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## Multiple Identities in Sport Fandom: Balance, Conflict, & Negotiation

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## **Multiple Identities in Sport Fandom: Balance, Conflict, & Negotiation**

Aaron Mansfield

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**MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN SPORT FANDOM:  
BALANCE, CONFLICT, & NEGOTIATION**

A Dissertation Presented

By

AARON C. MANSFIELD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in the partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FEBRUARY 2021

Isenberg School of Management

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I completed this dissertation during the COVID-19 pandemic. In an unprecedented season of social isolation, I reflected on my immense ‘who luck.’ God has graciously saturated my life with remarkable people – family members, friends, colleagues. As they have shaped me, their influence shaped this research.

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The best was marrying my wife. I love you, Elisabeth. Thank you for spending way too much time talking about fandom with me. I am so excited to raise our son together...regardless of whether he cares about sports.

## **ABSTRACT**

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN SPORT FANDOM:

BALANCE, CONFLICT, & NEGOTIATION

FEBRUARY 2021

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Simultaneous to the sport industry's ascent, obesity has become an issue of growing societal concern. Scholars have explored the role of social-psychological identification in both fandom and physical health, but have not yet explored the *intersection* of the two. Throughout life, individuals must negotiate all of their identities, including their attachment to sport teams, yet understanding of role identity within sport management is limited. Likewise, scholars have noted the need for greater illumination of the relationship between fandom and physical well-being.

I address these gaps through three studies. In Study One, I completed semi-structured interviews with individuals who consider both role identities central to their self-concept. Some interviewees suggested the two identities compete for salience, yet others explained that they view the roles as mutually supportive pieces of self. In Study Two, I examined experiences of relevant 'identity work' through autoethnography. I found that I often struggled to balance and integrate my fan identity and health-consciousness, but other central identities and social contexts played lynchpin roles in my experiences. Finally, in Study Three, I surveyed health-conscious sport fans to understand their experiences through a more generalizable lens. I found

fandom is correlated with positive physical health outcomes, yet health-conscious sport fans perceive identity conflict while consuming sport.

In sum, the findings of this dissertation indicate health-conscious sport fans often perceive conflict between these two identities, sensing they are not harmonious – yet this experience is nuanced and contextual, hinging on both individual (i.e., psychological) characteristics and social (i.e., sociological) forces. Directions for sport scholars and the industry are unpacked.



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The sport industry generates nearly \$80 billion in annual revenue (Statista, 2018), positioning it as one of the world's biggest economic movers and fastest-growing industries (Williams & Williams, 2013). Consumers' social-psychological identification with sport entities, such as their favorite teams and players, often serves as the foundation of their financial investments (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Indeed, identification fuels consumer behavior in both sport (McDonald, Karg, & Vocino, 2013) and non-sport (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012) contexts.

Simultaneous to the sport industry's ascension, physical well-being has also become a prevalent subject of discourse. Population health has worsened exponentially in the past century and become of particular concern in recent decades. The World Health Organization (WHO) labeled obesity an 'epidemic' at the turn of the millennium (World Health Organization, 2000). Since this declaration, however, the upward trend of excessive body weight has become even more pronounced, with more than half of the United States population projected to be obese by 2030 (Park, 2019). Many countries are experiencing economic burdens as a result of the growing prevalence of poor physical health (Colditz & Mariani, 2000; Daar et al., 2007).

Weight management is often considered a matter of personal responsibility (Brownell et al., 2010); thus, prejudice against overweight individuals is common (Crandall, 1994).

Individuals perceive individuals of a healthy weight as responsible, entrepreneurial, and moral – and overweight individuals as the inverse (Crawford, 2006; Steim & Nemeroff, 1995).

Nonetheless, a wide body of research has demonstrated health behavior is impacted by culture, context, relationships, and socio-psychological conditioning (e.g., Askegaard, Gertsen, &

Langer, 2002; Puhl & Brownell, 2003). There is more to the equation than willpower (Brownell et al., 2010).

Given the multifaceted nature of obesity, various disciplines have been prompted to reflect upon how they may be helping or hindering their stakeholders' health – contributing to or combating this epidemic (Khan, Choudhury, Uddin, Hossain, & Baur, 2016). Chalip, Johnson, and Stachura (1996) suggested health is one of five legitimations for sport. Further, consistent with George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, and Tihanyi's (2016) suggestion that management research should strive to address broad societal challenges such as health promotion, Chalip (2006) argued that serving public health should be a primary aim of sport-focused research. Indeed, some of the most influential voices in sport management have noted that this discipline is optimally positioned to address the obesity crisis (Chalip, 2006; Zeigler, 2007).

