interview, which tested the practicality of these decisions in a non-academic setting. The initial interview guide (appendix F) started with participants' perspectives on activism in sport, but the structure was changed following the first pilot interview. Chronologically, it made more sense to start with participants' experiences during the pandemic and their sport consumption before introducing activism. This change gave participants the opportunity to discuss sport activism without being unprompted, which several did. From this point onward, the interview guide remained unchanged throughout the following 15 interviews, and thus, the third pilot interview was included in the data per Malmqvist et al.'s (2019) recommendation. Altogether, 16 semistructured interviews made up the data.

Once HS-REB approved the research, participants were recruited. A day before each interview participants received the following documents: (a) instructions on how to join a Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) meeting (Appendix G) and (b) a back-up plan in the case of technical difficulties (Appendix H; Lobe et al., 2020; Tracy, 2019b). As the interviews were conducted on the MS Teams virtual platform, I anticipated technical difficulties including (but not limited to) loss of internet connection, freezing, and audio/video lagging. However, only one interview suffered from these technical issues: (1) there was some audio loss with Julian and, (2) my video did not work for half of Mayra's interview.

Fifteen minutes before each interview, I followed Gray et al.'s (2020) recommendations for using videoconferencing applications. That included testing the platform (i.e., MS Teams) ahead of the interview, having a contingency plan (i.e., the backup plan in the overview document), and planning for distractions (Gray et al., 2020). I tried to limit distractions by asking

participants to put their phones on silent if possible. Each interview was recorded through MS Teams and were on average 58 min. The interview structure was approximately 5-10 minutes of rapport building, 20-25 minutes on motivations, and 20-25 minutes on identity. The first ten minutes focused on the origins of the participant's fandom, and the subsequent 45 minutes discussed identity and motivations of the fan in relationship with sport and activism. Ultimately, this outline was flexible and changed on a case-by-case basis depending on the participants and the stories they told (Eckert, 2020; Tracy, 2019b).

The Interviews

Semistructured interviews have been frequently used by interpretive sport consumer researchers (e.g., Hyatt, 2007; Hyatt et al., 2018; Kim & Mao, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2019; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). This technique allowed for participants' responses to guide the discussion. While I still followed an interview guide, semistructured interviews are "flexible and organic in nature" (Tracy, 2019a, p. 158). My role as an interpretive researcher was allowing the participants to tell a story that made sense to them (Tracy, 2013). As sport activism is a contentious topic (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020), each conversation produced a compelling and unique perspective exclusive to that individual. Interviews differed slightly across the participants. They varied depending on the individual's perspective on activism, motivations for watching sport and social identities on the conversation. As a result, the interview structure differed slightly across the semistructured interviews. A strict interview guide would have restricted the ability to fully explore participants' experiences and perspectives of activism in sport.

I formed my pilot study interview structure based upon Hyatt et al. (2018) and Mansfield et al.'s (2019) interview guides (see Appendix I). Specifically, I used Hyatt et al.'s (2018)

rapport building and identification-level question: “how big a sports fan are you?” (p. 544). This question simultaneously acted as a primer for our future discussions and allow me to assess their identification levels (Hyatt et al., 2018). Other priming questions would be “when and how did you become a sports fan of your favorite team?”, “what is your earliest memory of that team?”, and “what do you think professional sports role is in society?” Mansfield et al. (2019) took an interpretive approach to explore social identity threats, as such, their interview guide acted as a practical starting point for the construction of my interview questions. Mansfield et al.’s (2019) interview guide helped inform the core questions related to identity and motivation that later changed to better suit the focus of this research study.

Additionally, SDT provided guidelines for assessing and better understanding the origins of participants’ consumption motives. For instance, if an individual mentioned that sport became a space for socializing during the pandemic, follow up questions could specifically ask about relatedness and broader social questions – e.g., “Did activism in sport change/influence the relationships with sport friends? How so?” or “Do you feel like you need to hold a different public and private opinion [on activism]?” Therefore, SDT served as a great tool for adapting and structuring the interview based on participants’ responses

Although U&G had primarily been used by quantitative researchers to categorize individuals’ needs into typologies (e.g., Haugh & Watkins, 2016; Qian et al., 2019), supported by SDT, the needs portion within U&G can be further understood (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Zimmer et al., 2018). In particular, scholars (e.g., Doyle et al., 2016; Hyatt et al., 2018; Whiting & Williams, 2013) have utilized qualitative methods within exploratory research inquiry. Critics (e.g., Massey, 1995; Palmgreen et al., 1980) of survey-based U&G research have warned that pre-set answers do not allow respondents the freedom to speak about their own experiences with

media. Through semistructured interviews, participants were able to discuss their sport consumption motives free of a pre-determined list. Further, interviews allowed for a greater level of reflection in participants' responses than surveys (Tracy, 2019a).

The second half of the interview focused on participants' experiences of activism with a social identity lens. I first recounted how the "George Floyd incident" led to activism entering sport, as a means to not reveal my positionality. After this primer, I asked participants if they identified as an activist or an ally, which was interpreted in relation to the BLM. Next, I asked Serazio and Thorson's (2020) question "what do you think is good and/or bad about politics mixing with sport?" (p. 156). Participants' responses dictated the following questions based on their answers and the themes that emerged. While surveys have typically framed fans as "in support" or "in opposition" of activism in sport (Lefton, 2021; Serazio & Thorson, 2020), categorizing responses dichotomously oversimplifies the complex relationship sport fans have with activism. By having fans share their perception of activism in sport – good and/or bad – nuanced themes emerged from this discussion with further probing. For instance, many participants acknowledged both good and bad aspects of sport activism, which prompted personal stories from their lives.

From here, the discussion was directed towards overlapping inquiry, specifically, identity- and motive-specific questions. SIT, U&G, and SDT all aim to understand how individuals satisfy psychological and sociological needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Rubin, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT provided a framework regarding the structure of fan groups – i.e., based on intergroup comparisons – and why individuals joined these groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For instance, conversations containing topics of activism may "re-personalize" fans, thus, highlighting intragroup dissimilarities. So, it became necessary to ask

whether topics of activism have altered participants' relationships built around sport. For instance, were these topics being avoided? Why? Has sport improved their understanding and legitimized these issues or instead done the opposite?

Ethical Considerations

As mentioned earlier, this research was ethically cleared by the HS-REB at Brock University. To do so, I had to file an *application for ethical review of research involving human participants*. Alongside the application, I completed the TCPS2-Core Certificate, created relevant ethics documents (i.e., informed consent, letter of invitation, recruitment posters), and I read through Section III: B in Brock University's faculty handbook (which outlines the graduate academic regulations – including guidelines on ethics). All documents used in this research study were approved by the HS-REB at Brock University, which included the demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) and the interview guide (Appendix F). Additionally, I used Franzke et al.'s (2020) *Internet research: Ethical guidelines 3.0* to justify my decisions for conducting research in a technology-mediated space.

As this research dealt with topics central to the participant's identity (e.g., political identity, social beliefs), there was the potential for psychological and social risks. These risks were minimized through two strategies: (1) my role as a researcher and (2) reminding the participants that all research is confidential and that they can withdraw at any point. I was aware that topics such as politics and social injustices can be taboo, so I withheld my personal opinions to create a safe space where participants felt comfortable discussing these topics. Interviews are already an unnatural space with an assumed power structure (Kellehear, 1996), so I aimed counteract this dynamic. I believe this was accomplished by taking a collaborative interview stance. A collaborative interview is defined by putting myself (the researcher) on the same level

as the participant (Tracy, 2019a). I encouraged participants to ask questions and reminded them that there are no wrong answers. To my advantage, Tracy (2019b) mentioned that participants tend to feel more comfortable disclosing personal stories through technology-mediated interviews, which seemingly helped my research.

As the SIT deals with perceptions of status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and this research examined when status is threatened, inevitably, participants may have felt vulnerable at times. If I perceived hesitancy from participants, I re-emphasized the confidentiality of their data and the ability to withdraw from participation to assist in mitigating these psychological and social risks. Confidentiality was strictly between myself and the participant, which excluded my committee members. After pseudonyms were selected by participants and other major identity defining characteristics are concealed, only then I shared data with my advisor, Dr. Naraine.

Technology-mediated interviews posed increased risks surrounding security and confidentiality (Franzke et al., 2020; Lobe et al., 2020; Tracy, 2019b). The issue was that once data is online, it is always online (Lobe, 2017). To neutralize this risk, data remained on local drives, which prohibited the use of all cloud services (i.e., Google Drive, Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive). Once the interview was recorded, the file was immediately transferred to my personal external hard drive – which is password protected. I retained both the audio and video of the participants for transcription purposes. All interviews were conducted from my home office to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, for added security, all data containing sensitive information (i.e., interview recordings, transcripts, analysis) were saved to password-protected folders. The external hard drive was permanently located in my personal workspace, meaning that all transcribing and analyzing was completed in private and on a local network.

Outside of “procedural ethics,” Guillemin and Gillam (2004) highlighted the need for awareness of “ethics in practice” (p. 264), which are ethical dilemmas stemming from conducting research rather than the institutionalized ethics mentioned above. While this dimension of ethics operates in more of a grey area, I planned to report any situations involving harm to self or others to the Brock REB, which did not have to occur. Participants were informed on March 4, 2022, whether they had won an Amazon gift card, which were paid for by me. This occurred after data collection ceased, ensuring this ethical element was met.

Data Analysis

Studies 2a and 2b took an RTA approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Sparkes & Smith, 2014a). A reflexive approach acknowledges that the generated themes are influenced in part by my experiences (e.g., lived experiences, research views, training; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Specifically, a thematic analysis allowed for social and psychological interpretations of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014a), which aligned with my theoretical frameworks (i.e., SIT, U&G, & SDT).

Braun and Clarke (2021) outlined a six-step recursive approach to RTA: (1) data familiarization, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) explicitly defining the themes, and (6) writing up (p. 39). The first stage involved me immersing myself in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Familiarization was accomplished through the transcription process by listening attentively to the conversations. Here, I started to form ideas about patterns in the data. Next, in the coding stage, I started to select segments of the transcripts that I found interesting and were common among participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Haslett et al., 2020). After, I started to cluster similar segments together, developing the emerging themes that answered the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Finally, I wrote up the data into

two articles (i.e., chapters 2a and 2b; Braun & Clarke, 2019) using direct quotations from the participants to drive the narrative, as per Sparkes and Smith's (2014a) recommendation. The emphasis was on creating a "multivoice reconstruction" (Lincoln et al., 2017, p. 216) rather than prioritizing my voice.

Morse (2017) acknowledged challenges that researchers face when using raw data to represent a phenomenon. Morse (2017) contested that communicating the phenomena accurately and rigorously should be to the priority, and that the presentation of the data is secondary (Morse, 2017). I believe the first five stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) RTA created a rigorous foundation for the presentation of the data in step six. Due to the flexibility of RTA, data were analyzed inductively, deductively, critically, and reflexively (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Haslett et al., 2020). Flexibility was particularly important in this case, considering the structure of the thesis. As activism research inherently includes aspects of politics and social norms, a critical and reflexive approach was necessary at times. However, for chapter 2a, the motive analysis, it was more inductive at times due to the exploratory nature of the study, and deductive via previous literature helped guide the construction of themes. At the end of this process, I had two skeletal frameworks to answer each sub-study's research question. The flexibility and rigor that this analysis process offers, satisfied Morse's (2017) concerns regarding the use of raw data.

It is important to acknowledge that there was only one data collection process, but multiple data analyses. During the second and third phases of Braun and Clarke's (2021) RTA, the transcripts were openly coded. Open coding allowed me to develop broad themes, which were later refined and categorized into three overarching themes (Willaims & Moser, 2019): (a) motive-related, (b) identity-related, and (c) simultaneously occurring – resulting in a Venn diagram-esque framework. This technique allowed me to compartmentalize data appropriately

for each sub-study and the future meta-analyzed discussion. As data were analyzed concurrently with interviewing, sorting the data was an iterative process.

All data were transcribed by me following the interview, and later analyzed using the program NVivo for Windows. Following Tracy's (2019b) guidelines, initially, 12 interviews were scheduled to evaluate whether data saturation occurred. Data saturation was reached at 16 interviews. At this stage, interviews started to produce no new themes and the preliminary themes were repeated by multiple respondents (Tracy, 2019b).

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

As Lincoln et al. (2017) outlined, an interpretive approach should prioritize trustworthiness and authenticity. Sparkes and Smith (2014b) explained that trustworthiness consists of a combination of Lincoln and Guba's (1989) qualitative criteria: confirmability, transferability, dependability, and credibility. While I believe this criteriology is somewhat archaic, it provided a basic framework to ensure rigor. Confirmability related to reflexivity and ensuring the findings presented were *actually* present and not included due to the researcher's biases (Sparkes & Smith, 2014b). Transferability, within an interpretive approach, implied that the findings can be generalized to the theoretical framework rather than the population (Sparkes & Smith, 2014b). Dependability involved tracking and documenting the process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014b). Finally, credibility was built through several techniques – i.e., the pilot study and critical reflexivity (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2014b).

The RTA approach process and the critical reflexivity undertook through journaling improved the confirmability of my research. I took field notes during each interview, as suggested by other interpretive researchers (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017), and then journaled for at least 10 minutes after each interview. By allocating a minimum of 10 minutes after each

interview, I was forced to revisit and, in some cases, challenge my initial thoughts. These notes provided additional contextual detail and improved my recollection of the conversations with participants as time passed. Throughout the analysis process, I continued to journal. It was a useful technique during the construction of the themes. During this process, I deliberated whether my bias influenced the development of certain themes.

Member-checking was initially considered as a credibility and authenticity technique, but Morse (2017) advised against this process. Member-checking incorporates the participants in the construction of the data (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Initially, I believed that including the participants in the feedback process would strengthen the authenticity of the data, but instead Morse (2017) recommended that if researchers wish to confirm information, it should be done through a second interview. Typical member-checking methods – e.g., sending participants the interview transcript – can lead to alterations or withdrawal, overall, reducing the quality of the study (Morse, 2017). Due to my reflexivity and rigor, I believed that member-checking was not needed (except in the case with Julian where technical difficulties occurred). As mentioned earlier, the safe space created during interviews allowed participants to feel comfortable sharing or withdrawing from the study completely if they felt compelled to do so.

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Chapter II

Findings

The findings chapter contains two research articles: *A needs-based contextual approach to understanding fan motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic* (i.e., Chapter 2a) and “*Black Lives aren't all that matter. All Lives Matter*”: *Examining fans’ experiences of sport activism through a multiple social identity lens* (i.e., Chapter 2b). These articles correspond to the research questions on social identities and motives and are a result of the 16 semistructured interviews. A version of Chapter 2a was sent to *Sport Marketing Quarterly* on August 26th, 2022. A version of Chapter 2b was submitted to the *Journal of Sport Management* on June 16, 2022 but was rejected for publication on August 3, 2022. A revised version of Chapter 2b, integrating the feedback from the peer-reviewed process, is planned for submission to *Sport Management Review*. Each study’s findings are discussed internally in their respective sections but underpin a broader discussion in Chapter 3.

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Chapter IIa

A Needs-Based Contextual Approach to Understanding Sport Fan Motivation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 global health pandemic undoubtedly altered the landscape of professional sport (Naraine & Mastromartino, 2022). Government-imposed restrictions saw the cancellation and postponement of top sporting competitions (e.g., English Premier League (EPL) football, National Basketball Association (NBA)) and, subsequently, there were unprecedented financial losses in the sector. For instance, North American professional sports leagues reported deficits accumulating to \$13B USD over the course of 2020 (Drape et al., 2020; Skinner & Smith, 2021). Further, Mastromartino et al. (2020) outlined additional challenges encountered by sport organizations, specifically, continuing to satisfy fans' needs while transitioning to a virtual and strictly-mediated sport product. Indeed, while the difficulties professional sport organizations faced during the pandemic continue to be documented and explored (e.g., Sato et al. 2022), it is critical not to omit the impact the pandemic had on a complementary stakeholder group: the fans.

Fans are critical to sport marketing (Karg et al., 2022) and were also affected by the aforementioned cancellation and postponement of sport (Lock & Reghunathan, 2022). In addition to pandemic-related stressors, temporarily fans were unable to root for their favorite teams in person or fulfill other gratifications typically obtained through sport consumption. Once sport returned, inexplicably, viewership declined (Skinner & Smith, 2021). There is speculation that athlete activism may have been a contributing factor (Badenhausen, 2020), while others have theorized that sport without in-stadia fans lacked an "emotional resonance" to connect with consumers at home (e.g., Majumdar & Naha, 2020). However, not all forms of sport consumption behaviors experienced a decline. Social media platform engagement in sport (e.g.,

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) has grown steadily (Naraine & Bakhsh, 2022), and rose 483% year-over-year in lieu of the waning spectatorship consumption (Skinner & Smith, 2021). This behavior suggests that the appetite to consume sport remained throughout the pandemic, but primarily within non-traditional-mediated spaces. However, it remains unclear why this was (and continues to be) the case. Specifically, it is unknown the role and extent to which context can influence motivation and behaviors in sport. Knowing this information is relevant in the quest to unpack critical contextual events like COVID-19 and understand sport consumers in the sport marketing paradigm.

In this spirit, the purpose of this study was to explore sport fans' motivation, specifically whether fans' needs, and contextual events influence motives and behaviors toward sport. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a fascinating context to extend the present understanding of sport fan motivation research (Skinner & Smith, 2021), as contextual events impact individuals' needs and motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2020). For example, stressful environments can instigate avoidance coping strategies (i.e., escape) and effect sought motives (Weinstein & Ryan, 2011; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). However, due to the fluid and dynamic nature of motivation, this research takes an alternative approach to conventional scale-based tendencies within sport consumer motivation research (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Harnessing a dual-pronged conceptual framework of uses and gratifications theory (U&G) and self-determination theory (SDT), this study takes a qualitative approach to understand how and why fans consume sport to fulfill their needs.

Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

Sport Consumption and Motives

Why do fans consume sport? This question is central to sport consumer behavior research (Funk et al., 2022) and, in response, many scholars have constructed sport spectatorship scales to identify fans' motives. Initially, Wann (1995) found eight-core motives contributing to sport consumption: entertainment, eustress (i.e., drama), group affiliation (i.e., socializing), self-esteem, aesthetics, escape, family, and economics (i.e., betting). Wann's (1995) scale set a precedent for future research. For example, when Trail and James (2001) developed the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) seven motives from Wann's (1995) scale were borrowed. Trail and James (2001) added physical attraction and the skill levels of the athletes to the MSSC and removed economics from the scale. Since then, the MSSC served as a starting point for consumption scales within various contexts such as fantasy sport (e.g., Dwyer & Kim, 2011), esports (e.g., Xiao, 2018), team websites (e.g., Seo & Green, 2008), and social media (e.g., Haugh & Watkins, 2016); each time the scale has been operationalized, it has added to MSSC by applying it to a novel context. Evidently, a multitude of statistically-valid spectatorship scales have emerged in sport consumer motivation literature with similar but varying motives. Despite, the reoccurrence of seemingly foundational sport consumption motives (e.g., entertainment, drama, socialization, escape; Funk et al., 2012; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995), the volume, variety, and validity of these motivation scales allude that fans' motives for sport consumption are contextual and everchanging.