Sport consumer behavior (i.e., fandom) is one of the most well-studied concepts in sport management (Lock & Heere, 2017). Similarly, health behavior has been explored in detail (Caplan, 2013). However, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the intersection of these concepts – to the relationship between sport fandom and physical well-being. As Chalip (2006) suggested, “We know very little about the factors that currently inhibit or that could ultimately foster a stronger contribution to health by sport” (pp. 5-6). Further, Inoue, Berg, and Chelladurai (2015) observed “a lack of interest in the topic (fandom and physical health) among sport management scholars,” and argued that “it is only appropriate that sport management scholars get involved in studying the relationships between spectator sport and population health” (p. 715). I aim to answer these scholars' calls with this dissertation.

Addressing multiple theoretical gaps in the sport literature is the impetus for this work. First, greater insight into the relationship between fandom and physical health outcomes is



needed. However, there is also a need to examine the manifestations of role identity negotiation in sport fandom (Lock & Heere, 2017), particularly as it pertains to multiple psychologically central role identities (Mansfield, In Press). Scholars have devoted significant resources to understanding social identity in fandom (i.e., team/group identity), but understanding of *role* identity – and the negotiation of multiple identities – is lacking (Lock & Heere, 2017).

There has not yet been an exploration of the overlap between fan identity and health identity, two role identities that may coexist within an individual's salience hierarchy (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Many different identities influence the extent to which individuals engage in physically healthy and unhealthy behaviors (Tarrant & Butler, 2011), and the social-psychological identification inherent to sport fandom may have a similar impact. Likewise, other valued role identities often influence the extent to which individuals engage in fandom (Hyatt, Kerwin, Hoeber, & Sveinson, 2018; Lock & Heere, 2017), and health may have a similar impact.

Given these theoretical gaps and that sport scholars have consistently emphasized the need for empirical sport research to strive to contribute to positive public health outcomes (see Chalip, 2006; Inoue et al., 2015; Zeigler, 2007), this dissertation is needed. Thus, the purpose of this project is threefold:

1. To illuminate the 'identity work' of health-conscious sport fans;
2. To expand understandings of role identity (i.e., identity theory) in sport fandom;
3. To highlight how the sport industry is currently serving, and could optimally serve, fans' physical well-being.

The following section includes a review of the theoretical literature that frames this work – including identity theory, fan identity, and health identity – as well as a synthesis of studies related to the subject matter (i.e., the Effects of Fandom on Well-Being; Sport Fandom and

Health). I then detail the three studies I completed, two of which were qualitative (and focused on meaning and lived experiences), with the third quantitative (and aimed at understanding individuals' experiences of health-fan identity work on a broader scale). For each study, I share the research method, data collection process, data analysis procedure, findings, and theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and directions for future work. I conclude this dissertation by unpacking its significance, demonstrating how this project contributes to the sport management literature and sport industry.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Identity Theory

##### *2.1.1 Role Identity and the Salience Hierarchy*

Dating back to the works of James (1890), Cooley (1902), and Mead (1934), psychologists and sociologists have observed that the various roles which an individual occupies in society (e.g., spouse, employee, volunteer) hold varying levels of influence upon his/her understanding of self (i.e., self-definition). This idea spurred identity theory, which was pioneered by the sociologist Stryker (1968, 1980, 1987). According to identity theory, each individual possesses within his/her self-concept ‘multiple selves’ (McCall & Simmons, 1978), and these pieces of self become activated in different settings depending upon the social context – in other words, people are capable of transforming. For example, an individual may act like an employee while meeting with her workplace supervisor, like a mother while preparing dinner for her children, and like a sport fan while watching her favorite soccer team compete at the stadium with fellow fans.

Thus, each individual possesses a ‘situational self’ (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) and ‘working self-concept’ (Markus & Kunda, 1986). One’s present role (i.e., active identity, or the ‘hat’ being worn) and his/her understanding of self both fluctuate based on stimulus cues in the environment and on which symbolic interactions are present (Burke, 1980, Burke, 1991; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Mead, 1934). For example, different social connections lead to different manifestations of fandom (Katz, Mansfield, & Tyler, 2019), while the relationship between health and self-identity is moderated by the context presently accessible (Oyserman, Fryberg, & Yoder, 2007). Thus, for role identities, setting is essential.