Once researchers had identified consumers' motives, the next logical step was to understand how each motive uniquely affected attitudinal and behavioral aspects of fandom. Scholars have conducted numerous predictive analyses to determine motives' influences on

stadium attendance (see Kim et al., 2019), relationship quality (e.g., Paek et al., 2021), and media consumption (e.g., Trail & James, 2001), to name a few. By discovering which motives best predict fans' attitudinal and behavioral intentions, sport organizations can alter their communications to evoke certain motives and outcomes. For instance, Trail and James (2001) found that escape was a predictor for increased consumption of media, which Haugh and Watkins (2016) validated in a social media context. Therefore, at a time where 78% of sport fans harnessed sport-related avenues to escape from pandemic-related stresses (Lefton, 2021), fans' dramatic shift online becomes more apparent; individuals who sought escapism likely fulfilled this gratification through media.

While past research has uncovered the relationship between motives, attitudes, and behaviors, a crucial piece that has been overlooked has been the antecedents to motivation, specifically individuals' needs (Ryan & Deci, 2020). A needs-based approach asserts that motives result from needs, which individuals are motivated to fulfill. Although it is possible to presume that fans increased their media usage to escape the COVID-19 pandemic, to sufficiently understand fans' relocation to mediated spaces for consumption (Skinner & Smith, 2021), it is first necessary to investigate how situational factors effected their needs. As Raney (2006) explained:

[I]ndividuals experience psychological and sociological needs in their daily lives that they expect media content to address and fulfill. These needs certainly vary between individuals of different ages, gender, and stages in life, among other factors, as well as within individuals given situational factors such as mood, time of day, and stress. With this in mind, it should not be surprising that many individuals turn to sports programming to meet the various needs they experience. (p. 340)

Many factors contribute to and precede one's motives. As a result, the qualitative approach in this current study provides participants' stories to explore how and why fans' consumption habits changed during the pandemic.

Although quantitative methods have dominated sport consumer motivation research (Funk et al., 2022), qualitative approaches empower participants to respond freely, as well as recognizing the importance of context and sophisticated details in this particular subdomain (cf. Delia et al., 2022). For instance, from their interviews, Kim and Mao (2021) found the presence of motives that previously had received little attention in consumer motive research (i.e., authenticity, sociability, emotional hedge, multi-tasking). Moreover, qualitative methods suit exploratory sport consumption research, such as investigating individual-level benefits obtained through sport consumption (e.g., Doyle et al., 2016) and deciphering how fandom can de-escalate (Hyatt & Foster, 2015) and empower (Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). The present study continues this emergent tradition towards qualitative research in sport consumer motivation to explore the situational factors contributing to fans' sought gratifications. To do so, the principles of U&G and SDT help to provide a guiding frame to unpack how and why fans' consumption habits altered during the pandemic, and the strategies sport organizations can implement to satisfy more than just fans' temporary motivation needs.

Uses and Gratification Theory

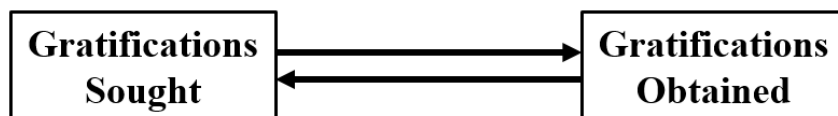
U&G emerged in response to increased consumer engagement with media (Rubin, 2009). U&G purports that individuals seek media to satisfy specific gratifications stemming from social and psychological needs (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). If this condition is met, the user's relationship with the media is strengthened – acting as a media feedback loop as Palmgreen et al. (1980) depicted (see figure 1). Early U&G scholars (e.g., Katz et al., 1973)

encouraged future empirical research to ascertain (a) how media consumption gratifies needs, (b) what are consumers' motives, and (c) what are the outcomes resulting from these needs, motives, and behavior. Currently, sport management U&G research largely focuses on answering *why consumers use* social media, rather than the original guiding questions. As such, research in sport management has addressed fans' motives and their implications on behavior, yet crucially, it has conflated fans' needs with their motives.

Needs are the antecedents to motivation and evolve according to contextual factors (e.g., the socio-contextual environment, the individual; Rubin, 2009). SDT explicitly delineates these needs as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In this article, U&G is the less significant of the two frameworks. Although, its application of Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) media feedback loop provides a basic structure that SDT can improve through its multiple concepts. When used synergistically, U&G and SDT (see figure 2a.1) form a conceptual framework to understand why individuals seek gratifications (i.e., the media feedback loop; Palmgreen et al., 1980) and answers Katz et al.'s (1973) inquiries on how media consumption gratifies needs and the outcomes resulting from these needs.

Figure 2a.1

Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) media feedback loop



Self-Determination Theory

SDT is a macro-motivational theory that stipulates one must consider humans' innate psychological needs to understand motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008). As such, SDT is comprised of multiple concepts: basic psychological needs, cognitive evaluation, causality

orientations; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). It is important to explain each concept in order to fully grasp SDT as a guiding framework.

The concept of basic psychological needs purports that universally, humans strive for growth through their three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are universal necessities rather than acquired motives (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Autonomy refers to acting with a sense of volition and that the resulting behavior is consistent with the individual's self-concept (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Competence, as it sounds, concerns the individual feeling effective through their actions while possessing the ability to grow and learn (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Relatedness deals with the need to experience a sense of belonging and connection with others. Ultimately, it is the need to feel loved and cared for by others and vice versa (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness provide a necessary starting point to understand fans' motivations via their needs. It is believed that sport can fulfill these three innate psychological needs in many ways, which is why Funk et al. (2012) encouraged its usage in future sport motivation research.

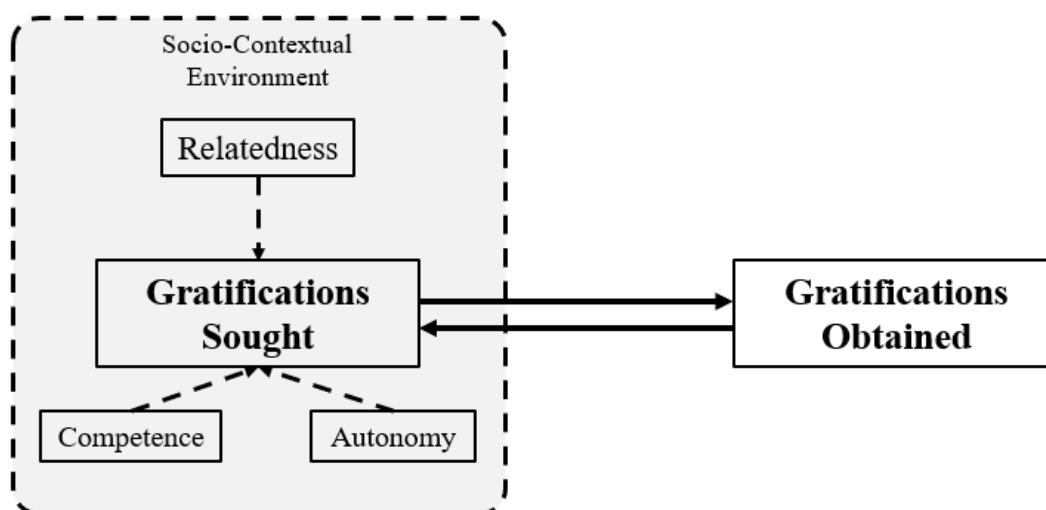
Next, one must understand the antecedent to the antecedent: how individuals' needs are shaped and formed. The cognitive evaluation concept acknowledges that socio-contextual factors may facilitate or thwart needs (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). While SDT research has focused on instances where individuals' needs are satisfied, scholars have begun exploring the "dark" side of motivation: need thwarting conditions and need-frustrating experiences (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Need frustration is not the opposite to satisfaction but rather a separate mechanism in which individuals cannot gratify their needs. Levine et al. (2022) characterized the COVID-19 pandemic as a need-thwarting environment as individuals experienced need frustrations to all innate psychological needs – e.g., government-imposed

restrictions (autonomy thwarted), being laid off from work (competence thwarted), and isolation from loved ones via mandates (relatedness thwarted). In response to need-frustrating experiences, individuals seek substitutes to fulfill their needs or engage in compensatory behaviors (e.g., escape, oppositional defiance; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Therefore, it is likely that the initial loss of sport would have contributed to fans' need frustrations, helping explain the changes of sport consumption habits during the pandemic.

These two concepts (i.e., basic psychological needs and cognitive evaluation) are reflected in Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) revised media feedback loop (figure 2). This conceptual framework now outlines individuals' needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2020) and how they are influenced (i.e., socio-contextual environment). Therefore, changes to one's needs, occurring situationally (e.g., life stages, mood, stress; Raney, 2006) or from a need-thwarting context (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), would affect gratifications sought and disrupt the media feedback loop altogether.

Figure 2a.2

Revised version of Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) media feedback loop



Finally, there is the concept of causality orientations (i.e., autonomous and controlled motivation). Despite not being included in the conceptual framework, Deci and Ryan (2008) explained that in SDT, “the most central distinction...is between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation” (p. 182). Here, motivations are classified on a continuum in relation to the locus of origin (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Deci and Ryan (2020) distinguished that self-determined internally-driven motives are autonomous-oriented motivations, whereas actions driven by external factors (e.g., shame, approval-seeking, guilt) are control-oriented motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In order to identify the causality orientation, one must ask who is the driver of the action? Although it is important to note that human motivations are rarely completely autonomous (i.e., intrinsic) or controlled (i.e., extrinsic), hence the classification of autonomous- or control-oriented. Importantly, Funk et al. (2012) classified causality orientations with sport as the locus, irrespective of whether the actions were self-determined by the user. They reasoned that within sport spectatorship, autonomous-oriented motives represent *the end* (i.e., excitement, performance, and esteem), whereas control-oriented motives in sport are the *means* to the end (i.e., socialization and escape; Funk et al., 2012). Further, autonomous-oriented motives can be limited to sport, and individuals can obtain control-oriented motives through external activities such as movie theatres and casinos (Funk et al., 2012). In this spirit, the current study follows Funk et al.'s (2012) sport-specific conceptualization of causality orientations.

Operationalizing both U&G and SDT forms a rigorous conceptual framework that is able to interpret the origins of fans’ motives and how sport gratifies their needs. As a result, recent sport management scholars (e.g., Kim & Mao, 2021; Qian et al., 2019, 2022; Xiao, 2020) have used U&G and SDT to guide their motivation research. For instance, to construct their respective motivation scales, Xiao (2020) used U&G and Kim and Mao (2021) used SDT. However, Qian

et al. (2019) utilized both frameworks, recognizing the implications of both needs and gratifications in their motivation scale. Outside of those scale-based, quantitative examples, Qian et al. (2022) utilized SDT (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) to understand how esports satisfies fans' needs, and the relationship between need fulfillment and behavior; their implementation of SDT demonstrated its applicability within sport consumer motivation research as fans' attitudes and behaviors were distinctly influenced by the needs (they sought to gratify). However, there has yet to be a qualitative approach to combine U&G and SDT principles as a guiding framework to explore sport consumer motivation, a notable gap the present study seeks to address.

Specifically, the concepts of U&G and SDT help to explain the consequences of a socio-contextual environment on consumers' abilities to satisfy their needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) and their causality orientations (i.e., autonomous, controlled). A visualized conceptual framework (see Figure 2) outlines the influence of situational factors on innate needs and thus, gratifications sought. According to Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) media feedback loop, the gratifications sought drives consumers' relationships with the media. In cases like the pandemic, where the social environment thwarted individuals' autonomy satisfaction, motivations for consuming sport would likely become more control-oriented (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Weinstein & Ryan, 2011). Additionally, findings show that environments that hinder competence and relatedness promote amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) – another outcome of the pandemic (Levine et al., 2022). The implications are that control-oriented motivations rarely become long-term behaviors, as individuals react to external stimuli rather than committing self-determined actions, leading to reduced satisfaction, and in some cases, ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Thus, it would be expected that fans' motives for watching

sport would become more control-oriented (e.g., escape and socialization) in an attempt to satisfy their needs in response to the pandemic-influenced environment; sport would become *the means* to the end, in turn causing adverse attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

Methods

This study used semi-structured interviews to explore how the pandemic influenced sport fans' consumption habits. Past research has used quantitative methods to examine consumption motives. Due to this research's objectives, a person-centered perspective alternate approach provided an opportunity for understanding fans' motivations uniquely from past literature. As recommended by Vansteenkiste et al. (2020), a person-centered approach allows for deeper insights into the participant's need satisfactions and frustrations caused by the socio-contextual environment. Here, detailed descriptions are necessary to interpret how participants' needs altered during the pandemic and the role it had on their interactions with sport. Semi-structured interviews are often employed in sport management qualitative research (Hoerber & Shaw, 2017), and are useful for exploratory endeavors (e.g., Walker & Melton, 2015).

Data Recruitment and Collection

After obtaining research ethics clearance, a diverse group of highly identified sport fans who followed sport closely during the pandemic were targeted. Both fandom and close following of sport were self-reported measures by participants, but responses were assessed by the principal investigator alongside fan identification research and motivation research (e.g., Sveinsson & Hoerber, 2016). For instance, to determine "closely" following behavior, Wann and Branscombe's (1993) question of "how closely do you follow the [team name] via ANY of the following [forms of media]?" was asked, and participants qualified when reporting having watched roughly 10 or more sporting matches during the pandemic, in addition to consistent (i.e.,

nearly every day) auxiliary forms of sport media consumption. The recruitment of participants occurred through Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit social media platforms. On Facebook and LinkedIn, recruitment flyers were shared via the principal investigator's personal profile, reaching immediate and indirect connections accounting for 9 participants. On Reddit, the primary investigator contacted various sport-team subreddit moderators of North American sport teams and leagues and, when approved to do so, posted the recruitment flyer, which resulted in 7 participants (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021). Recruitment through social media helped ensure that participants were active in receiving or interacting with media content (Rubin, 2009; Sundar & Limperos, 2011), and increased likelihood that they sought to satisfy their needs through media (Palmgreen et al., 1980). Once participants denoted their interest, they were sent a demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form prior to their interview.

First, a pilot study was conducted with three graduate students at the principal investigator's institution to assess the quality, structure, and clarity of the interview questions. Pilot studies are useful tools to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Initially, two pilot interviews were conducted, which led to meso-level changes to the interview guide based on feedback from the graduate students, specifically the wording and order of questions. These changes were implemented for the third interview to complete the pilot study. At this point, the structure of the semi-structured interviews remained unchanged throughout the data collection process, and thus, the third pilot interview was included in the data per Malmqvist et al.'s (2019) recommendation.

A total of 16 semi-structured interviews makes up the data in this study. All of the interviews were conducted over a synchronous video conferencing platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams) due to the pandemic-imposed restrictions. The principal investigator incorporated

specific techniques to accommodate for the virtual space including taking extra precautions with confidentiality, spending more time on rapport building, and planning for distractions (Lobe et al., 2020). The lead researcher also used self-disclosure techniques to create a safe space (e.g., sharing his struggles with the pandemic; Tracy, 2019). The intention was to create a space where participants felt comfortable sharing how the pandemic impacted their lives. At the conclusion of each interview, the lead researcher prompted respondents to choose their own pseudonyms, aligned with past sport management research (e.g., Walker & Melton, 2015).

Table 2a.1 Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race
Camila	Female	24	Asian
Mickey	Male	75	White
Julian	Male	29	Black
Sue	Female	48	White
Evan	Male	23	White
Freddie	Male	24	Asian
Shannon	Female	42	White
Joe	Male	47	Black
David	Male	24	Asian
Sofia	Female	23	White
Jessica	Female	26	Black
Raikor	Male	62	White
Mayra	Female	35	Asian
Zach	Male	18	White
Elizabeth	Female	56	White
Hannah	Female	45	Asian

Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences consuming sport during the pandemic (Tracy, 2019). Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for pause and reflection (Skinner & Smith, 2021). While COVID-19 affected multiple aspects of sport (e.g., Lock & Reghunathan, 2022; Naraine & Mastromartino, 2022), its impact on sport consumer motivation was particularly helpful. Initially, participants were asked about how the pandemic influenced their social and mental health to assess whether

the social environment influenced their innate psychological needs. Further questions explored the affect the loss of sport had on social and mental health, substitutions for sport during the “pause”, return of sport, changes in sport consumption during this period, and whether attitudinal and/or behavioral changes persisted or were bounded to the pandemic. Follow-up questions were posed for clarity and to encourage more detail when necessary. Interviews spanned 35-90 minutes in duration, with an average length of 58 minutes per interview. Noting the lack of diversity in sport consumer behavior research (Delia et al., 2022), interviewee composition ranged across age and race (see Table 2a.1). Of the eight men and eight women interviewed, ages ranged from 18 to 75 with an average age of 38. Participants also self-identified their race, with eight participants identifying as White, five as Asian, and three as Black.

Data Analysis

Data were interpreted through a thematic analysis. This technique was used to identify and label patterns (i.e., themes) across participants’ stories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To begin, basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) were used as deductive codes to determine whether these needs were being satisfied or thwarted. Further, aforementioned sport motivation (e.g., Funk et al., 2012; Trail & James, 2003) and U&G (Palmgreen et al., 1980; Sundar & Limperos, 2013) literature served as deductive guides for coding at times. Concomitantly, due to the exploratory nature of this research, new experiences were revealed and coded accordingly.

The analysis was conducted alongside the data collection. Following each interview, the principal researcher would, first, engage in reflexive journaling, and then transcribe the conversation verbatim. Open coding was completed in NVivo 12 for all transcripts before reviewing and refining themes via axial and selective coding. Braun and Clarke (2006) stressed

that thematic analyses are recursive and iterative processes, so, as new themes were created by the researcher, previously coded transcripts were re-visited and re-coded. After the 16 interviews, data saturation was reached, meaning that interviews started to produce no new themes and that the preliminary themes were repeated by multiple respondents (Tracy, 2019).

Findings

Through semi-structured interviews, participant responses revealed how and why their motives for sport consumption changed during the pandemic, suggesting that they are indeed contextual and fluid. The loss of sport re-emphasized its meaningfulness in participants' lives. During this lull, many attempted to find substitutes to the gratification that their fandom fulfilled, although only two were able to simulate similar gratifications. Due to pandemic-imposed need frustrations, many participants used sport for socializing to subdue feelings of isolation. Further, sport acted as a diversion for participants; yet, in some cases their bingeing habits became unhealthy. Finally, participants' causality orientations (i.e., autonomous- and control-oriented) informed sustained attitudes and behaviors. Those with autonomous-orientated motives tended to hold long-term attitudinal and behavioral changes compared to the participants who used sport as a means to an end to gratify their frustrated needs.

The Context: A Need Frustrating Environment

The declaration of a global health pandemic from the World Health Organization left participants with many uncertainties regarding their futures. Participants noted that the loss of sport exacerbated their worries. Elizabeth said that "it [the cancellation of sport] emphasized the seriousness of it... considering the business that it is and they're shutting it down, okay, that's not good." Additionally, the cancellation of sport legitimized the enormity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hannah continued that because it was an unfamiliar territory, containing more

questions than answers, “anxiety was just at an all-time high because it was so unlike anything anyone had ever experienced... what kind of economic impact is this going to have?” The loss of sport ultimately foreshadowed the imminent need-thwarting environment.

Consistent with Levine et al.’s (2022) findings, all participants described need-thwarting experiences inflicted by the socio-contextual environment. David’s statement epitomized participants’ autonomy frustrations: “I have all the time in the world, but I can't do the things I want to do.” While competence frustrations were less frequently mentioned, participants shared that temporary work layoffs and online-schooling contributed to this feeling. In particular, Joe’s auto-immune condition meant that he had “been off of work for the last two years,” which caused his competence frustrations. However, relatedness was the most commonly experienced need frustration among participants. Physical restrictions prevented participants from gratifying their relatedness in multiple facets. Although technology made socialization possible, the quality of these interactions left participants unfulfilled. Mickey, a retiree, explained that he and his wife “still talk to [family] on the phone and stuff, but it's not the same, you know, physically, to be there with them and do things with them.” Others shared how autonomy frustrations reinforced and stifled relatedness gratifications: “at some point, asking people for updates about their lives is literally like the same thing. Like copy and paste for each person” (Camila). Participants’ thwarted-needs caused by the pandemic led to compensatory behaviors (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013); the first was searching for an adequate substitute to live sport.

In addition to the pandemic, sports’ cancellation needlessly compounded these highly-identified fans’ frustrations. Palmgreen et al.’s (1980) media feedback loop suggests that consumption habits are formed because that media fulfills their sought gratifications. Unsurprisingly, most participants intentionally sought substitutes to obtain similar gratifications

from sport – a typical response by frustrated individuals (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Many participants attempted to find a “sport-for-sport” substitution. For instance, “in the first few weeks after COVID,” Raikor, a hockey fan, recalled watching “a couple of bizarre things like Korean baseball” in which he “watched it just out of defiance...like somewhere, someplace, there's a live sport occurring”. While others turned to historical games such as when their favorite team “where they won the championship” (Elizabeth) and “old-World Series games and stuff...but the more that you watched then you missed it all that more [laughs]” (Mickey). None of the participants were completely satisfied with these new forms of consumption. As Zach remarked, it was a time where “you can't get that ‘fix’ of sports at all whatsoever,” and most individuals were left waiting for its return.

A few participants successfully obtained sport consumption-specific gratifications through other activities. Sofia and Evan both realized that board game nights became their substitute for sport spectatorship. Sofia shared: “I could root myself, which was nice. It's just that competitive aspect that you think about during a hockey game... Competition and good mental health, that's what sports bring for me.” While it was not sport, board game nights facilitated similar gratifications in lieu of sports’ absence. Similarly, Evan’s board game nights evolved in accordance with sports’ return. For example, Evan’s social group intentionally avoided conversations surrounding sociopolitical topics during games night (e.g., Black Lives Matter).

We would talk with each other at different times, but kind of like when we're doing our board games, it's just a full escape from everything that's happening because we didn't have that...[long pause] Okay okay! So then like by sports talking about it and all of those things, like you don't fully get that escape from reality that you might want.

Evan realized that his board game nights provided a sense of escapism that sport activism interrupted. The loss of sport had participants seeking substitutions to sport consumption, but most of them were unable to adequately fulfill these gratifications. These individuals would have to wait for sports' return.

While the loss of sport legitimized participants' uncertainties and need frustrations, the return of sport symbolized "a signal for some type of normalcy" (Camila). Participants expressed that although "there might not be any fans, but, you know, at least sports is occurring" (Raikor). Jessica explained this relief as "something that was like from the before times.... when it came back, I was like 'okay, things are looking up'... it kind of gave us- gave me that kind of optimism." Symbolically, sport's return provided some reassurance. Practically, it represented an opportunity for participants to fulfill their gratifications through sport. In many cases, sport's role became much more substantial in participants' lives, often becoming a vehicle (i.e., a *means* to an end) to assist with their frustrated needs.

The Shift: Restructuring Consumption Habits

While sport's return promised optimism and normalcy, the ongoing nature of the pandemic confined participants within a need-thwarting environment. As a result, most participants' sport consumption habits altered in response to their frustrated needs. As Evan put it: "you don't know what you got until it's gone, and now that we went without it, you wanna enjoy it while it's here." As a result, many participants "put more emphasis in enjoying the games given that there wasn't as much look forward to outside of outside of the games" (Mayra). Re-visiting Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) feedback loop, a change in one's needs would interfere with the subsequent gratifications sought. In response, sport became a social activity (i.e., relatedness frustration) and a means for escape (i.e., need-thwarting environment). Funk et al.

(2012) classified both socialization and escape as control-oriented motives, and here, both newly acquired motives represented a *means* to an end external to sport.

Socialization: A Response to Frustrated Needs

Participants shared that they encountered relatedness frustrations more frequently than autonomy and competence frustrations during the pandemic. In direct response to these frustrations, many participants began using sport for socializing, as an activity or a talking point. Fantasy sports particularly improved respondents' social health: it acted as both the activity and the talking point. Joe even created a new fantasy league with some old friends just for that purpose:

[It was] an attempt to reconnect with some old buddies that I hadn't seen in like forever.

So, I found one of them and I said, "hey dude, like what's up? You've been watching football?"... it [fantasy] was an outlet to reach out to people during a time when we were isolated and I kind of felt like I need to connect.

Similar to Joe, Freddie's fantasy league was as an "excuse" to rekindle old friendships: "we hadn't really talked in a long time, but then we made a group chat, and now it's kind of like a weekly thing where we're talking." More broadly, fantasy sport provided participants with opportunities to have conversations outside of sport. Sofia used her fantasy leagues as "a conversation starter because the fact that it was back and... people could bond about that, people could talk about that." No longer was sport solely the *end*, participants motivations for watching sport shifted to become control-oriented, which is to be expected in need-thwarting environments (Weinstein & Ryan, 2011; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Escape: A Response to the Socio-Contextual Environment

Likewise, participants consistently revealed that sport had become an escape during the pandemic. When asked to clarify what escape meant, Hannah responded, “my full definition of escapism, I would say, it's a time where I'm not necessarily thinking about what I have to do at work or even relational things. I don't really have to think about any of that stuff.” While Hannah describes escaping from over-stimulation (i.e., stress), one can also escape from under-stimulation (i.e., boredom; Segrave, 2000). As Joe put it, “it made the time more bearable.” Interestingly, the pandemic simultaneously caused over-stimulation from the stress and the uncertainty, and under-stimulation from the physical restrictions and an abundance of free time. These factors reinforced bingeing habits, as escape is temporally bounded to the sport consumption.

Sue, a nurse working amidst the pandemic, used sport as a de-stressor: “It’s to get away. Like for me, as a nurse, that escape to get to my [local hockey] games is wonderful. Like just to get away from the stress of what's going on during COVID at my nursing home.” Like many others, Sue explained that sport participation provided her with “a little bit of normalcy.” Escape was typically mentioned with positive connotations; yet, in David’s case, his search for escape manifested into unhealthy consumption:

It's two-tiered. Like, when it first came back it was good, but I think as we can get into later, like as the lockdown dragged on, it became more of like a distraction and like not in not in a good sense...it [the pandemic] started getting worse. So, you realize, like "oh no, things are gonna go back to the first lockdown." And, because of that, you sort of retreat into the shell of sports consumption, and you watch a little too much... So, initially, it was good for my mental health, but afterwards, it became a sort of detrimental to it.

While this sentiment was not common among participants, other literature on escape (e.g., Stenseng et al., 2012) warns that escape for sedation and distraction can produce negative outcomes. So, while escapism in sport is not inherently bad, a person-centered SDT approach illustrates the nuance within this motive.

In both cases, it required that participants consume more sport to satisfy their relatedness and/or escapism. As these motives originated from frustrated needs acquired from the pandemic, participants needed more sport to satisfy their newly sought gratification. Media consumption was a more accessible way to fulfil these sought motives than live sport. For instance, Shannon explained that since she is the biggest sport fan in her immediate social group, Reddit facilitated an important community for discussing sport. She explained that “being on the game thread during the game, is a sort of a social activity... it may not be social in the traditional sense, but for me it kind of is.” In addition, as Camila recognized, the excess of online media touchpoints (e.g., social media) kept individuals enticed as “algorithm-wise, they saw that I was consuming a lot more...so they started recommending their vlog-style videos.” This form of media engagement allowed Camila to escape under-stimulation and feel a greater sense of connectivity to sport and the athletes. Ultimately, these fans had already determined what gratifications they obtained from live sport, therefore, many turned to mediated consumption to fulfill additional sought needs.

The Consequences: Attitudinal and Behavioral Outcomes

Although sport consumption increased during the pandemic, many of the newly acquired behaviors appeared to be bounded to this time period. The primary distinction is that temporary behaviors originated from control-oriented motivations (i.e., a *means* to an end), whereas long-term habits developed from autonomous-oriented actions (i.e., the *end*). For instance, three

participants started following Major League Baseball (MLB) during the pandemic and have since stopped. Hannah began watching her local MLB in particular as a substitute “because there was no basketball”, the latter being her favorite sport. In Evan’s case, his baseball consumption resulted from his relatedness frustrations, and he classified it as “more temporary, something to do with my roommates, and something for us to bond over” during the initial shock of COVID-19 in the summer of 2020. Finally, Julian found himself watching full MLB games during the pandemic when previously he “did it once just to see if [he] could do it”. Admittedly, Julian claimed “a new appreciation for baseball that [he] would have never had if it wasn't for the pandemic.” As the COVID restrictions lessened, so did participants’ specific baseball consumption. This behavioral rebound suggests that other activities, whether it be a sport or something external, fulfilled these participants’ sought gratifications more suitably than baseball.

For some, the socio-contextual environment provided an opportunity to “become a bigger fan throughout the pandemic” (Camilla). While increased sport consumption was primarily a response to need frustrations and compensatory behavior (i.e., escape), a number of participants’ motivations were primarily autonomous-oriented. Shannon, a newer fan, commented on how the pandemic’s influence reinforced her fandom: “It's been my main kind of outlet... it's really filled a void...I don't ever see, you know, stopping being a fan, and all of this is probably [sic] was cemented during COVID.” Although, in order to maintain their elevated levels of fandom outside of the pandemic required participants to accommodate for sport into their everyday-life schedules. Camila, who began following a sport podcast, shared: “I've kind of integrated that into like my workday sometimes. Like, if I don't catch the episodes live, then I'll just listen to it like during my workday.” Similarly, Jessica now watches sport more than ever post-pandemic: “I think I've just now come into a place where I want sports on in the background when I'm doing

things.” For these individuals, sport was not a *means* to cope with the pandemic, instead they leveraged the pandemic as a springboard to increase their fandom. Notably, their decision to consume sport was autonomously-oriented, which led to sustained behavioral changes.

Discussion

This research study utilized U&G and SDT to explore the applicability of a needs-based approach within sport consumer motivation research. In particular, SDT supplemented Palmgreen et al.’s (1980) media feedback loop to form a conceptual framework capable of explaining sport fans’ habitual development (see figure 2). Indeed, participants’ gratifications sought were influenced in part by the socio-contextual environment and their resulting needs, which informed their usage rates and media choice for fulfillment.

In line with Levine et al.’s (2022) findings, the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted participants’ needs, notably their relatedness. The sport fans in this study expressed behaviors similar to frustrated individuals in non-sport contexts; participants sought need substitutes and engaged in compensatory behaviors (i.e., bingeing and escape; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Need substitution appeared in two forms: a substitution of activities during live sport’s absence and as adaptations to their sport consumption in accordance with their sought needs (i.e., relatedness). Sport provided highly-identified fans with gratifications that could not be easily obtained elsewhere, which Funk et al. (2012) characterized as autonomous-oriented motives (i.e., excitement, performance, and esteem). For instance, Hyatt and Foster’s (2015) study on fan de-escalation found that former-NHL fans typically substituted their fandom for other sport-based identities and activities (e.g., other fandoms, athlete identities). Similarly, our participants attempted to fill sport’s void with more sport. Participants watched historical matches and foreign sport, but neither could adequately fulfill their needs. When juxtaposed with

Hyatt and Forster's (2015) research, the findings reaffirm that sport provides highly-identified fans with unique gratifications that other activities cannot easily replicate.

Only two participants successfully obtained their sought gratifications from an alternative to sport, and for both, it was via board games. Perhaps it is fortuitous that both participants used board games, but importantly, they made it clear that board games intentionally served as a substitution for live-sport consumption. More commonly, individuals' forms of consumption corresponded to their sought needs (and, by extension, to the environment). Relatedness frustrations provoked activities that facilitated socialization, such as fantasy sport, online forum participation, and watching live sport virtually with friends. Likewise, individuals sought escapism to neutralize their frustrations at the source, specifically for diversion from over- and under-stimulation caused by the pandemic. Typically, participants obtained this gratification through increased (social) media consumption, which may explain why escape tends to be a predictor of increased media consumption (Trail & James, 2001).

While eclectic, the aforementioned behaviors (e.g., fantasy sport, online forum participants, and watching sports virtually with friends) fall under the umbrella of sport consumption. Importantly, participants intentionally chose specific media that better fulfilled their needs. Interpreted within the conceptual framework, it is apparent that sport fans strive to maintain this media feedback loop and that it is quite fragile. In this case, the socio-contextual environment influenced individuals' needs, causing alterations to their habits and increasing their social media usage (Skinner & Smith, 2021). Disruptions to the media feedback loop could occur situationally and are not limited to the pandemic (e.g., life stages, mood, stress).

Moreover, the semi-structured interviews revealed that participants' motivations shifted to control-oriented during the pandemic. Sport consumption was a *means* to satisfy individuals'

needs (Funk et al., 2012); Weinstein and Ryan (2011) also found this shift when observing individuals in stressful environments. Participants with control-oriented motives typically did not maintain their elevated levels of sport consumption as pandemic-related restrictions lessened. Relative to autonomous-orientated actions, control-orientated behaviors are less fulfilling to individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Funk et al. (2012), control-oriented motives in the context of sport are outcomes that are available through occasions external to sport (e.g., movie theatres, casinos). Therefore, obtaining relatedness via socialization and escape via bingeing does not hinge on sport. Altogether, SDT's mini-theories (i.e., basic psychological needs, cognitive evaluation theory, causality orientation) comprehensively illustrates how sport fans form their needs and motives. The concepts of basic psychological needs and cognitive evaluation elucidated the reproduction of need-frustrated behaviors – e.g., seeking substitutes and compensatory behaviors (i.e., bingeing and escape; Vansteenkiste et al., 2013). In addition, causality orientations explain participants' behaviors, as the shift from autonomous- to control-oriented motives resulted in less fulfilling outcomes. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the usefulness of SDT within sport consumer motivation research.

Theoretical Implications

This research extended on past articles by addressing how sport fans' needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) contributed to their motives and how these needs are influenced by the socio-contextual environment. This research demonstrated that U&G and SDT are appropriate frameworks for understanding these antecedents to motivation. Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) U&G-media feedback loop bolstered by SDT and its three mini-concepts (i.e., basic psychological needs theory, cognitive evaluation theory, and causality orientations theory) formed a rigorous conceptual framework capable of interpreting altered-motives both

deductively and inductively. These findings provide sport consumer motivation research with a new starting point, addressing fans' needs. Similar to the predictive analyses conducted to determine which motives influence certain attitudes and behaviors, scholars should assess how individuals' needs contribute to these outcomes.

Although, first, scholars must reassess Funk et al.'s (2012) conceptualization of autonomous- and control-orientated motives within sport motivation research. SDT is a broad theory with multiple mini theories, so, to create parsimony, testability, falsifiability, and explanatory and predictive power likely required some concessions, but by categorizing excitement, performance, and esteem as autonomous-oriented, and socialization and escape as control-oriented, much of the nuance is lost. Technically in SDT, causality orientations consider whether the action is self-determined or externally regulated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the case of bandwagon-fan, motivation by esteem and/or performance would be more control-oriented, as they are considering their social evaluation. Further, socialization and escape can be self-determined motives, or obtained supplementarily to autonomous-oriented motives. Scholars must reconcile with this discrepancy and decide whether the autonomous- and control-orientations apply to the individual or the gratifications obtained through sport. We suggest a compromise. Rather than limiting motives to causality orientations, scholars should consider whether the motive is the *end* or the *means* to the end. While this research used and found support for Funk et al.'s (2012) orientation classifications, classifying certain motives as autonomous- or control-oriented ultimately restricts SDT. This approach assumes that motives are fixed, neglecting the influence of the socio-contextual environment and individuals' basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) on motivation.

Managerial Implications

The findings revealed that fans' sport consumption levels increased in response to the need-thwarting environment. Sport managers should feel comforted knowing that highly-identified fans still sought sport amid a global epidemic, albeit external to live sport. Individuals' needs will persist, so sport organizations should proactively plan for disruptions and monitor the social environment. As fans' behavioral responses to their needs are fairly intuitive – e.g., fans sought escape in response to a need-frustrating environment – organizations can better plan for and respond to broader contextual factors influencing fans' needs. For instance, during a presidential election year, sport organizations could avoid political discourse and position live sport as an escape from politics.

Likewise, being proactive does not necessarily mean building a contingency plan for a future pandemic. Like a portfolio manager choosing investments, sport managers should build diversification outside of live sport to protect against its absence and fans' fluid needs. Despite being commonly sought, participants never fulfilled their relatedness needs from sport organizations, although they did through external forms of sport consumption (e.g., fantasy sport, online forums). There is an opportunity for sport managers to develop activities which gratify fans' relatedness. To build a sense of community, scholars (e.g., Doyle et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2019) have recommended that sport organizations engage with their fanbase through community involvement and integration, yet evidently, this has not been accomplished. In addition, Doyle et al. (2016) found that while fans received positive gratifications from their sport fandom during the off-season, there was a disparity between in-season and off-season contexts. They suggested that sport organizations design more initiatives during the off-season to account for this discrepancy. Activities may involve teams fundraising for local foundations or contributing to

other corporate socially responsible causes (e.g., reducing illiteracy, homelessness, poverty, etc.). Community outreach programs should create shared value and increase social capital, which can positively influence attitudinal (e.g., team identification) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., stadium attendance; Kim et al., 2019). Further, sport organizations could organize social events that reproduce similar outcomes to live sport – e.g., a community board game event, or a screening of a historic match to promote nostalgia and deeper ties to the team. While there may not be another pandemic, more likely occurrences resulting in temporary absences of sport could include but are not limited to a strike, a labor dispute, or a terrorist attack. Concomitantly, need-thwarting contexts are not limited to the aforementioned extraordinary events. Situational factors like a recession, a bad day at work, stress, and lifestyle change (e.g., having a baby) can influence individuals' immediate needs. By building social capital through activities external to sport, sport organizations can still protect against these threats and be better prepared to deal with need-thwarting circumstances.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, some may argue that this work was exploratory, not explanatory. Rather than making assumptions and targeting anticipated needs and motives (e.g., relatedness, socialization, escape), this inductive research aimed to protect against bias by allowing the participants to freely discuss their motivations for sport. Open-ended questioning generated thoughtful responses without leading participants to respond in a socially desirable manner (Tracy, 2019). Although explanatory research may have elicited more detailed responses on the anticipated (and, subsequently, found) needs and motives, inductive inquiry better aligned with the purposes of this research. Future research should take a deductive

approach to examine the conceptual framework and replicability of this needs-based contextual approach within sport consumer motivation.

Next, data were collected cross-sectionally from Oct. 2021 to Jan. 2022, not longitudinally. Participants had plenty of time to reflect on the pandemic's influence on their lives and sport consumption, but longitudinal data would have provided more insight into long-term behavioral changes acquired by participants. Finally, the pandemic is an unusual socio-contextual environment, hence the considerable attention paid toward the context through the research article. The aim was to leverage the pandemic as a delimitation to assist in producing more significant and apparent results that were generalized to the theoretical frameworks. Future scholars should look to reproduce and validate these findings from a person-centered perspective outside of the pandemic longitudinally.