According to identity theory, one's roles are organized in terms of prominence and likelihood of activation through the 'salience hierarchy' (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Envision such a structure as a pyramid. The identities at the top of this hierarchy are most prone to become salient, and also play the most foundational roles in one's self-definition (Callero, 1985; Stryker, 1968). When different situations arise, an individual will consult this hierarchy to determine which identity should become activated. One's most valued identities hold the highest positions in the individual's salience hierarchy, are most likely to be activated in different social contexts, and most strongly influence decision-making (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). These identities of high self-ascribed value are often described as being central to an individual's self-concept.

### *2.1.2 Centrality*

Rosenberg (1979) described the idea of 'ranking' one's most important identities as 'psychological centrality,' encompassing the reality that some identities are pivotal to an individual's self-concept and others are more peripheral. The more central an identity, the more it is theorized to influence behavior and self-definition. Similarly, Heiss (1981) described this idea as 'role commitment,' whereby individuals are devoted to viewing some identities (e.g., husband) as a constant piece of self, but are less committed to the sustainment of others (e.g., youth soccer coach). The logic is clear: some roles simply hold more importance to an individual than others. Individuals, however, may possess varying views on the same social role; one youth soccer coach may not consider this identity to be very important, but for another, this may be a central identity.

Individuals' actions are fueled by the "the labels people use to describe themselves" (Biddle, Bank, & Slavings (1987, p. 326). This is a circular relationship: behaviors also impact

self-identity (Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988). In other words, behavior shapes identity, and identity also spurs behavior.

Psychologically central identities hold immense influence in the process of self-evaluation. Self-esteem is largely contingent upon successful performance in one's most valued role identities (Callero, 1985; Thoits, 1991). If an individual fails to perform up to self-standards in a peripheral role identity, this failure may not substantively influence his/her self-esteem; coming up short in a central domain, however, could be crippling. As James (1890) famously observed:

I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek. My deficiencies there give me no sense of personal humiliation at all. Had I 'pretensions' to be a linguist, it would have been just the reverse. (p. 309)

Gecas (1982) suggested that salience and psychological centrality (i.e., role commitment) are conceptually equivalent, while Reed (2002) argued the two share much in common but occasionally diverge. Identity theorists have long debated this matter (Reed, 2002). Though the salience/centrality debate continues among academics, consensus holds that both concepts – as well as related terms such as 'importance' and 'prominence' (see Callero, 1985; McCall & Simmons, 1978) – refer to the relevance and value attributed to a role within an individual's self-concept. As Stryker and Serpe (1994) outlined, "the higher the commitment, the higher the identity salience *and* psychological centrality of identities" (p. 27).

As life progresses, one's sense of identity develops (Crites, 1978); role identities come into focus over time (Super, 1957). Identity experiences differ between individuals, even when they find themselves in similar circumstances. For example, Lally and Kerr (2005) found many collegiate student-athletes who invest heavily in their athlete identity at the start of college and

up discarding this identity entirely, instead focusing on their student identity; Adler and Adler (1991), on the other hand, illustrated how many athletes remain focused on their athletic selves throughout college and downplay their student identity.

One's most valued role identities – particularly those self-conceptions that prove to be stable over time (see Epstein, 1973; Mead, 1934) – serve as a guide for behavior. Thus, role identity scholars often use past role-specific behavior to predict future behavior (Ervin & Stryker, 2001). For example, Stryker and Serpe (1982) found a relationship between individuals' religious role identity and the amount of time they spent engaged in religious activities. Analogously, Callero (1985) examined blood donors, finding that role identity salience, self-definition as a regular blood donor, and relationships contingent upon this role identity all had positive effects upon the degree to which individuals engaged in blood donation. Consistent with the final point, Brewer (2001) argued that one's role identities are fundamentally based upon the *relational* components of self-definition (i.e., the social piece of one's social-psychological self-concept).

### *2.1.3 Socialization*

Social structures play a key role in identity salience (Kleine & Kleine, 2000). Indeed, socialization has long been viewed as an essential component of identity theory (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The idea that individuals discover who they are through their interactions with others is rooted in the symbolic interactionist perspective of Mead (1934), who noted that “the structure of the complete self is thus a reflection of the complete social process” (p. 144).