Future Directions

As mentioned, deductive research should build on these findings. For instance, scholars have defined escape as the desire to get away (Wann, 1995), which is an oversimplistic assessment of escape experienced by through sport. Segrave (2000) listed six elements of sport as escape: space, community, purpose, self, time, and order, which do not occur in silos. The semistructured interviews in this study revealed the presence of all six dimensions of escape to varying degrees amongst their sport consumption outcomes. Further, scholars should assess how sport fans' use of escape affects fans' attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Stenseng et al. (2012) outlined two distinct orientations of escape: escapism as self-expansion (i.e., healthier, autonomous-oriented motive) versus self-suppression (i.e., unhealthier; control-oriented motive). Seemingly both forms of escapism in sport occur. It is an opportunity to improve self-esteem through increased belongingness to a sport team (i.e., self-expansion), but it may cause bingeing

and distortion of individuals' self-evaluations (i.e., self-suppression; Moskalenko & Heine, 2003). Zillman (1988) purported that individuals seek activities of low stimuli (e.g., media consumption) to remain in this hedonic state with a distorted self-evaluation, which may explain why escape tends to be a predictor of increased media consumption (Trail & James, 2001). While self-suppression may promote bingeing and increased media usage, there may be negative long-term effects on the consumer as it is a control-oriented behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Moreover, escape has consistently proved to be a predictor of increased fan identification (e.g., Wann, 1995), media consumption (e.g., Seo & Green, 2008), or both (e.g., Trail & James, 2001; Xiao, 2020). Due to escape's repeated use in scale-based research, there are many interesting jumping-off points for applied research. For instance, Wann (1995) found that cis-male fans were more likely to use sport for escape than cis-female fans. Literature on female sports fan experiences (e.g., Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016) has illustrated that female fans sometimes feel pressure to prove their fandom, as sport perpetuates hegemonic masculine practices. As such, conscious displays of "normative" fan behavior may interfere with their sense of escape. Although this research did not notice this difference among gender identities, it is a phenomenon worthy of further research. This illustrates the need to understand escapism in sport outside of it being as a diversion. Future research should explore the many facets of escapism and the consequences of self-expansion versus self-suppression on sport fans' consumption.

Another suggestion is for future researchers to take an SDT approach toward fantasy sport consumption. In this study, several participants either began or increased their fantasy sport usage during the pandemic. Seemingly, fantasy sport allowed participants the opportunity to fulfill all three basic psychological needs – i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Billings

and Ruihley (2013) uncovered that fantasy sport fans tended to be bigger fans and received elevated gratifications (e.g., self-esteem, entertainment, social interaction) from non-fantasy users, barring escapism. In fantasy sport, individuals get to construct their team and, essentially, don the role of a team's general manager with the autonomy that accompanies the position. These teams face off head-to-head, motivating users to research athletes to be successful (i.e., competence), also leading to increased social interaction among fantasy participants (i.e., relatedness; Karg et al., 2022). Similar to Qian et al.'s (2022) esports research, an SDT approach would uncover what needs predominantly drive users' motivations and the resulting attitudinal and behavioral changes in the context of fantasy sport. If fantasy sport is able to satisfy fans' needs and elevate outcomes obtained from sport, this could have significant practical implications for sport organizations. For example, a team could host a fantasy league exclusive to their fanbase or form an interleague fantasy league, where fanbases compete against each other. Further, users could collectively vote on the team's starting lineup, providing fantasy participants with what Hyatt et al. (2013) describe as vicarious management. Such outcomes could contribute to building relatedness among supporters outside of the sport itself, simultaneously reinforcing team identity through intergroup comparisons and disidentification with competing fanbases.

Conclusion

Why fans consume sport still remains a question central to sport consumer behavior research. While this study does not answer that question outright, the needs-based contextual approach illustrated how fans' consumption habits changed during the pandemic and that their motives are fluid and contextual. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is an atypical socio-contextual environment, we found evidence that participants' motives evolved in accordance

with their frustrated needs and the environment – i.e., sport for socialization when individuals felt isolated and sport to escape from under- and over-stimulation. Behaviors that were a means to an end did not typically translate into long-term habits, in contrast to autonomous motivated actions. The U&G-SDT hybrid theory provided a conceptual framework to understand participants' behaviors in response to their sought needs and the environment, whereas scale-based research lacks that contextual element. Such situational factors likely apply more generally to sport consumption motivation – e.g., a tough day at work may lead to sought escapism. By progressing this SDT approach, we can continue to understand how the antecedents to motivation alter sport consumption, so we encourage future research on this topic outside of this exploratory study.

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Chapter IIb

Examining fans' experiences of sport activism through a multiple social identity lens

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin (BBC, 2021). Bystanders captured the final minutes of Floyd's life on cell phone video – displaying Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for over ten minutes as Floyd pleaded for his life. Within 24 hours of the incident, Minneapolis protestors took to the streets, ignoring the COVID-19 public health protocols, actively protesting the growing anti-Blackness sentiment in the United States (Singer et al., 2022). Within two weeks – partly due to the proliferation and normalization of racial discourse on social media (Hu, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020) – the BLM activist movement was catapulted onto a global scale.

Activism occurs when an individual or entity takes a stance on a contentious topic with no “right” answer (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Activism is often conflated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The marked difference is that CSR pertains to widely agreed-upon social issues, thus, consumers tend to view such messages as unanimously positive, whereas activism elicits polarized responses (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Sarkar and Kotler (2018) further classified the BLM movement as social activism, which involves taking a stance on contentious societal issues – e.g., intersectionality equality (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality, disability), human rights, and privacy.

Following Floyd's murder, professional athletes and sport organizations were among the first stakeholders to announce their support for the BLM movement (Chen, 2021). Professional sports leagues, their leadership and several athletes felt compelled to use their platforms responsibly to incite critical reflection from their audiences. For instance, Colin Kaepernick –

who championed the BLM movement in 2016 by kneeling during the national anthem (Boren, 2020) – tweeted, "when civility leads to death, revolting is the only logical reaction" to justify and voice his support for the widespread George Floyd protests (Lauletta, 2020, para. 6).

Likewise, LeBron James, one of the marquee stars in the National Basketball Association (NBA), used Instagram to share an image of Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck next to an image of Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem with the caption "this is why" (Lauletta, 2020, para. 7). These actions by Kaepernick and James highlight sport as a site for resistance and activism. Although, the "shut up and dribble" counter-narrative that emerged in responses to Kaepernick and James' posts indicate sport is "a site of both oppression and resistance" (Singer et al., 2022, p. 217).

Nevertheless, athlete actions are subsequently interpreted by their fans. Activism is already contentious and, given the polarized nature of sport, this environment amplifies consumers' opposition to this intersection (Mudrick et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2018). Approximately 50% of fans view activism as non-salient and non-normative within sport (Serazio & Thorson, 2020). Further, past research (e.g., Mudrick et al., 2019; Sanderson et al., 2016) suggested that fans may experience social identity threats – i.e., adverse attitudinal and behavioral responses affecting their fandom (Fink et al., 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) – in response to misalignments between their personal beliefs and the activist message. Given the prominence of activism amongst athletes and generally in sport, it is important to uncover how fans evaluate activism in line with their social identities, particularly as scholars have indicated the need to broaden the scope of social identity research (e.g., Delia & James, 2018; Lock & Heere, 2017).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine fans' experience of sport activism. This article acknowledges the interplay of multiple social identities contributing to fans' experiences of sport activism (e.g., team, political, and intersectional identities). Related, key terminology and concepts from political science research are borrowed, notably opinion-based identities (McGarty et al., 2009) and advantaged and disadvantaged identities (Curtin et al., 2016). By doing so, these concepts provide a basis for how individual identities interact within activist spaces like sport. Altogether, Roccas and Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity enables the fans' experiences of activism in sport to be examined through their various social identities and milieus.

This article addresses a prominent gap within sport consumer behavior research by presenting the fan experience of sport activism from their own perspective. Past research (e.g., Mudrick et al., 2019; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018, 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020) has shared fans' attitudinal and behavioral responses to sport activism but lacked insight into the process of their experience. Therefore, this study builds upon those foundations and offers empirical support for the complexities that exist within sport consumers' social identity, as well as offering key considerations for sport managers navigating the delicate balance of athlete and team behaviors and reticent fans.

Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

Sport Activism

Sport activism is not a 21st-century phenomenon. Edwards (2018) noted four distinct waves of athlete activism in the US, the first of which spans back to 1900. The two most recent waves – the third and fourth – occurred during the mid-1960s through the 1970s (i.e., the civil rights and equal rights movements) and from 2010 onwards (Edwards, 2018). During the civil

rights and equal rights movements, many prominent athletes (e.g., Muhammad Ali, Billie Jean King, Tommie Smith, John Carlos) used their platforms obtained through sport to address social inequalities persisting within the US (Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020).

Conveniently, during their triumphs, these athletes were celebrated as “American,” although, during their protests, they faced resistance from the media and had their accomplishments largely dismissed (Gutoskey, 2020). Such framing demonstrates an early example of the media’s anti-blackness: Black athletes were only framed as part of their ingroup (e.g., American) opportunistically, and experienced backlash for their protests.

Following the third wave, activism was largely dormant in sport until 2010. Athletes feared participating in activism due to the perceived social (Kaufman, 2008) and financial (Agyemang et al., 2010) repercussions. However, activism in sport returned out of necessity. Specifically, athlete protests stemmed from the same issues of racial discrimination faced by athletes nearly half a century earlier. Some scholars (e.g., Schmittle & Sanderson, 2015) have argued that the fourth wave coincided with the rise and spread of social media and, subsequently, increased individual autonomy and created liberties for athlete activists. As such, experts have predicted that social commentary and activist behavior will remain in sport for the foreseeable future (Beiderbeck et al., 2021).

Current experimental and survey research disputes the sustainability of sport activism. For instance, Lefton’s (2021) survey found that over 50% of fans do not support the intersection of activism and sport. Serazio and Thorson’s (2020) open-ended question “what do you think is good and/or bad about politics mixing with sport?” (p. 156) helped contextualize fans’ opposition to sport activism. Participants identified that athletes have a dangerous influence politically, are unqualified, should stick to sports, should circumscribe to public citizenship (i.e.,

remaining apolitical publicly like the rest of us), and that sport should remain separate from politics (Serazio & Thorson, 2020).

Quasi-experimental research (e.g., Mudrick et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2019) uncovered that alignments between fans' beliefs and the activist messaging had negligible benefits on their attitudes and behaviors towards the participating stakeholder (Mudrick et al., 2019). In cases of misalignment, fans elicited strong negative reactions towards the messenger (Mudrick et al., 2019). Schmidt et al.'s (2018) quasi-experimental research examined how the riskiness of activism affects sport fans' attitudes and behaviors. Fans preferred less-risky forms of activism (i.e., reducing childhood obesity) compared to risky, race-based activism. Further, it was revealed that the athlete's effort level did affect fans' interpretations of the athlete or activism. While these themes and findings challenge the role of the athlete, the place of sport, and the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, research, ultimately, does not disclose how fans arrived at these conclusions.

Current qualitative research on sport activism has either employed a critical theory approach (e.g., Chen, 2021) or conducted thematic analyses through unobtrusive data collection methods (e.g., Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019). The caveat here is that only speculations can be made about the processes underscoring fans' responses to sport activism. By speaking with fans directly, participants in this study shared their experience of sport activism and the origins of the social identity threats they faced, rather than scholars speculating on their behalf.

Social Identity Theory

SIT was formed to understand an individual's motivation for joining and belonging to groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) purported that an individual joins

groups to enhance or maintain their social identity. Tajfel (1974) defined a social identity “as that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge or his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 69). So, it is psychologically driven but sociologically influenced. Furthermore, social identities are evaluated through relevant intergroup comparisons – meaning that social identities represent status relative to the outgroup (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Finally, if a group’s social identity becomes undesirable (i.e., threatened), individuals will use social creativity (e.g., ingroup bias or disidentification; Fink et al., 2009) or undergo behavioral changes (e.g., leaving the group, reduced consumption intention; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to remedy their status.

Individuals possess multiple social identities. Identities are attributed meaning via individuals’ relationships with the group and their membership; each social identity has a unique significance to the individual (Tajfel, 1974). Accordingly, individuals must engage in saliency, “the activation of an identity in a situation” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 229), to navigate their various social identities. Saliency enhances the perception of the ingroup in comparison to the outgroup, improving both the individual’s and the group’s self-evaluations (Turner et al., 1987).

SIT has been used in sport consumer behavior due to its application in team identification research such as in rivalry (e.g., Tyler & Cobbs, 2015), spectator motivation and behavior (cf. Wann), and identity threats (e.g., Fink et al., 2009) contexts. Team identification is derived from an individual’s membership within a social group, in this case, a sport team, and differs from fan identification, which occurs at a psychological locale, the level at which identification is internalized (Lock & Heere, 2017). As such, the team identity – which is broadly characterized as place, past, and present (Delia & James, 2018) – is prescribed to the fan group, yet it is still

given meaning by the individual. Therefore, highly identified fans receive positive outcomes from their association with the team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), but conversely, become more susceptible to social identity threats via their membership (Fink et al., 2009).

Social Identity Complexity

As mentioned above, most individuals belong to multiple social groups (Lock & Funk, 2016; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Turner et al., 1987). As such, it is necessary to consider how these multiple identities intersect to explain individuals' experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Social identity complexity extends on social identity theory by challenging its functional antagonism viewpoint (i.e., that only one identity can be salient at a given time; Hogg & Turner, 1985). Social identity complexity provides a dynamic framework to assess the interplay of multiple social identities (e.g., team, opinion-based, and intersectional identities; Delia, 2015; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). More poignantly, Brewer and Pierce (2005) described social identity complexity as “a comprehensive theory involving the dynamic interactions between individual differences, social structure, and social cognition as the foundation of a social psychologically informed approach to social identity, tolerance, and prejudice reduction” (p. 436).

Individuals structure their social identities on a continuum of complexity. Complexity, here, refers to the degree of overlap between multiple group memberships, which is subjectively interpreted by the individual (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Group identities with greater overlap between social identities are classified as less complex. Thus, complexity increases as overlaps between multiple group identities lessen. Altogether, less complex groups are less inclusive and more complex groups are more inclusive.

Ultimately, social identity complexity is structured by the individual, and Brewer and Pierce (2005) noted that education level and opinion-based identities (i.e., political ideology and

certainty-orientation) affected individuals' group characterizations. Likewise, Roccas and Brewer (2002) acknowledged the role intersectional identities contributed to group structuring. Within political science, certain identities are categorically defined as advantaged and disadvantaged identities based on levels of inequality (i.e., systematic advantages or disadvantages; Curtin et al., 2016). Brewer and Pierce (2005) found that individuals with disadvantaged identities (i.e., non-White, non-male, non-straight), more education, and liberal ideologies tended to structure their groups more inclusively.

To further demonstrate social identity complexity structuring, a fan characterized by low complexity would perceive a rival fan as an outgroup member, despite potentially sharing other group identities (Delia, 2015). At the opposite end of the spectrum, a fan with high social identity complexity may recognize the opposing fan's other social identities (e.g., shared regional identity), leading to an increasingly inclusive group structure (Delia, 2015). Just like SIT, social identity complexity is situational and contextual, meaning that individuals may alter their group structures based on internal (e.g., need for distinctiveness) or external factors (e.g., social identity threats, context; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Ultimately, it is a combination of these factors that contribute to an individual's social complexity.

Social Identity Threats

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) SIT explained that individuals will engage in social creativity or disidentification in response to threats. In the case of team identification, groups are formed via relevant intergroup comparisons rather than interpersonal relationships (Lock & Funk, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which is why sport is celebrated as such a great unifier. Essentially, sport fans' loyalty belongs to the superordinate identity (i.e., team identity) rather than their ingroup members. As a fundamental characteristic of a group is to strive to accentuate ingroup

similarities and outgroup differences (Hogg & Reid, 2006), sport activism and political discourse may reveal dissimilarities amongst fans. Once fans' political identities become activated, ingroups may perceive other members as dissimilar causing adverse responses.

Roccas and Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity offers an alternative interpretation of social identity threats. They posited that individuals' group structures would become less complex (i.e., less inclusive) in response to threats (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Additionally, Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggested that individuals with more complex identity structures (i.e., more inclusive) would express more tolerance towards the outgroup when faced with a threat, which Brewer and Pierce's (2005) findings supported. Roccas and Brewer (2002) theorized that multiple group memberships reduce individuals' biases towards any one social identity within their self-concept, reducing ingroup bias altogether. Such a characterization would reduce prejudice towards other groups leading to increased tolerance towards outgroups.

Social identity complexity has been seldom used in sport management research. Recently, there has been a call to examine how fans' multiple identities influence and inform experiences in sport (Delia & James, 2018; Singer et al., 2022). This approach is crucial within sport activism, as the phenomenon involves multiple intersecting social identities. Using social identity complexity, Delia (2015) found that the place of sport promotes less complex (i.e., less inclusive) group characterizations. Delia (2015) observed that football fans simplified their group structures (i.e., less inclusive) on game days to reinforce their own identity. Team identification is evaluated via intergroup comparisons (i.e., "us" vs. "them"), and members aim to accentuate ingroup similarities and outgroup differences (Hogg & Reid, 2006). On game days, fans ignored shared identities with the rival fans (e.g., regional identity) to accentuate outgroup differences

(Delia, 2015). As such, this research takes to examine how fans' experiences of sport activism are informed through their multiple social identities.

Methods

As this research focuses on the fan's experience of sport activism, a qualitative research approach was implemented to allow participants the opportunity to speak freely on this phenomenon. Specifically, this research aimed to contextualize past research with detailed accounts exploring the role that their multiple social identities played in their experiences. By taking an interpretive-paradigmatic approach, the participants' stories are presented as a multivoice reconstruction (Lincoln et al., 2017), allowing the phenomenon to be illustrated through their words and what they experienced. It is important to note that the recounts of the participants appear as fragments rather than as the whole person (Josselson, 2007).

Participants

After obtaining institutional research ethics clearance, a heterogeneous group of self-reported highly identified North American sports fans of the Big Four leagues (i.e., NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL) were targeted. Heterogeneous sampling was used to get a full spectrum of responses from individuals with a diverse range of social identities (Lincoln et al., 2017). Fandom was self-reported, meaning the interviewer would evaluate participants' responses to the question "how big a sports fan are you?" in line with past fan identification research (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1993) as a validity check to ensure that participants were indeed highly-identified fans. Past interpretive research in the *Journal of Sport Management* (e.g., Hyatt et al., 2018; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016) used similar techniques, allowing participants to share their own explanation of what it means to be highly identified fan.

To achieve a diverse range of participants, the lead author posted the recruitment flyer on social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) and Reddit across multiple Big Four sport team subreddits. As outlined in Kozinets and Gambetti (2021), the researcher gained access to subreddits through the moderators before posting recruitment flyers. The posting was framed as a discussion on fandom during the pandemic to avoid non-response bias from individuals who opposed sport activism. To ensure heterogeneity, the original posting evolved throughout the recruitment, by including limiters such as “Female,” “BIPOC,” and “40+.” Adhering to Delia et al.’s (2022) calls to challenge the lack of diversity in sport consumer behavior research, eleven individuals were excluded from the data collection because they did not meet the heterogeneity criteria – e.g., too many White, cisgender men under the age of 30.

Data Collection

Three pilot interviews were conducted prior to the full data collection. Malmqvist et al. (2019) endorsed pilot studies to increase the confidence in the trustworthiness of qualitative data. Initially, two graduate students were interviewed and asked for their feedback. Based on their suggestions, meso-level alterations (e.g., the wording and the order of the questions) were made to the interview guide. Following these changes, the researcher interviewed a third individual to complete the pilot study phase. By this point, the structure of the semistructured interviews remained unchanged throughout data collection, so their responses were included as per Malmqvist et al.’s (2019) recommendation.

Altogether, a total of 16 semistructured interviews were conducted. The purpose of semistructured interviews was to contextualize past research and to help uncover particular behaviors that are not yet understood (Tracy, 2019). Follow-up questions were posed to participants for clarity and to encourage more detail when necessary. Each interview ranged from

35 to 90 minutes in duration, with an average time of 58 minutes. Eight men and eight women were interviewed, with their ages ranging from 18 to 75 (i.e., the average age was 38); eight participants self-identified as White, five as Asian, and three as Black.