Relationships matter. An individual's social connections hinge largely on his/her perceived role identities (Bolton, 1981; Stryker, 1981). Likewise, identities gain salience when they are associated with a larger number of social relationships (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Indeed,

role identities prove to be useful for expressing oneself to others and as a heuristic for helping individuals make sense of the connections in their lives (Callero, 1985). Thus, when individuals converse, they engage in identity negotiation (Swann, 1987). Conversational partners aim to achieve a ‘working consensus’ of the identity each individual should occupy in the interaction (Goffman, 1959) – or to discern ‘who is who.’

#### *2.1.4 Identity Negotiation*

Given humans’ strong need for psychological coherence (Guidano & Liotti, 1983), individuals are driven to verify their self-views, regardless of whether such views are positive or negative (see Schroeder, Josephs, & Swann, 2006). This reality is illustrated by self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), which asserts that individuals are motivated to convince ‘perceivers’ to see them in the same way they see themselves (Swann, 1987). Given that this may spur a ‘battle of wills’ (Swann & Ely, 1984), individuals often create social environments known as ‘opportunity structures’ in order to nourish and promote their self-views (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Thus, individuals seek out relationships with like-minded others; for example, individuals who are more certain of their self-conceptions gravitate toward romantic relationships with others who are also high in self-certainty (Pelham & Swann, 1989). Such a connection is viewed as ideal because it allows both individuals in the relationship to promote their self-views and maintain their sense of self, given that the results of identity negotiation tend to be lasting (Goffman, 1959; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1964).

Scholars have suggested shared role identities lead to more positive evaluations of others (see Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identity negotiation, however, often occurs subconsciously, or in intermittent moments of consciousness (Swann, 1987). The manifestations of such negotiation will, over time, shape one’s sense of self and behaviors (Swann & Bosson, 2008). As

Hogg et al. (1995) noted, “People behave in ways that are consistent with their role identities as a consequence of reducing or avoiding incongruity between internalized identity standards and others’ perceptions of self” (p. 263). Nonetheless, individuals must reconcile their desire for self-congruity with changing social environments and different demands across their multiple identities. Individuals may also attempt to integrate their multiple identities.

#### *2.1.5 Identity Integration*

Since the evolution of psychology (see James, 1890), researchers have explored self-identity across numerous academic disciplines (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011), and sport is no exception. Likewise, as scholars from other disciplines have increasingly explored multiple identities (e.g., Cooper, 2011), so too have researchers within sport management (e.g., Lock & Funk, 2016).

In preliminary explorations of identity, insufficient attention was paid to the interrelation between multiple identity domains (Syed & McLean, 2016). Erikson (1950, 1968) provided the first theory of identity integration, which represents “a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity” (1968, p. 19). In other words, integration represents individuals’ efforts to pull multiple pieces of self into a cohesive whole, working in harmony, despite changing life experiences and contexts. Successful integration is considered essential for proper identity development (Waterman, 2015), and the lack thereof – a perceived incongruity between pieces of self – can cause psychological harm (see Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, Hallett, & Marcia, 2003).

Individuals often do not feel compelled to integrate all identities, but only those considered meaningful to the respective individual (Frisen & Wangqvist, 2011; Van Hoof & Raaijmakers, 2002). When central identities cannot be integrated, individuals often sense these identities exist in conflict (Syed & McLean, 2016).



### *2.1.6 Identity Conflict*

Though individuals are driven to maintain a stable self-image (Swann, 1987), identities change as life circumstances and environmental stimuli change. Accordingly, the salience hierarchy is dynamic (Stryker & Burke, 2000). When two identities come into competition with each other, individuals engage in ‘identity work,’ which is “people being engaged in the forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising (of) the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Identity theorists posit that, though the pieces of self reflect the dynamic nature of life, one’s self-concept is composed into an organized whole (see Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Thus, Callero (1985) called for scholars to investigate “how all role-identities function together as a single structural unit” (p. 214). In other words, it is incumbent upon scholars to examine both the parts and the whole of the salience hierarchy.

Conflicting demands between identities may manifest in “a search for ways of actively dealing with identity” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1167). For example, tensions can emerge between one’s fan identity and the other valued role identities within the individual’s self-concept (Lock & Heere, 2017).

For dedicated sport consumers, fandom plays a key role in the salience hierarchy. It is a central role, a foundational component of such individuals’ self-concept (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003). To understand why this identity holds such value to sport spectators, it is important to trace the roots of scholarly explorations of fandom.