Table 2b.1 Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Education
Camila	Female	24	Asian	C/UG
Mickey	Male	75	White	SC/U
Julian	Male	29	Black	C/UG
Sue	Female	48	White	C/UG
Raikor	Male	62	White	PD
Freddie	Male	24	Asian	C/UG
Hannah	Female	45	Asian	PD
Joe	Male	47	Black	SC/U
David	Male	24	Asian	SC/U
Sofia	Female	23	White	C/UG
Jessica	Female	26	Black	C/UG
Evan	Male	23	White	C/UG
Mayra	Female	35	Asian	PD
Zach	Male	18	White	SC/U
Elizabeth	Female	56	White	PD
Shannon	Female	42	White	C/UG

Note. SCU = Some College/University, C/UG = College/University graduate, PD = Postgraduate degree

All of the interviews were conducted over a synchronous video conferencing platform.

Video-mediated interviews have benefits and drawbacks. Although geographical proximity became less of a concern and contributed to the diversity of the sample, the nuances of body language were lost (Tracy, 2019). As such, the interviewer incorporated procedures and techniques specific to accommodate for video-mediated interviewing such as spending more time building rapport with participants through conversation (Gray et al., 2020; Lobe et al., 2020). Moreover, participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym for reporting purposes, and names were noted during the interview process.

Data Analysis

A reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to make sense of the data. An RTA approach acknowledges that the generated themes are partially influenced by the researcher's experiences (e.g., lived experiences, worldview, training; Braun & Clarke, 2021). The flexibility of an RTA allowed for the data to be analyzed inductively, deductively, critically, and reflexively (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In alignment with the framework, a thematic analysis allowed for social and psychological interpretations of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

An RTA involves a six-step recursive process: (1) data familiarization, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) explicitly defining the themes, and (6) writing this article (Braun & Clarke, 2021). As such, the analysis was conducted concurrent to the data collection. Following interviews, the lead researcher engaged in reflexive journaling before transcribing conversations verbatim and openly coding the data in NVivo 12. As the code list grew, the interviewer would re-visit and re-code previous transcripts to ensure rigor (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Data saturation was reached after the 16th interview, meaning that interviews started to produce no new themes and that the preliminary themes were repeated by multiple respondents (Tracy, 2019). At that point, the lead researcher began reviewing and refining themes via axial and selective coding, which resulted in the findings within this paper.

Researcher Positionality

Due to the prevailing topics of race and culture embedded in the conversations on sport activism and the BLM movement, it is necessary to acknowledge the lead researcher's positionality (Milner, 2007; Singer et al., 2019, 2022). Here, the lead researcher follows Milner's (2007) framework of researcher racial and cultural positionality by imparting my "research of the self" and "the self in relation to others" below. In line with this article's purpose, it is important

to acknowledge how my multiple social identities contributed to my interpretation of the data. The lead researcher identifies as a heterosexual White, cisgender male, therefore bearing an “advantaged identity” has created an entitlement to certain privileges reinforced by post-colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative structures in society. Although the lead researcher considers themselves an ally to the BLM movement and other equal-rights movements, his lived experiences create barriers to achieving complete empathetic inquiry and understanding as an interpretive researcher.

As this research purposively sought a diverse sample, the lead researcher’s role was to learn about how participants’ milieus and social identities influenced their experience of sport activism. Imparting personal beliefs were purposefully avoided to create a safe space where individuals could openly share their experiences without fear of judgement. It is important to reiterate here that participants appear as fragments and not as whole people (Josselson, 2007). While some participants expressed beliefs contrary to the lead researcher’s view, there was no belief that any participants acted with malicious or harmful intent. Perhaps that disclaimer stems from naivety tethered to the lead researcher’s privilege but as suggested by Milner (2007), findings were interpreted and presented through a broader, non-individualistic lens rather than individualistic one.

Findings and Discussion

These findings outline how fans experience sport activism in line with their social identities. First, individuals interpreted messages through their various social identities: opinion-based identities and their memberships (e.g., intersectional identities, and team identities). Next, as saliency occurs situationally (Turner et al., 1987), the context of evaluation was considered. Participants surmised that the current social environment, the place of sport, and the relevant

superordinate identity (i.e., league or team) mediated their interpretations of and responses to sport activism. Finally, responses to sport activism were fairly dyadic: some individuals experienced threats, while others used sport activism as a vehicle for further discourse.

Interpretation of the Message

Opinion-Based Identities

All participants, in some way, acknowledged how their opinion-based identity alignment – i.e., whether or not they agreed with the activism – contributed to their experience of sport activism. Sofia acknowledged how this relationship impacted her consumption: “I support those two movements, like LGBTQ and movements of Black Lives Matter... So, it actually made me wanna watch more.” Many participants shared Sofia’s sentiment. A shared alignment on social activism positively influenced participants’ consumption intention, challenging Mudrick et al.’s (2019) finding that positive alignments have a negligible impact on fans’ attitudes and behaviors. Participants who became fans during the pandemic, remarked that activism was a factor in catalyzing their fandom due to perceived fit with the sport organization on multiple levels.

Conversely, Mickey, who is a retiree and an NFL fan, believed that “[no one] should use the flag or their country as a tool to present their case.” He admitted that after Kaepernick kneeled during the national anthem that “when he was an active player there [the San Francisco 49ers], I wasn't watching him.” Evan, a younger NFL fan, explained how the differences in opinion-based identity alignment can contribute to the interpretation of the activism:

I was pro-Colin Kaepernick... but a lot of people saw it as a harmful thing... from their perspective he has a dangerous amount of influence. He's changing the league, he's changing their game, he's perverting [sic] it into something else. I think it would depend on your side. Since I'm on the positive side, I guess it's a good thing.

While opinion-based identity alignments appear to be relatively straightforward, Fink et al. (2009) outlined a more complex origin. Sport fans form parasocial relationships with teams and athletes, and thus, fans intuitively perceive their favorite athletes and teams as a part of their ingroup, thus assuming alignment (Fink et al., 2009). Therefore, the absence of stakeholder's stance allows individuals may protect against misalignments among opinion-based identities (e.g., views on social movements) that cause identity threats.

Additionally, the meaning that was given to the social identity by the individual must be discussed. Within SIT, groups are classified along continuums. At one of those levels exists the social mobility-social change paradigm – i.e., the individual's belief that their group membership is flexible and permeable (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Opinion-based identities would be classified towards the social change end of the spectrum (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Essentially, this means individuals feel like they cannot leave their group. As one participant, Julian, commented on this phenomenon, he felt that “with the ubiquity of politics, and how politics, especially, party-political stances or ideologies, are so much a core part of peoples' identities now.” Hobsbawm (1996) explained that with identity politics, “people choose to belong to an identity group, but it is a choice predicated on the strongly held, intensely conceived belief that the individual has absolutely no choice but to belong to that specific group.” Thus, individuals may perceive threats toward their political identity as an extension of their self-concept and thus, a personal attack.

So, while aligned participants consequently supported sport activism, it may not be an all-encompassing support for activism in sport, but rather based in their alignment. After being asked whether sport is a place for activism, Hannah joked:

yes, but do it at your own risk...cause maybe there's activism for stuff that I don't believe in, that I might find offensive, then I don't want to hear it [laughs], and I don't want you to have a platform for it.

Evan and Hannah's comments both acknowledged that their alignments might skew their perception of the activism and neither participant dismissed the outgroup for their opposing stance. Instead, they demonstrated tolerance for the outgroup, which is a sign of a complex (i.e., inclusive) social identity structuring (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Memberships

Participants alluded to how their multiple identities reflected their stance toward activism. On a representative level, Jessica, a young Black lawyer, identified that her professional identity reinforced her activist identity:

I'd say I am a Black Lives Matter activist. Like, I get involved in whatever is happening both on the legal side, because that's been like a big renewal in the legal field. But like on LGBT issues, I'd consider myself an ally.

Due to Jessica's professional and social identity categorization, she was more comfortable labelling herself as a BLM activist than an LGBT activist. Many participants were similarly careful with their language, preferring to identify as allies if they did not share intersectional identities with the disadvantaged social group, which was also found in Curtin et al. (2016). Non-Black participants with disadvantaged identities demonstrated empathy stemming from shared lived experiences, which assisted their understanding of how to be an ally (McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2020). Camilla reflected on the "Asian hate" during the COVID-19 global health pandemic to inform her response to the BLM movement as an ally: "I don't want to take up space where I know it's not meant for my specific voice."

Context of Evaluation

Current Social Environment

Regardless of their political orientation, all participants viewed society as fragmented and polarized. Many individuals expressed difficulties engaging in productive conversations involving sport activism. David believed that social media contributed to this division: “it's very polarized. You have one side that wants one thing, one side that definitely wants something else. I think it's hard to get a nuanced- balanced view of things.” David’s observation aligned with Park et al. (2020) finding that the media’s representation of activism may skew individuals' initial position on sport activism, which leads to more prolonged attitudes and behaviors.

When participants attempted to add nuance to conversations, they often faced resistance. Participants felt that were grouped into the “more” relevant corresponding binary group despite being impartial in some cases. Jessica stated that “even when people try to bring in the gray, it's still kind of at that point, whatever side you might be more towards, you just kind of get pushed into that bucket.” Hannah further expanded on how these conversations can be restricting:

It's like everyone has their own shade of gray, and I can't pinpoint exactly why we don't understand that collectively. I think it has more to do with the way that we engage with each other is very, I like to call it staccato, where it's just short bursts and there is no room for understanding. You're either agreeing with me or you're disagreeing with me.

Ambiguity seemingly threatened individuals with less complex (i.e., less inclusive) group structures. Roccas and Brewer (2002) explain that individuals with a greater need for closure and certainty favor clear ingroup-outgroup categorization, which is sometimes induced by perceived threat (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). However, uncertainty-orientation individuals, those

acknowledging the “gray,” are more likely to seek out information leading to higher social identity complexity and tolerance towards the outgroup (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Place of Sport

All participants were aware of the notion that “politics should be separate from sports,” yet, it was primarily older sports fans that held this belief. Many of the older participants shared the sentiment that “professional sport, now, is too much of a business” (Mickey). Thus, the increased commercialization of sport has influenced how fans perceived the authenticity of activism in sport. Along this vein, some participants viewed certain leagues’ actions on BLM and other topical activism phenomena as “reactionary” (Mayra) and “financially motivated” (Elizabeth), rather than altruistically or well-intentioned.

Consequently, those who held the belief that politics and sports should remain separate reflected the more traditionally-held view of professional sports. Scholars have noted that activism may be viewed as non-salient within sport due to its absence from sport during the 1980s to the 2010s (Edwards, 2018; Sanderson et al., 2016) and its interference with spectator outcomes like escape (Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020). For instance, Sue, who held more traditional views on the place of sport and used sport as an escape, said: “I’m in agreement with them [racial equality protests, but not BLM], but I just don’t think they belong in sport.” Despite agreeing with the racial protests, Sue’s attitude toward the place of sport superseded her alignment with the protests.

Younger participants and those with more complex (i.e., inclusive) social identity structures tended to be more tolerant of sport activism. Freddie and others took issue with the more traditionally-held view: “those are the people that would just see it as like entertainment... I think that’s kind of annoying, to be honest”. Younger participants were likely more accustomed

to activism in sport than their older counterparts. Some older participants, like Joe and Raikor, while displaying some ambivalence towards sport activism, and “at times, it makes [him] uncomfortable” (Raikor), expressed that “it’s the perfect place for it,” (Joe) due to the high-profile nature of the sport platform. It appears that fans’ attitudes toward the place of sport are changing, and while scholars (e.g., Singer et al., 2022) have come to redefine sport as a site for resistance, certain individuals still feel threatened by this change.

Superordinate Identity

The acknowledgement of superordinate identities occurred at two levels: the league and the team. Team identification can be broadly categorized as place, past, and present (Delia & James, 2018), each of which contributed to the acceptance of activism within superordinate identities. Most participants were under the impression that “the NBA is way ahead on this [sport activism]...but the NFL is a disaster, and I feel like the NHL is a disaster” (Shannon). While NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell publicly supported BLM (Boren, 2020), Jessica recalled the league’s *past*, and the lack of support towards Kaepernick’s initial protests: “were you not a couple of years ago doing all these things that were not great?” As such, Jessica and others felt that the NFL’s stance was more reactionary and less authentic in comparison to the NBA.

While NFL fans doubted the authenticity of its activism based on its history, NHL fans cited the league’s *present* culture and fanbase. Notably, the NHL has begun to receive backlash for its lack of diversity (Sandrin & Palys, 2021). Zach explained that “everyone understands hockey culture, and it’s probably the most White-dominated sport there is.” As a result, David reasoned that the NHL’s underwhelming support stemmed from their lack of diversity: “it was like White people trying the best they can but to a predominantly White audience... it was just

like, you might want to get a few more Black voices first.” Participants felt that the NHL had less incentive to engage magnanimously, as BLM was less relevant to both the fans and athletes.

By comparison, some fans applauded their favorite team’s support of the BLM movement. When the activism aligned with the team’s *place*, *past*, and *present*, authenticity was reinforced through their team identity and fans received the message positively. Hannah spoke on this relationship:

we have one of the most international rosters out there, where it just kind of feels like a natural extension of the city. And so, there's a lot of that kind of pride associated with what they do socially that's so beyond just having a certain cause or like a foundation. Additionally, fans spoke about the *past*, recalling the history of activism embedded within a team’s culture. Camila, Hannah, and Myra, fans of the same team, all mentioned a sport for development initiative to establish their team’s precedent for authenticity towards activism.

Responses to Sport Activism

Social Identity Threats

Most commonly, older-White participants experienced identity threats from stakeholders endorsing BLM. Specifically, individuals experienced threats from the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” For example, Sue would counter: “‘No, Black Lives aren't all that matter. All Lives Matter,’ *they* shouldn't be promoting that only Black Lives Matter, *everybody* matters.” Similarly, Elizabeth retorted “All Lives Matter” in response to Black Lives Matter. Even Joe, a Black man, initially preferred “All Lives Matter.” Although Joe admitted:

I didn't get it 'till I talked to [my daughter] actually, because she's taking it in school and they discussed it, talked about it, and I learned more about the movement... it wasn't till she actually broke it down. I've changed my tune. I get it.

Joe did not want to offend others by saying BLM. After multiple conversations with his daughter, he understood that BLM did not prioritize Black lives over other lives. Following these conversations, Joe commented on the counternarrative that some individuals broadcasted:

Because I understand human nature, if I say, “Black Lives Matter,” you're like “White Lives Matter” ... then cops are like, you know, “Blue Lives Matter.” Everyone just jumps up and gets defensive. I understand that, so I was reluctant to be “Black Lives Matter.”

Joe’s explanation described the core of the identity threat and showcased his tolerance toward the outgroup by acknowledging that their response was “human nature” rather than an attack on the individual, which is a trait of an individual with high complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

As both Sue and Elizabeth tried to reframe the BLM phrase as All Lives Matter, neither participant intended any harm. At one point, Elizabeth recognized: “Black lives absolutely matter, of course they do, but I [pauses]... everybody matters.” While their responses resulted from identity threats, they were not malicious, just uneducated and threatened. Thomas et al. (2020) acknowledged that White individuals typically feel a subjective disadvantaged identity in spaces such as race-based activism. Typically, advantaged and disadvantaged identities are categorized objectively based on levels of inequality (i.e., systematic advantages or disadvantages), yet seemingly advantaged and disadvantaged identities can be subjectively interpreted (Curtin et al., 2016). While both participants may not claim that being White is an important identity trait to them, within racial discourse, these social categories become relevant and are salient (Thomas et al., 2020). Therefore, the phrase “Black Lives Matter” likely threatened their White identity, triggering the “All Lives Matter” response.

In the case of Raikor and Joe, sport activism threatened their national identity. Raikor, a dual-citizen who has spent 30 years of his life in the US but frequently crosses the US-Canada

border for his job, elicited a more complex response than others. He understood “the importance of players to look for societal improvements” but thought kneeling in front of the Armed Services personnel “was provocative, and [he] couldn't agree with that.” Refocusing on Joe, he demonstrated high social identity complexity through his tolerance for the outgroup, and was frustrated that threatened individuals were not doing the same:

I feel for veterans, and I feel for the families of lost veterans and how they interpreted the kneeling during national anthem, but that wasn't what it was all about, right? So, on the one end of the spectrum, you got people going, “well, you need to respect the flag for what they suffered and what they endured so that you can live here.” And, on the other hand, they're like, “so what? So that my people can get shot and my people can still live in a crappy society?” And they both have a very valid point. But yet, somehow kneeling during the national anthem is like [exasperated pause]... I threw my hands up in the air.

At the core of this phenomenon is an interest convergence. BLM requires individuals to acknowledge systematic privileges, which inherently causes threats to the holder of said privilege, in this case, non-BIPOC individuals (Milner, 2007). To support BLM, one must alter their status as a White person, which contradicts Tajfel and Turner's (1979) three tenets of SIT: that individuals strive to improve or maintain social identity, to appear favorably in relevant intergroup comparisons, and to neutralize social identity threats through maintenance strategies. Concomitantly, social identity complexity literature (e.g., Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) suggests that individuals' group structures decrease in complexity (i.e., less inclusive) in response to threats, which Delia (2015) confirmed with sport fans. Individuals with less complex structures tend to show greater resistance to threats, often developing ingroup bias

rather than disidentifying, as fewer identities contribute to their self-concept (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

All participants experienced threats resulting from others' stances on sport activism. Due to the current social environment, participants acknowledged the binary-stances held by individuals (i.e., with us or against us) led to ingroup (e.g., friends, family, coworkers) and intergroup threats. For the latter, participants spoke about a perceived majority signifying the outgroup. Mickey believed that individuals prioritized normative fit – the perception that their group's actions are considered socially acceptable within a culture (Turner et al., 1987) – in response to contentious issues rather than acting autonomously. “With politics, with race, with everything, people tend to take sides now and, you know, strength-is-in-numbers type of thinking,” he explained. Zach, a college freshman, sensed this same pressure: “it's like, ‘if you don't agree with us, then you're just an awful human being’ ... a lot of people agree with the majority, there's nothing wrong with that, but there definitely is that pressure to conform.” Tellingly, Jessica, a BLM activist, did not share the same encumbrance: “I've just been in spaces where I feel like I've always been with the majority, so I didn't feel that need [to conform].” These contrasting responses indicate that participants are aware of how their opinion-based identities and memberships are socially evaluated, thus affecting their responses to sport activism and reinforcing the perceived dichotomy of opinion-based identities emanating within society.

As a result, many participants avoid sociopolitical conversations altogether. Elizabeth viewed these discussions as taboo and off-limits: “I mean you're not supposed to discuss religion, politics, and what is the third? Sex?” As political identities “are so much a core part of peoples' identities now” (Julian), participants approached these conversations cautiously and/or avoided them entirely. In addition to Elizabeth and others, Mickey (aged 75) and Zach (aged 18) used

avoidance as a social identity maintenance tactic. Mickey said: “if I feel like I have nothing to gain by saying something I usually don't say it.” Similarly, when probed on the lack of discussions amongst friends, Zach responded: “I wouldn't say it's intentionally avoided. I think it was more of a sense of (1) it's not about us in a way, and (2) we're not the problem” to justify his avoidance.

While avoidance might be perceived as a non-response, Hannah interpreted inaction as an outcome of an identity threat. Despite that, she still demonstrated some tolerance towards them:

I did notice a lot of fear amongst White people in terms of being nervous around how to proceed... they had that kind of fear of saying anything wrong, so they just they don't say anything at all and then they don't realize that in and of itself is the problem. But then I understand why they're nervous to say anything, because people are so willing to be like, "you used the wrong word!"

While some non-White participants voiced a similar sentiment, like Camila's “I don't want to take up space is where I know it's not meant for my specific voice,” it stemmed from allyship rather than avoidance (Thomas et al., 2020).

Primarily, less-recently-educated White participants most commonly experienced threats from sport activism. Some White fans fixated on the exclusivity within the moniker “Black Lives Matter.” These fans interpreted the phrase as a threat to their White identity, which may be subjectively disadvantaged in race-based activism spaces (Thomas et al., 2020), engendering less complex (i.e., less inclusive) social identity structuring. Elsewhere, this subset of participants sensed a pressure to conform to the majority opinion-based identity, demonstrating an understanding that their social identity was being evaluated unfavorably by the outgroup. To mitigate these identity threats, most participants avoided conversations to prevent conflict.

Vehicle to Further Action

The participants that supported sport activism leveraged it as an opportunity to discuss activism on a broader scale. For instance, David noted exchanges amongst his friend group:

We would talk about like, "oh, they're kneeling before a game, what do you think of that?" Or like, "oh, like they're in a circle before the game holding minute of silence," or like "oh, at the all the athletes are, you know, tweeting about it."

Similarly, Freddie had conversations with his parents to "encourage open-mindedness and thinking more critically about things rather than just like taking them face value" in response to various mainstream media sources and their portrayal of the BLM movement.

Although some participants engaged in productive conversations with friends and family resulting from sport activism, productivity did not always indicate positivity. Jessica explained an encounter: "it was like a very productive conversation, but we also do not speak anymore." Many participants experienced similar outcomes resulting from such conversations; they felt as if they knew the individual more intimately, which was not always a good thing. As many of these conversations are rooted in individuals' self-concepts, it was rare that discussions including opposing viewpoints ended in compromise. In cases of misalignment, conversations accentuated an ingroup's dissimilarities, endangering the primary objective of a group (Hogg & Reid, 2006). So, while sport activism encouraged productive discourse from those who supported its intersection, it also introduced identity threats within social groups.

Theoretical Implications

If sport is viewed as a microcosm of society, accordingly, scholars must consider how the broader socio-contextual environment permeates the boundaries of sport. As recommended by past literature (e.g., Delia & James, 2018), this study utilized a multiple social identity approach

to answer our research question: how fans experienced sport activism through their social identities (i.e., team identity, opinion-based identities, intersectional identities). When participants' identities were interpreted alongside the context of evaluation, it further illustrated that individuals prescribe fluidity to the meaning of their identities (Delia & James, 2018). For instance, while White identities are typically defined as advantaged, White participants less educated on BLM felt subjectively disadvantaged in social activism conversations, supporting Thomas et al.'s (2020) findings. Similarly, the place of sport facilitated the relevance and activation of opinion-based identities. For example, some older participants viewed activism as non-normative and, thus, they avoided such discourse. This research outlines factors contributing to fans' experiences of and responses to sport activism, which can help guide future sport activism research.

Participants with less complex social identity characterizations, and less (recently) educated White participants more commonly experienced threats. While Brewer and Pierce (2005) found that political stance, race, and education influenced social identity complexity, the recentness of education was specified from the findings here. Both older and younger White individuals experienced similar identity threats stemming from racial discourse related activism. Roccas and Brewer (2002) acknowledged that diverse milieus contribute to individuals' complexity structures, which post-secondary education may accomplish. University students exhibited relatively complex (i.e., inclusive) group structures (Delia, 2015) and that they largely welcomed athletic departments' activism (Bunch & Cianfrone, 2022). As the education level of older participants was not necessarily lower than the rest of the sample, the more educated individuals are not simply more aligned with activism in sport. However, contemporary

Figure 2b.1

Sport fans' process of experience of sport activism within a social identity framework



Note. The figure represents the factors contributing to fans’ experiences of sport activism outline by the participants. The interpretation of the message, which was informed by participants’ opinion-based identities and memberships, served as the foundation for individuals’ experiences of sport activism. Next, the context of evaluation’s guided/shaped fans’ interpretations of and responses to sport activism (depicted in the background). In particular, participants with less complex (i.e., less inclusive) structures faced heightened identity threats. Participants with more complex (i.e., more inclusive) group characterizations used sport activism as a vehicle to further action.

education activities simultaneously present an opportunity to experience diversity, influencing social identity complexity (including for fans who identify as White).

Managerial Implications

Managerial recommendations stemming from these findings should be considered alongside the work of Black scholarship in sport management (e.g., Singer et al., 2022). In this spirit, sport management scholars and practitioners must carefully and strategically address the resistance that some fans have towards sport activism. Individuals and their identities are complex and susceptible to threat, especially in an increasingly fragmented society (Jackson et al., 2020). SIT explains that it is a human tendency to characterize individuals with opposing opinion-based identities as the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), yet sport is a space where external social identities can be shed in favor of a shared superordinate identity (Lock & Funk, 2016). By promoting a shared superordinate identity, Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggest that fans will exhibit more tolerance towards those who would otherwise be outgroup members. Similar to (post-secondary) education, sport can act as a diverse environment to promote more complex (i.e., inclusive) social identity group structures.

Based on the findings, sports organizations should prioritize educating fans, especially older and White fans, on the specific activist cause. With BLM, White participants that were uneducated on the movement supported racial equality but experienced threats from the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” Singer et al. (2019) explained BLM through a metaphor of a house being on fire and the firefighters rushing to the scene: “the other houses in the neighborhood matter and are important, but the firefighters must deal more immediately with that house that’s on fire” (p. 54). It is very plausible that many of the participants would have benefitted from hearing and learning this metaphor, especially if it was directed from the sport organization. Sport managers

should encourage fans into more intimate, educational settings where team officials, athletes, coaches, and staff, share their message; managers should create safe space focus groups and/or to listen to fans and their resistance, but also use that opportunity to educate and inform. Once organizations identify the source of the threat, they are able to implement messaging to better educate fans.

Further, this study challenged past findings (e.g., Mudrick et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2018) on sport activism's efficacy as a viable marketing strategy to promote growth. Sport organizations must assess whether their place, past, and present aligns with an activism-oriented marketing approach (Delia & James, 2018). Teams who integrated activism genuinely, and with the fanbase's support, were successful in such efforts. However, such an environment may not be available to many teams. Any attempt to make activism wide-appealing (1) may be perceived as inauthentic, or (2) may become so neutral that it is no longer activism but rather CSR (e.g., "Vote Democrat" vs. just "Vote").

In particular, women's sports organizations or sport organizations that are underrepresented by mainstream media should consider integrating activism into their marketing strategy. As mentioned, those with disadvantaged identities, specifically, those who are not straight, White, and male, tend to be more empathetic towards other disadvantaged identity communities (Curtin et al., 2016; McGarty et al., 2009). As Guest and Luijten (2017) discovered that a primary motive for attending National Women's Soccer League games was to support women's sport, it would reason to be that sport managers should consider their organization's view on social inequities and embrace a more activist stance. Taking this step may seem to deviate away from the secular nature of sport and business, but it could yield greater fan support

through empowerment (cf. Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016) and, simultaneously, offer an opportunity to educate those who are unfamiliar or respond negatively to the activism, *prima facie*.

Conclusion

If sport is viewed as a reflection of society, then activism will undoubtedly remain in sport. This research sought to contextualize past research by uncovering fans' process of experience of sport activism within a social identity framework. The findings outline factors contributing to fans' experience of sport activism. Much like when joining a social group, fans interpreted the activism message (i.e., self-concept; Tajfel, 1974), evaluated that message within the appropriate context (i.e., saliency; Turner et al., 1987), and responded harmoniously with the former assessments (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity complexity enabled further examination of how participants' multiple identities contributed to their response to threats (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Participants' threats originated from sport activism and the resulting conversations on sociopolitical discourse (e.g., BLM). The most threatened group by BLM messaging was less recently-educated White participants. Seemingly, they perceived their Whiteness as a subjectively disadvantaged identity within racial justice conversations, which caused threats and subsequent less complex group structuring.

Limitations

There are some limitations worth noting from the study. First, the data were collected cross-sectionally, not longitudinally. As fans' experiences were mediated by the socio-contextual environment, interviewing fans over time may demonstrate a greater tolerance for sport activism informed by social pressures or through the normalization of this phenomenon. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic must be acknowledged for its implications on the interactions and the social environment; participants mentioned challenges related to discussing activism virtually,

citing that they feared their words would be taken out of context or misinterpreted. Although, it is not believed that the pandemic influenced the transferability and generalizability of the findings. Third, although this study recruited a diverse spectrum of participants, it lacked context diversity (Delia et al., 2022). As this study was concerned with leagues' that resumed in 2020 – during the height of the protests and the pandemic – this resulted in North American fans of the Big Four men's professional leagues. Other contexts, such as women's sport, historically black colleges and university sport, and parasport, including taking a view from the Global South, could provide more insight into the role intersectional identities play in the experience of activism and how certain fan communities respond to activism. Following Delia et al.'s (2022) call, this study was unable to report the political affiliation or sexual orientation of participants, identifiers that may have produced additionally rich insights to perceptions of activism in sport. Finally, as identities are activated situationally, it is possible that fans' team identities were not fully activated during the interview, despite prolonged conversations about their respective fandoms.

Future Directions

As this research intended to explore fans' experiences of activism in sport, there are a few points of departure for future research. First, scholars should seek to examine the effects of reverse socialization – children socializing their parents (Brim, 1968) – on older fans' attitudes towards sport activism. For instance, Hyatt et al. (2018) found that children can influence their parents' sport fandom, so, by extension, children may influence other attitudes and behaviors, like Joe's daughter influencing his view on BLM. Raikor, Sue, and Elizabeth, all of whom are parents of older children, shared stories involving discussions on social activism with their kids, who often hold different perspectives to their own, because of sport. Sport activism may be a

vehicle that facilitates inter-generational conversations (e.g., among families) on sociopolitical issues more naturally. Second, it would also behoove scholars to situate the research context in other jurisdictions, sampling participants from other jurisdictions in the Global North and Global South to examine similarities and differences in sport activism perception.

Additional research should be conducted on how superordinate identities and fan communities become spaces that reinforce or reject sport activism. Responses were consistent across participants, viewing the NBA positively, whereas they voiced skepticism towards the NFL and NHL. It's worth asking who perpetuates this type of culture within a fan community – e.g., is it the fans, the athletes, and/or the executives? By analyzing specific fan segments, researchers can better understand how social capital – i.e., individuals' ties and connections to a group (Fenton et al., 2021) – manifests itself and informs such belief systems within sport fan communities. Further, while perceived authenticity was discussed in conjunction with the characteristics of team identification (i.e., place, past, present; Delia & James, 2018), fans' skepticism of sport activism should be explored more rigorously. Participants' skepticism aligned with Bunch and Cianfrone's (2022) findings, specifically that the authenticity and the efficacy of the activism were both important components to stakeholders. Participants were less willing to tolerate sport activism if they felt neither component was satisfied. Future research should explore what factors contribute to authentically perceived activism.

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Chapter III

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to better understand how sport activism influences highly-identified fans' lived experiences in relation to sport, specific to their sought needs and held social identities. Due to the interpretive approach, and double-barreled nature of the research question, this thesis is structured in a paper-based format to address each question inductively and separately. Chapter 2a explored how fans' consumption habits altered during the pandemic utilizing a U&G and SDT dual-framework to assess their needs. Chapter 2b utilized a social identity approach to uncover processes contributing to fans' experiences of sport activism. Two data analyses were conducted to understand each phenomenon individually before a third analysis interpreted the findings collectively to address the overall research question.

Summary of Findings

Chapter 2a: A Needs-Based Contextual Approach to Understanding Sport Fan Motivation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Chapter 2a explored how fans restructured their consumption habits in response to their changing needs, motives, and the socio-contextual environment. To do so, this research utilized U&G and SDT in conjunction to assess how participants' needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) and the external socio-contextual environment influenced their sought gratifications and subsequent behaviors. The findings revealed the pandemic-imposed restrictions meant that participants had difficulties satisfying their needs, especially their relatedness. During sport's absence, participants sought activities to replace sport, yet there were few apt substitutes. Following its return, for many, sport transformed into a social activity and a means to escape the reality of the pandemic through increased consumption of sport media. Individuals that increased

their sport consumption primarily as a means to socialize and for escapism did not sustain these habits as the pandemic-imposed restrictions lessened, whereas autonomously-motivated individuals maintained their elevated consumption levels.

Chapter 2b: Examining fans' experiences of sport activism through a multiple social identity lens

Chapter 2b outlined how fans experienced sport activism via their social identities. First, their interpretation of the message served as the foundation for guiding individuals' experiences of sport activism. Interpretations varied depending on the individual's opinion-based identity (i.e., stance on the activism) and their multiple memberships. If they disagreed with the message, individuals mostly opposed the intersection of politics and sport. Next, as social identities are activated situationally (Stets & Burke, 2000), it was necessary to acknowledge the context of evaluation's role in shaping fans' interpretations of and responses to sport activism. Participants evaluated their social identities situationally within the current social environment, the place of sport, and the relevant superordinate identity (i.e., the league and team).

The interpretation of the message and the context informed participants' responses to sport activism. All participants noted some form of social identity threat resulting from sport activism – either from the sender (i.e., the organization, team, or athlete) and/or the subsequent conversations that resulted from the demonstrations (i.e., intergroup, intragroup, interpersonal). Participants used social identity threat maintenance strategies to reduce unfavorable social identity evaluations. In particular, participants with less complex (i.e., less inclusive) structures faced heightened identity threats. Participants with more complex (i.e., more inclusive) group characterizations used sport activism as a vehicle to further action and typically expressed tolerance toward the outgroup.

Fans' Lived Experiences of Sport Activism

As activism in sport continued to persevere, it was necessary to understand fans' experiences external to their attitudinal and behavioral outcomes to this phenomenon. Past research utilized quantitative methods to measure fans' responses to sport activism. These findings indicated fans preferred less risky forms of activism (Schmidt et al., 2018) that aligned with their opinion-based identities (i.e., views on activism, political identity; Mudrick et al., 2019). Further, these findings suggested that alignments between the fan and the social cause had negligible benefits on the fan's attitudes and/or behaviors, yet adverse consequences in cases of misalignment (Mudrick et al., 2019). However, this thesis found that alignments between participants and the activism created additional points of attachment to the sport organization and strengthened their relationship with the stakeholder.

This research builds on the past qualitative sport activism research, which mostly collected social media data unobtrusively in response to protests in sport (e.g., Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019; Yan et al., 2018). While this data edified some of the foundational knowledge in sport activism research – specifically how fans respond to threats (Sanderson et al., 2016), whether athletes' intersectional identities affect spectators' interpretation of activism (Schmidt et al., 2019), and social media's ability to spread awareness of activism (Yan et al., 2018) – only speculations could be made about the underlying phenomena contributing to fans' responses. These scholars recommended that future research explore how social identity threats (Sanderson et al., 2016) and escapism (Schmidt et al., 2019) contribute to fans' experiences of sport activism. As a result, a multiple social identity lens (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1986) and a modified-SDT approach (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013) were employed to assess fans' experiences of sport activism.

Participants' interpretations of sport activism reflected the broader socio-contextual environment – one fragmented and lacking ambiguity (Cendrowicz, 2020). The context served as an important mediating factor influencing participants' sought gratifications and their evaluations of sport activism. The COVID-19 pandemic thwarted participants' needs, altering their sport consumption habits. Specifically, participants increased their sport media usage to obtain supplementary gratifications, primarily escape and socialization, to remedy their frustrated needs, subsequently exposing individuals to more instances of activism. Likewise, participants' interpretations of sport activism varied depending on their context of evaluation. Contexts perpetuated different sets of norms, which allowed participants to justify their attitudes and behaviors toward activism. For example, some participants embedded their opposition to BLM in so-called rationalized thinking – specifying sport should remain separate from politics (Sanderson et al., 2016; Serazio, 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020). This argument allowed participants to protect their social identity by removing opinion-based identities tied to their self-concept from the conversation. In particular, this research found that participants who experienced threats from sport activism – i.e., typically, White and less-recently educated individuals – were also more likely to perceive sport activism as a need-thwarting contextual element that restricted their ability to obtain sought gratifications.

Unsurprisingly, threatened participants viewed sport activism as a more substantial disruption to their consumption. During the height of the BLM protests in the summer of 2020, activism was virtually unavoidable due to its embeddedness within culture. Previously, in the case of Kaepernick, opposing parties stopped watching him and his team as a threat management strategy, yet there was no equivalency once leagues began championing BLM. Threatened individuals who sought escapism through sport were confronted with the source of their threat in

a previously “sacred” place; additionally, this intersection obstructed threatened participants’ interactions with sport and thus, their gratifications obtained through sport. As scholars speculated (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2019; Serazio & Thorson, 2020), the loss of escapism contributed to fans’ aversion of sport activism, although it was only a significant factor for threatened participants.

Social(ization) Identity Threats

While needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) were collectively frustrated during the pandemic (Levine et al., 2022), participants most frequently discussed challenges satisfying their relatedness among the semistructured interviews. Relatedness is the need to experience a sense of belongingness and closeness to others while having that feeling reciprocated (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Although relatedness is an innate psychological need, it is fulfilled socially. To accommodate for these frustrations, many participants used sport as a means of socialization. For some, sport represented a social event, and, for others, it acted as the starting point for further conversations.

Inextricably linked to these conversations was the topic of sport activism. Following the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests, racial discourse had become more normalized and prevalent throughout the media (Hu, 2020). Participants who supported BLM’s inclusion in sport used it as an opportunity to have critical conversations with friends and family, whereas the opposition tended to avoid such discourse as a social identity maintenance strategy. At the core of this phenomenon were two counteracting forces: (1) allies keen on discussing BLM and (2) less enthused individuals who opposed BLM. Allies wanted to fulfill their role by encouraging conversation, yet opinion-based groups championed an opposing perspective on key issues like activism which lacked a “right” answer. Thus, resulting conversations caused threats

rooted in perceived moral superiority based on their willingness (or lack thereof) to confront systems of privilege.

Intragroup social identity threats, experienced from discussions on activism, interfered with individuals' abilities to fulfill their sought relatedness. Counteractively, individuals motivated by relatedness perceived threats to be more severe (Menard et al., 2017). Threats jeopardized groups' functions and the positive outcomes obtained from membership. Groups aim to accentuate ingroup similarities and outgroup differences (Hogg & Reid, 2006), and individuals derive a sense of belonging and social bonding from groups (i.e., relatedness; Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Fink et al., 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, competing stances may be perceived as more severe threats within the broader context of the pandemic, as participants sought relatedness, perhaps explaining other-regarding behavior (i.e., actions informed by external pressure; Martela et al., 2021) such as avoidance and conformity.

Control-Oriented Conformity. By understanding fans' motives within SDT's needs-based contextual-driven approach, participants' responses to sport activism become more apparent. Most participants engaged in avoidance tactics to mitigate ingroup identity threats, but curiously some participants abandoned their viewpoint, temporarily conforming to the dominant group's perspective. Vallerand (2000) explained that members often internalize the values and beliefs of said group, a process known as value transmission. While individuals amended their stance on sport activism in group settings, it was not due to value transmission but rather a conscious control-oriented decision (i.e., other-regarding behavior) to protect their social identity status and the fulfillment of their relatedness need. Other-regarding behavior involves actions undertaken to establish and/or maintain relationships with others (Martela et al., 2021). As individuals sought relatedness during this time, a misalignment between themselves and the

group endangered their relatedness, which many sought to fulfill. Seemingly, the participants who conformed to the group's stance compromised by sacrificing their autonomy for relatedness and positive social evaluation.

Participants exhibited this behavior in social groups that skewed toward social change belief systems and intergroup behaviors. These groups appear difficult or impossible to leave and are typically structured around a superordinate identity or a social category rather than interpersonal relationships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Examples of such groups mentioned by participants included extended family members (i.e., social change skewing) and ingroups structured around a shared interest in sport, usually containing many mutual friends (i.e., intergroup skewing). Participants did not feel the same need to conform to long-term friend groups. It appears that due to deindividuation, the shift from the self to the social (Hornsey, 2008), individuals were more likely to conform to group norms to maintain social harmony. In their meta-analysis, Postmes and Spears (1998) found the phenomenon of conformity to be more prevalent in groups with weaker interpersonal relationships. Evidently, these participants prioritized their relatedness over their autonomy.

Conformity and avoidance (to some degree) are control-oriented, other-regarding behaviors. In these cases, external regulations shape individuals' motives (e.g., reproducing normative values, ingroup members' perceptions; Deci & Ryan, 2000) rather than being self-determined. A few participants that opposed BLM in sport spoke about a perceived majority and a pressure to conform, ostensibly motivated by shame. As discussed in chapter 2a, controlled motivation is less fulfilling and more energy-consuming than autonomous-oriented motivation (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Such actions are not sustainable and negatively impact well-being. Therefore, sport activism, and all that comes with it (e.g., the discussions, the

inescapability, the threats), is expected that avoidance and/or conformity tactics would only facilitate short-term gratifications, as it is ultimately a control-oriented motivation imbued by a dominant external pressure.

Who “Needs” Escape?

Escapism in sport extends past scholars’ (e.g., Funk et al., 2003; Wann, 1995) early definitions, which labelled escape as the desire to “get away.” While participants primarily used escape as a diversion to over- (i.e., stress) and under-stimulation (i.e., boredom) during the pandemic, all six elements of Segrave’s (2000) characteristics of escape in sport (i.e., space, community, purpose, self, time, and order) were mentioned in some form across the semistructured interviews. As a result, escapism is defined differently among various disciplines. For instance, within SDT, escape is viewed as a compensatory behavior in response to need frustrations (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013), not a need. In this case, the individual releases self-control, typically engaging in self-suppression forms (i.e., unhealthier) of escapism such as binge consumption, which results in negative outcomes (Hussain et al., 2021; Moskalenko & Heine, 2003; Stenseng et al., 2012). Likewise, within a social identity approach, the concept of deindividuation could be conveyed as an escape to community. Here, escapism may enable positive self-expansion outcomes (i.e., healthier; Stenseng et al., 2012). Highly-identified fans can derive purpose (e.g., Stander, 2016) and improved self-concepts through belongingness (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991), among other positive benefits from escapism in sport consumption. So, escape is two-fold: self-suppression is typically a diversion from unsatisfactory conditions through sedation (e.g., bingeing media), conversely self-expansion has the opposite effect, it improves the individuals’ well-being and sense of self. Therefore, interference with one’s escape may cause adverse consequences.

Most participants noted that sport activism interfered with their escapism to some degree. Consistent with Serazio & Thorson's (2020) findings, for many, sport acted as a sacred place separate from social issues, and, as a result, the BLM protests reminded them of the very world they were trying to escape. Participants who identified as allies understood that their needs were secondary to the BLM movement. Despite incurring reduced escapism, allies were willing to make this sacrifice. Participants with less complex social identities that opposed BLM leveraged the loss of escapism to justify their opposition. The loss of escape for these individuals may be more nuanced; it is not only interfering with sport as a diversion to the pandemic but also as an escape from the exact social-activism-based discourse they are trying to avoid. As such, sport activism may remind individuals of social identity threats they have received external to sport originating from their stance on activism.

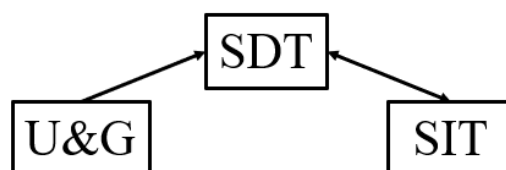
Motivation Convergence. Interest convergence was central to threatened participants' response to sport activism. To re-iterate from chapter 2b, interest convergence considers the motivating factors required to abolish racial injustice (Milner, 2007). Individuals with power, typically those with advantaged identities (i.e., White, male, heterosexual), are often not aware or willing to acknowledge societal inequalities and prejudices (Branscombe et al., 2007; Milner, 2007). To challenge systematic issues, those in power must first recognize their privilege, which may cause identity threats, as seen from some participants' responses to the phrase "Black Lives Matter." Bell (1980) maintained that individuals with advantaged identities will only promote BIPOC interests and achieve racial equality when it converges with their self-interests.

Thus, it is practical to understand individuals' motivations for participating in collective action. Typically, individuals' motives are bound by their personal and collective identities (Radke et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2020). These identities can help explain individuals' motives

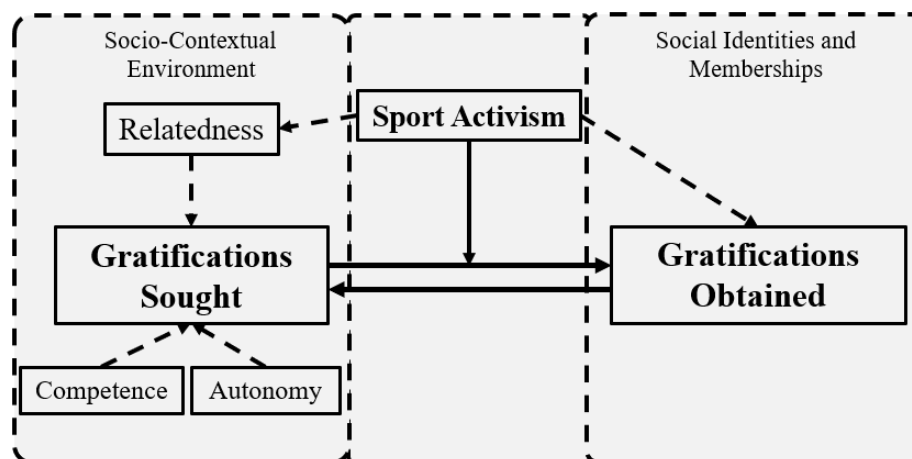
for participation and their sought outcomes. For example, non-black participants with disadvantaged identities demonstrated empathy for the BLM movement stemming from shared lived experiences. Radke et al. (2020) contested that the motives for participation for individuals with advantaged identities are either ingroup-focused, outgroup-focused, or personally-motivated, each of which elicit different behavioral outcomes. Namely, ingroup-focused and personal motives tend to be more self-serving, normative and public acts of support than outgroup-focused motives which prioritize the disadvantaged group. In this thesis' research, participants with advantaged individuals with complex social identity characterizations (i.e., more inclusive) tended to exhibit outgroup-focused motivation. Seemingly individuals with multiple non-overlapping social identities (i.e., high complexity) have lower ingroup identification (Branscombe et al., 2007; Brewer & Roccas, 2002), which is an indicator of outgroup-focused motivation (Radke et al., 2020). These individuals were more willing to relinquish their escapism in support of activism.

Theoretical Implications

Independently, each research article advanced its respective theoretical framework: (1) by implementing a multiple identity approach to understand fans' experiences, and (2) by combining U&G and SDT to form a needs-based contextual approach to explore fans' motives. Altogether, this thesis advances scholars' inclinations (e.g., Kim et al., 2013; Martela et al., 2021) that SIT and SDT can be used complementarily to add context to the mechanisms of relatedness within groups. Moreover, Martela et al. (2021) stated that SIT is particularly relevant in contexts where other-regarding behavior occurs, which participants who used avoidance and conforming tactics in response to threats elicited. U&G is less involved in this macro-relationship between theories (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1*Theoretical framework interaction*

Further, sport activism's influence on fans' experience can be interpreted within Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) revised media feedback loop to reveal a more comprehensive conceptual framework (see Figure 3.2). The changes made reflect the findings in each study. In particular, the socio-contextual environment played an important role informing participants' sought needs. Although the pandemic is a non-normative environment and likely exasperated participants' frustrated needs, it still demonstrates how participants' motives evolved in response to a context. One's needs may similarly alter given situational factors such as stress, mood, and changing life contexts (e.g., moving cities, becoming a parent; Raney, 2006; Weinstein & Ryan, 2013; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the socio-contextual factors when assessing an individual's motives for consuming sport.

Figure 3.2*Integrating sport activism into Palmgreen et al.'s (1980) revised media feedback loop*

The central, self-contained rectangle contains sport activism and its influence on consumers' experiences and relationships with sport, which the multiple directional arrows depict. This research found that activism affected participants' relatedness (both positively and negatively depending on their opinion-based identities), changed the product of sport (i.e., the central arrow pointing downwards), and, thus, altered participants' gratifications obtained based on their social identities and memberships.

As noted above, the relationship between activism and socialization was particularly nuanced, but it generally led to threats. Utilizing SDT and SIT complementarily show that participants sought relatedness although discussions about sport activism often thwarted their relatedness or autonomy via social identity threats. Participants expressed relatedness frustrations due to opinion-based misalignments; many individuals re-evaluated their relationship with the perceived outgroup. Alternatively, participants using avoidance or conformity social identity maintenance strategies exhibited autonomy frustrations. In the latter case, participants behaved according to the group norms to protect their social identity statuses. This response is a form of control-oriented motivation, which is less fulfilling, and facilitates other negative responses (Ryan & Deci, 2000). So, participants who held competing opinion-based identities, yet sought relatedness (due to the pandemic), either sacrificed their autonomy or relatedness outcomes in response to a misaligned group structure.

The disruption of socialization and relatedness was mostly external to the product of sport via conversations pertaining to sport activism, hence the dotted line, whereas activism in sport interfered directly with participants' gratifications of escape, ergo the solid line. Here lies the motivation-interest convergence (Milner, 2007). Activism altered sport as a product, but the magnitude of interference experienced by participants largely depended on their opinion-based

identities and memberships. For instance, sport activism disrupted aligned participants' sense of escape to a lesser degree than non-supporters. Allies were willing to make this concession to fulfil their role as a supporter, whereas the others were not. Seemingly, sport activism interfered with one's escapism regardless of their opinion-based identities, yet social identities and memberships mediated the severity of participants' responses.

The dotted borders represent the overarching interactions and blurry boundaries between each quadrant. This thesis has repeatedly enunciated the importance of acknowledging contextual elements (i.e., the socio-contextual environment, social identities and memberships), and Figure 3.2 is no different. For example, the BLM protests that emerged in sport were in response to George Floyd's death, and a reflection of the current social environment. Juxtaposing this thesis' findings with the past literature on fans' responses to sport activism (e.g., Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Mudrick et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2018), suggests that fans' attitudes and behaviors toward this phenomenon are changing. An explanation for their tolerance sport activism is the exposure and the increasing normativity of activism in society. This research revealed that sport activism can reinforce and strengthen fans' relationships with sport organizations, counteracting Mudrick et al.'s (2019) findings, which can be interpreted as growth attributed to a changing social environment.

Likewise, an individual's social identities and memberships affect their interpretations of sport activism and their interactions within the current social environment. In particular, those who opposed BLM acknowledged a social pressure to conform to the majority, while the "majority" did not feel this pressure. Therefore, an individual's opinion-based identities may inform their perception of the socio-contextual environment as positive or negative. An individual who opposes activism and is fearful of "cancel culture" may perceive the environment

as need-thwarting. Conversely, liberal-minded individuals may be preferential to the current environment. Therefore, the dotted boundaries represent how contextual factors contribute to the experience of sport activism.

Practical Implications

[T]he peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (Mills, 1859/2001, p. 19)

By definition, activism lacks a “truth,” yet participants commonly perceived their preference as the truth. As a result, participants typically designated individuals with opposing stances as the outgroup and discourse between these groups often resulted in social identity threats. The findings indicated that those who opposed BLM were often miseducated on the social cause. They supported racial equality, yet they derived threat from the term, BLM. While education appears to be an obvious solution, it must be implemented strategically and appropriately. To be effective, individuals must seek education autonomously. Therefore, education must overcome several control-oriented factors (i.e., external pressures), such as a pervasive social pressure to conform, social identity threats inducing less complex group structures, and a willingness to make sacrifices (i.e., interest convergence).

To effectively educate those who oppose BLM, and other activism causes, may require sport organizations to educate fans who agree with the message first. The barriers that stem from the social context and intergroup threats requires cooperation from aligned individuals to

overcome, as they are partly responsible for the reproduction of these structures. While research has debunked the notion that liberal-leaning individuals are enforcers of cancel culture – i.e., a term used to describe when individuals with dissenting opinions face backlash (Cook et al., 2021) – this perception still persists, which discourages individuals from engaging in critical discourse. The fear of shame and shame itself are non-productive tools for enacting social change; shame is a controlled motivation, which is non-productive as individuals' autonomy becomes thwarted (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, “cancelling” an individual for their opinion-based identity, may frustrate their relatedness. Frustrations of these needs can prompt oppositional defiance, reinforcing individuals' opposing stances (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). In social identity complexity, Roccas and Brewer (2002) referred to this behavior as individuals' group structures becoming less complex (i.e., less inclusive). Therefore, if sport organizations educate supporters of activism on how to best respond to the opposing group – i.e., by separating the stance from the individual and not shaming or “cancelling” the person – sports organizations can assist in creating an environment tolerant to discourse and perhaps susceptible to being educated. As evidenced, sport organizations must proceed thoughtfully if they intend to educate their fans. Participants' responses in chapter 2b indicated an opportunity for sport organizations to engage in activism.

Outside of opinion-based identity misalignments and threats, activism conflicted with individuals' obtained gratifications. Notably, activism interfered with fans' experiences of escapism and socialization, yet there were equally positive outcomes in moments of alignment. To appease a greater segment of fans, sport organizations could commit resources to activism efforts outside of the boundaries of the game (e.g., charities, volunteering, athlete representation), which would facilitate a greater sense of community as a by-product (see

Chapter 2b). By doing so, this form of sport activism should reduce or eliminate interferences with spectators' sought gratifications (i.e., escape, socialization), while demonstrating their support for a social cause. If implemented properly, fans may perceive this support as more genuine since organizations are acting proactively and not reacting opportunistically.

If a specific cause is not apparent, sport organizations should consider how the activism aligns with their team identity, specifically, the past, present, and place (Delia & James, 2018). Team identity characteristics contributed to how fans perceived teams' and leagues' activism efforts. Similarly, most participants were skeptical of brands' underlying intentions for engaging in activism, and dissonance reinforced their hesitancy. For example, participants view the NFL's BLM efforts as inauthentic because of their history with Colin Kaepernick. Conversely, Toronto Raptors fans believed their team's activism efforts were genuine. They acknowledged Toronto as a diverse and inclusive city, as well as their General Manager, Masai Ujiri's history of activism with the Giants of Africa program. If approached strategically, sport organizations can leverage activism to strengthen current fans' team identities while even attracting new fans.

Limitations

As with all research, this thesis had some limitations. The qualitative data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a highly-unusual context. This research utilized the pandemic as a delimitation by acknowledging its presence and paying considerable attention to the context in both studies. Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2011) noted that studying extreme cases (e.g., need frustrations during the pandemic) may produce more significant and apparent results that can still be generalized to the theoretical framework, which was my aim as an interpretive researcher.

Qualitative research and semistructured interviewing allow for participants to respond in socially desirable manners. Social desirability bias occurs when a participant presents a reality inconsistent with their own, and instead aligns with what is perceived to be socially acceptable (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). The focus of this research required participants to disclose their opinion-based identities (e.g., political ideologies, perspectives on activism), which could provoke social identity threats. To manage this concern, I did not disclose my political beliefs and remained neutral throughout the semistructured interviews. However, I understand that due to the topics of race and activism, participants may have altered their responses to appear more socially acceptable in my presence.

Another limitation was that the qualitative data collected in this research study was primarily soft data. Morse (2017) explains that data ranges from hard to soft on a spectrum. Hard data includes concrete evidence (i.e., demographics, dates, etc.), whereas soft data involves attitudes, values, interpretations, and recollections subject to inaccuracies or distortions (Morse, 2017). Due to the interpretive approach, I was less concerned with collecting descriptive data (i.e., hard data), although I acknowledge that there are flaws to assessing participants' needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) and social identity complexity qualitatively. Counteractively, this thesis utilized several techniques to develop trustworthiness: a pilot study (Malmqvist et al., 2019), reflexive journaling (Rose & Johnson, 2020; Sparkes & Smith, 2014b), data saturation (Tracy, 2019b), and seeking concordance (i.e., utilizing social identity complexity in response to findings; Morse, 2017). Moreover, hard data (i.e., demographic information) provided additional context for interpreting participants' responses to sport activism alongside their intersectional identities.

Invariably, as an interpretive inquirer, I must address my positionality and biases. My biases and preconceived beliefs must first be acknowledged so that they can be reduced. Namely, I am a liberal-minded individual, a supporter of BLM, and a person who experienced the pandemic, it is inevitable that these factors likely contributed to the research design, data collection, and interpretations of the data. To reduce such biases, I included a positionality statement within chapter 2b and engaged in critical reflexive journaling following each interview and throughout the data analyses process. The journal entries included information on my interactions with the participant (e.g., my mood, their perceived mood) and how codes were formed (e.g., which open codes contributed, whether there was a presence of certain phenomena). Moreover, findings were presented as a multi-voice reconstruction to not misconstrue participants' words (Lincoln et al., 2017). While bias in research is unavoidable, these techniques illustrate conscious decisions made to reduce bias and to assist in exploring other individuals' experiences (Gray, 2014).

Finally, as the sample was delimited to a heterogeneous group of highly-identified Ontario sports fans to expand on past US-focused literature, this study did not generalize its findings to an Ontarian or Canadian context. It is worth noting that differences between Ontarian, Canadian, and subsequently, American fans likely exist. Due to the nature of the protests (i.e., kneeling during the national anthem), American sport fans' may have perceived greater threats to their national identity, which was the case for Raikor, a dual citizen. However, it is believed that chapter 2b's process of experience would likely not change; fans would still interpret activism through their opinion-based identities, memberships, and contexts, which would inform their responses to sport activism.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis addresses how fans experience sport activism through their multiple social identities and motivations, yet it is mostly exploratory and foundational. The findings demonstrate the usefulness of both approaches in determining fans' responses to activism in sport. For instance, social identity theory was selected instead of role identity theory – a view where an individual's role defines the basis of identity (i.e., what one does; Stets & Burke, 2000) – as activism is decidedly contentious, and opinion-based identities (e.g., political identities, stance on activism) are typically evaluated socially (McGarty et al., 2009). Although, there is an opportunity for scholars to use role identity theory to explore role conflict when deciding what identity to activate. Participants shared instances of conflict between their fan identity, opinion-based identity, and external roles, which may contribute to conformity and reverse socialization. For example, the expectations of a sport fan differ from that of an ally or a parent. Therefore, future research should examine this phenomenon through a role conflict lens.

Likewise, the U&G-SDT motivation research illustrated the fluidity and contextual nature of fans' motives. It was found that behaviors resulting from the pandemic – i.e., as means to the end (e.g., increased consumption, control-oriented motives; Funk et al., 2012) – were rarely maintained as need-thwarting conditions lessened. Future research should look to validate these findings outside of a need-thwarting environment. There is an opportunity for quantitative research to test and challenge the findings in this exploratory research: e.g., whether control-oriented motives are less likely to develop into long-term consumption habits, day-to-day frustrations influences on motives, and if sport adequately fulfills fans' basic psychological needs.

Consistent with Bunch and Cianfrone's (2022) findings, participants were skeptical of most sport organizations' motivations for activism. Seemingly, fans interpreted organizations' authenticity through the components of team identification: place, past, and present (Delia & James, 2018). Typically, participants disputed sport organizations' financial and social motivations for conducting activism. Conversely, while athletes' activism was largely perceived as authentic, here participants questioned the effectiveness of such measures. Here lies an opportunity for scholars to build a sport activism typology/taxonomy and to determine how inauthenticity affects fans' team identification.

Additionally, future research should investigate whether individuals with advantaged or disadvantaged identities perceive sport organizations' actions differently. Radke et al. (2020) proposed that individuals engage in collective activism for either outgroup-focused motivation (i.e., to improve the status of the disadvantaged group), ingroup-focused motivation (i.e., on the condition that the status of their group is maintained), or personal motivation (i.e., to meet their personal needs). These forms of motivation were interpreted through Nadler and Halabi's (2006) needs-based model of helping, which outlines dependency- and autonomy-oriented help. Dependency-oriented assistance is characterized by providing a complete solution, re-emphasizing power and differential in status (Halabi et al., 2008). Conversely, autonomy-oriented-help empowers the disadvantaged group, allowing them to improve their status independently (Halabi et al., 2008). Research should explore whether segments of advantaged and disadvantaged allies perceive sport organizations' activism differently. For example, an individual holding privileged identities may perceive sport activism as more generously or autonomously-oriented in comparison to a member of the disadvantaged group championing said activism. Taking an approach similar to Schmidt et al. (2019), research could determine whether

the perceived identity of the sender elicits different responses among individuals. For example, the NHL (i.e., viewed as a traditionally-white league) and the Hockey Diversity Alliance (i.e., a diverse athlete-lead movement) commenting on race-based issues may elicit different responses from fans. Such research could provide sport organizations with data to inform their decision-making processes in response to sport activism.

This thesis demonstrated that SDT and SIT can operate harmoniously as complementary frameworks, so, an opportunity exists to examine how one's need for relatedness affects social psychological behaviors (i.e., joining a group, reproducing group norms). For example, if ingroup misalignments lead to social identity threats, then individuals may seek groups and spaces that reinforce their opinion-based identities. Technology and social media have enabled users to expand their networks and join like-minded virtual communities, which may act as an echo chamber reinforcing the dominant perspective and silencing subversive discourse. Therefore, scholars should investigate individuals' motives for joining social media fan communities and how sport activism influences social capital – i.e., individuals' ties and connections to a group (Fenton et al., 2021) – within these groups.

Further, future research should utilize SIT and SDT to examine other-regarding behavior within the context of sport activism. Other-regarding behavior refers to actions undertaken to establish and/or maintain relationships with others rather than acting autonomously. Examining this phenomenon could be accomplished through experimental research and focus groups. Participants would be surveyed about their perceptions on activism in sport prior to the focus group discussion to see whether they alter their answers in response to the group. The focus groups could be formed strategically around specific social identities (i.e., team identification,

opinion-based identities, intersectionality identities) to see whether they cause conformity or alternative other-regarding behaviors among participants.

Conclusion

This thesis and its research questions emerged following the 2020 Summer, which was a period of uncertainty and change. The COVID-19 pandemic was nothing like anyone had previously experienced, and the cancellation of sport legitimized the severity of this situation. Sport consumption habits altered drastically during this time as live sport spectatorship declined while online consumption increased by more than five-fold (Skinner & Smith, 2021). Concomitant to this time were the unjust killings of several Black Americans, which saw the resurgence of the BLM movement into the mainstream media and public discourse. Consequently, once sport returned, BLM and activism messaging were present in its strictly-mediated programming, contributing to the increasingly fragmented society in North America (Cendrowicz, 2020). The context and individuals' social identities were central to the development of this thesis and informed the overall research question of how does sport activism influence highly-identified fans' lived experiences in relation to sport?

Two research studies were completed to ascertain fans' experiences sport activism: (a) understanding how fans' needs form motives and influence behavior and (b) understanding how fans' social identities shaped their experience. Semistructured interviews with a heterogeneous group of 16 highly-identified fans produced detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of each phenomenon. Data were thematically analyzed separately for each article as well as the cumulative discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020; Sparkes & Smith, 2014a). Chapter 2a examined fans' motives from a needs-based contextual perspective to learn why consumption behaviors altered during this period. Most participants used sport as a vehicle to obtain

supplementary gratifications, specifically as a means to escape the pandemic and to socialize. Chapter 2b addressed how individuals' multiple social identities and their structures contributed to their interpretations and responses to brand activism. Here, it was found that White, less-recently educated participants held less complex (i.e., inclusive) social identity group structures, ultimately, contributing to their threats. Further, this research demonstrated the applicability and versatility of an SDT-U&G approach in future sport motivation research. Chapter 3 discussed the findings cumulatively, recognizing that threatened individuals perceived sport activism as a relatedness-thwarting contextual factor that interfered with their sought gratifications, namely escape. Although most participants experienced threats and the loss of escapism, participants' social identities and their complexity determined their tolerance of these adverse outcomes. Aligned, more recently educated individuals were more willing to make these concessions to their needs to fulfill their role as an ally.

This thesis provides several practical and theoretical advancements assisting practitioners and scholars on how to proceed with sport activism. By understanding how individuals' social identities and motivation contribute to experiences of sport activism. If sport organizations wish to incorporate activism into their communications, it must be done genuinely and authentically, or their actions may be perceived unfavorably. First, education surrounding activist movements should be prioritized. Theoretically, education should facilitate more complex social identity structures, reducing the severity of threats and increasing one's tolerance of the outgroup. Practically, if sport fans become more tolerant of activism, the opportunity exists for sport organizations to attract new fans and strengthen their current relationships through such practices.

Chapter IV

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Appendix A

Brock REB Clearance



Brock University
Office of Research Ethics
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Health Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 8/17/2021
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: NARAIN, Michael - Sports Management
FILE: 21-040 - NARAIN
TYPE: Faculty Research STUDENT: Keegan Dalal
SUPERVISOR: Michael Narain
TITLE: The Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW Expiry Date: 8/1/2022

The Brock University Health Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 8/17/2021 to 8/1/2022.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 8/1/2022. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Office of Research Ethics web page at <https://brocku.ca/research-at-brock/office-of-research-services/research-ethics-office/#application-forms>

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Craig Tokuno, Chair
Health Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B

Online posting for data recruitment






Accompanying text:

“Talk sport and have the chance to get paid! By participating in this study, you have the chance to win 1 of 5 \$20 Amazon gift cards (there will be roughly 15 participants total). To qualify, you must be:

- (a) a big sports fan
- (b) from Ontario
- (c) follow a team in the NFL, MLB, NHL, NBA, or MLS
- (d) followed sports closely during the pandemic.

If you watched ~10 games and continued to follow sports during the pandemic – by either following teams and athletes on social media, using online forums like Reddit, or watched sports broadcasts like ESPN or TSN regularly, then you qualify! I want to understand how COVID-19 has affected your fandom – for the better or for the worse. If you qualify as a participant, send me an email, text message or give me a call. You can reach me at kd16hf@brocku.ca or (519) 280-5854.

More information on this research study can be found in the accompanying ‘Letter of Invitation’”

 Participants Needed 	
Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption	
Brock University Research Study	
Who? Ontario sports fans who followed sports closely during the pandemic.	
What? A virtual interview over Microsoft Teams for approximately an hour.	
Purpose? To learn about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted sport fandom.	
If you are interested contact	
 (519) 280-5854	 kd16hf@brocku.ca
Participants will be entered into a draw with a chance to <u>win</u> 1 of 5 \$20 Amazon gift cards ----- Interacting with this post may jeopardize your confidentiality -----	
Department of Sport Management Keegan Dalal, Graduate Student Dr. Michael Naraine, Supervisor mnaraine@brocku.ca	
	
<small>This study has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (#REB 21-040 NARAINÉ)</small>	

Appendix C

Letter of Invitation

TBD

Title of Study: The Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption

Student Principal Investigator: Keegan Dalal, Graduate Student, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Michael L. Naraine, Assistant Professor, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

I, Keegan Dalal, a graduate student from the Department of Sport Management Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled The Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption.

The purpose of this research project is to understand the impact COVID-19 had on sport consumption. Should you choose to participate, you may be asked to talk about your stance on sociopolitical issues entering sport. Additionally, questions may relate to your identity (e.g., political affiliation, team identification).

Interviews will be roughly one-hour interview over Microsoft Teams. Audio and video will be recorded. If you prefer not to have your video recorded please inform the Keegan Dalal. These files will be kept confidential – meaning only the PSI will have access to the video and audio files. These files will be kept securely in a local, password protected folder and they will be permanently deleted following the transcription of your interview.

This research should benefit fans' experiences with sport consumption. If you wish to withdraw from this research study at any point during your participation, please contact Keegan Dalal.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,



Keegan Dalal
Graduate Student
(519) 280-5854
kd16hf@brocku.ca

Dr. Michael Naraine
Assistant Professor
905 688-5550 ext 5189
mnaraine@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board #REB 21-040 NARAINÉ

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic questions for participants in the research study “The Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption”:

To qualify for this study, you need to have watched ~10 sports games during the pandemic and consumed sport every day through alternative forms. Examples include, but are not limited to following teams/athletes on social media, presence on forum-based websites, reading news articles, watching sports broadcasts outside of the match.

1. What gender do you identify as?

☐ male

☐ _____

☐ female

☐ prefer not to answer

2. What is your age?

☐ ____

☐ prefer not to answer

3. What is your race?

☐ African

☐ Indigenous

☐ Asian

☐ Other. _____

☐ Caucasian

☐ two or more. _____

☐ Hispanic

☐ prefer not to answer

4. What is your level of education?

☐ Some high/Secondary school

☐ Master's degree

☐ High/Secondary school graduate

☐ PhD. or higher

☐ Some college/university

☐ Trade school

☐ College/university graduate

☐ prefer not to answer

5. What is your annual household income?

☐ <\$25,000

☐ \$100,000 - \$199,999

☐ \$25,000 - \$49,999

☐ >\$200,000

☐ \$50,00 - \$99,999

☐ prefer not to answer

6. How many children do you have?

☐ ____

☐ prefer not to answer

7. What is your current occupation? (Leave blank if you prefer not to answer)

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

Date: **TBD**

Project Title: **The Implications of COVID-19 on Sport Consumption**

Principal Investigator (PI): **Dr. Michael Naraine, Assistant Professor**
 Department of Sport Management
 Brock University
(905) 688-5550 ext. 5189; mnaraine@brocku.ca

Principal Student Investigator (PSI): Keegan Dalal, Graduate Student
 Department of Sport Management
 Brock University
 (519) 280-5854

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to better understand how COVID-19 influenced sport fandom.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions, to the best of your ability, related to sport consumption during the pandemic and your motivations for watching sport. Participation involves an interview of roughly an hour of your time conducted over Microsoft Teams – a video conference application. The video and audio of our conversation will be recorded through Microsoft Teams.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Possible benefits of participation include changes to improve fans' experiences with sport consumption. There also may be risks associated with participation, specifically socially or psychologically. The interview will be a safe space, but perspectives related to social and political issues may cause some discomfort.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.

Data collected during this study will be stored **offline on an external hard drive owned by the PSI**. Data will be kept for approximately 2 years after which time **the data will be permanently deleted**.

Access to this data will be restricted to the PI, the PSI, lab members under the PI and the PSI's research committee members (i.e., Dr. Nicholas Burton and Dr. Craig Hyatt).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be made available by the PSI. If you are interested in receiving updates in relation to this research study, please contact the PSI via email or text message.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Keegan Dalal using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [insert file #]. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Interview Guide for Pilot Study

Semistructured Interview Questions

Q1: How big of a sports fan are you?

- How often do you watch games?

Q2: When and how did you become a _____/sports fan?

Q3: What is your earliest memory of the team?

Q4: How did the pandemic affect/impact/change your fandom?

- Was it harder to be a fan?
- Did anything change? (e.g., the way you consumed sport?)
- Even in beginning when there was no sport? And when it returned

Q5: How did you feel when _____ league was cancelled? And how did you feel when leagues announced that they would be returning.

Q6: How did you feel about politics and social movements entering sport?

- What do you think is good and/or bad about politics mixing with sport?

Q7: Did you find yourself talking more about politics with the people you typically watch sport with?

- Were you glad to have had/not to have had these talks? Why?
- Did you feel restricted when having these discussions?

Q8: Did activism in sport change/influence the relationships with sport friends? How so?

Q9: Did athlete's activism change how you followed or watched sport?

Q10: Is there an acceptable amount of activism in sport?

- Are we at that point currently?

Q11: Did activism in sport change your opinion/perspective on social issues?

- Do you feel like you need to hold a different public and private opinion?

Q12: Do you consider yourself to be an activist?

Q13: What do you think sport's role in society is?

Q14: Did you find yourself using social media more for sports during the pandemic?

- Which websites?
- What was your role/purpose? (e.g., receive information, interact with others, create content?)

Q15: Did your motivations for watching sport change during the pandemic? How so?

Q16: How do you feel/what are your thoughts on the future of activism/politics and sport?

Q17: Did sport act as a coping mechanism during the pandemic?

Q18: In your perfect world, would activism be in sport?

Q19: Is there anything you would like to add that you did not get the chance to mention?

Appendix G

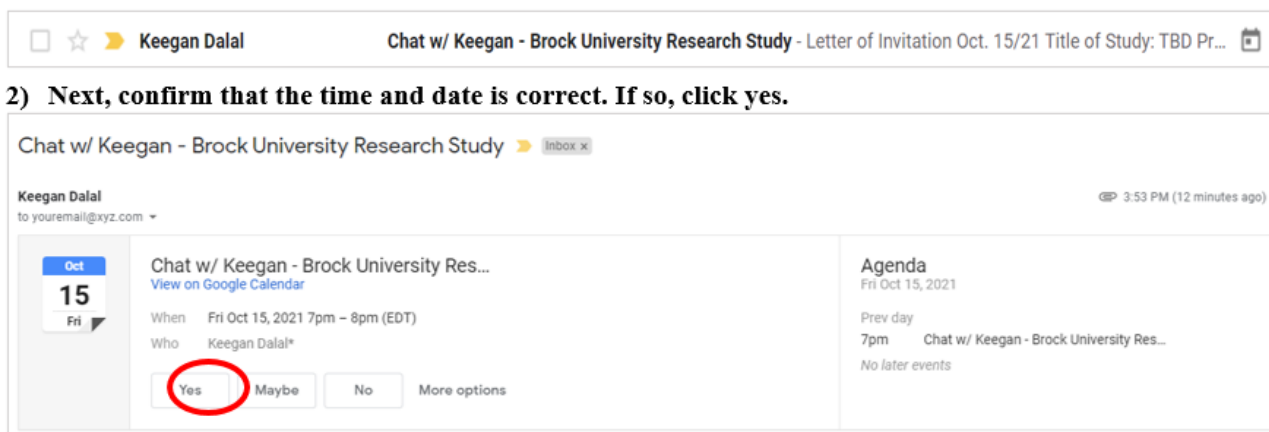
How to Join an MS Teams Call

Thank you for volunteering for this research. For health purposes, all interviews are currently taking place online.

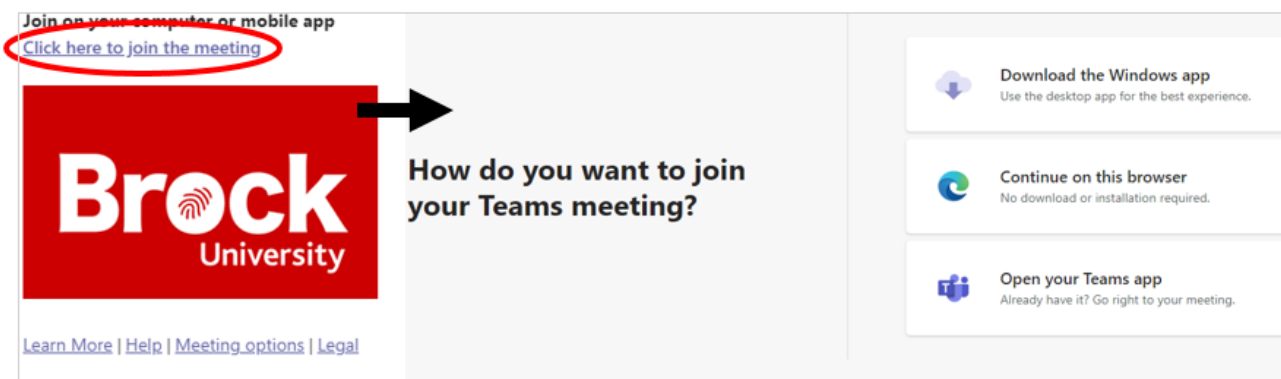
Your interview is scheduled for [day of the week], [month], [day] at [time].

To join a Teams' call, follow these steps:

1) Check your email inbox (you should see something like this):



3) At the bottom of the email there is a link to join the meeting. You will be redirected to this page:
Choose whatever method is most appropriate for you.



IMPORTANT NOTE: Only Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome are compatible for joining through the web browser. Otherwise, you will have to download the app via your computer or phone.

Appendix H

Contingency Plan in the Event of Technical Difficulties

Backup Plan

Ideally, we will use Microsoft Teams for our chat on how COVID-19 has impacted your sport fandom, but in the event of technical difficulties, we will talk over the phone. All of your information will remain confidential in the event of a phone call.

You can reach me at **(519) 280-5854**. This is a domestic number from London, Ontario.

If you prefer that we chat over Microsoft Teams, we can reschedule. I only recommend this option if we are in the beginning of our conversation

Appendix I

Interview Guide

Rapport

We're going to start off easy...

- How big of a sports fan are you?
- What's your earliest memory from being a fan of _____?
- What do you think professional sports role is in society?
 - o What role does sports play for you in your life?

Needs and Motives

Starting with a primer, I want you to think back to the beginning/early parts of the pandemic.... March 13th...Do you remember what you were doing and how you felt when you heard the news that sport was being cancelled?

- How did the **pandemic** impact your social and mental health?
 - o What did you do to try and improve it?
 - o Do you think that the loss of sport impact your social or mental health?
 - When sport returned, did it impact/improve your mental health?
- Did sport become more of a social activity for you during the pandemic?
- Did you find yourself watching more/consuming more sport? Has that continued?
- Did your of fandom change during the pandemic?
- Did you find yourself using different forms of media – like social media or other online forums – for sports during the pandemic?

Activism and Identity

Continuing with sport returning – that same summer there was the George Floyd incident leading to activism entering sport. Activism is defined as taking a stance on a contentious topic with no absolute “right” answer. So, as I say, there is no right answer and everything is confidential, so answer as honestly and true to yourself as possible.

- Do you consider yourself to be an activist? An ally?
- How do you feel about politics and social movements entering sports?
 - o What do you think is good and/or bad about politics mixing with sport?
- Did you find yourself having more conversations about social and political movements with the people you usually watch sport with because of activism in sport?
 - o Were you glad to have these talks? Were they productive?
 - o Did you intentionally avoid these topics? Why?
- Did your perception of anyone in your social circle change because of conversations born out of sport activism?
- Did any of your teams end up posting anything activism related?
- Can you empathize with people who hold perhaps different views?
- Do you find you have to hold a separate private opinion and public opinion on social and political issues?
- Did athlete's activism change how you followed or watched sport?
 - o Did it affect your perception of certain teams or leagues?
- Do you think sport is a place for activism?
- What CAN sport's role be in society?
- Is there anything you would like to add that you did not get the chance to mention?