## **2.2 Fan Identification**

### *2.2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Fandom*

Fandom has been around for as long as athletic competition itself (Osborne & Coombs, 2013). Gantz (1981) explored sport viewership motives and determined that a fan's psychological identification with a team led to increased consumption, a finding that has since been validated by numerous scholars (see Heere & James, 2007; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003). Such a connection offers a substantive explanation for why many sport fans consume related products and services – they see themselves within sport entities (e.g., teams, players) and these entities within themselves (Heere, 2016). For such individuals, fandom dictates both behavior and self-understanding (Mahony & Howard, 1998); conversely, for consumers with low or moderate identification, such an identity is peripheral (see Funk & James, 2001; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, et al., 2000). Fandom matters much more to some fans than it does to others.

Scholars have conducted many examinations of individuals' identification with sport entities since Gantz's (1981) watershed finding, and knowledge of this construct solidified on a theoretical level in the 1990s. Its academic underpinnings coalesced through the pioneering sport psychology work of Daniel Wann and Nyla Branscombe (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993). In the decade that followed, sport consumer behavior and marketing researchers expanded theoretical understandings of why fans develop psychological connections and how such connections influence behaviors and self-understandings. For example, Fink, Trail, and Anderson (2002) highlighted how a fan's inclination toward vicarious achievement – which they defined as “the need for social prestige, self-esteem and sense of empowerment that an individual can receive from their association with a successful team” (p.

198) – largely explains variance in his/her degree of identification (i.e., how ‘big of a fan’ the individual may be).

Many individuals are socialized into fandom by their families (James, 2001) and become supporters between the ages of 6 and 15 years old (Kolbe & James, 2000). Their identification is bolstered by how early in life this association is formed and how many social agents reinforce it (James, 2001). Further, many individuals come to associate their fandom of a given team with related external identities, such as a place identity (e.g., a city, state, or university), which enhances their emotional connection to the team (Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011; James, 2001). For example, if an individual identifies with not only the Bruins (National Hockey League) but also the city of Boston, that individual’s degree of fandom is often strengthened (see Mansfield, Delia, & Katz, 2019). Thus, socialization and related external identities play key roles in fandom (James, 2001; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010).

For many, fandom develops into a central identity, playing a key role in one’s understanding of *who I am* (Kolbe & James, 2000). Fandom often grows over time, as individuals gradually escalate their identification (Katz & Heere, 2016; Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012), becoming ‘bigger’ fans and more psychologically connected to their favorite sport entities over time. However, fans must constantly adjust their attachment to the many identities within their self-concept; scholars have noted that fan identification, like the salience hierarchy in general (see Stryker & Burke, 2000), is dynamic and always in flux (e.g., Delia & James, 2017; Funk & James, 2001; Lock et al., 2012; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Indeed, individuals negotiate all of their identities, including their fan identification, based on life circumstances, changing demands, and new social contexts and environmental stimuli (see Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Reed, 2002; Tarrant & Butler, 2011).

Some individuals' fandom becomes so ingrained on a social-psychological level that it comes to feel like an inextricable piece of self (Kolbe & James, 2000). Highly identified individuals care deeply about their favorite team's on- and off-field performance (Delia, 2015; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Wann, Waddill, Polk, & Weaver, et al., 2011), spend significant time and money on related products and services (Madrigal, 1995), purchase season tickets regardless of performance (McDonald et al., 2013), rejoice over rival teams being defeated (Havard, 2014), and may even buy a formal stake in the team (Cocieru, Delia, & Katz, 2018). Fans with high self-attachment come to experience deep and widely varying emotions as a result of the respective team's fortunes (Duquin, 2000).

The most committed fans often evaluate the value of their identity and their self-worth based on the team's success or failure (Delia, 2015; Heere & James, 2007). Such individuals are a "fan of the team, involved with the team, concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves" (Branscombe & Wann, 1992, p. 1017). Thus, a positive relationship exists between fans' identification and self-esteem (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005).

The strength of fans' attachment to the team influences their behavioral activity level (Shapiro, Ridinger, & Trail, 2013). Nonetheless, DeSarbo and Madrigal (2011) examined measures such as game attendance and merchandise purchasing and concluded that, even among the most loyal sport consumers, behavioral expressions of fandom vary greatly. Though fandom has been clearly demonstrated to impact behaviors and self-understandings, scholars have long disagreed about the most appropriate theoretical foundation for inquiries pertinent to identification in fandom.

### *2.2.2 Identity Theory versus Social Identity Theory*

As the sport industry has gained prominence and theoretical understandings of fandom have coalesced, scholars have often explored this concept through the lens of either social identity theory (i.e., social group identity; see Tajfel & Turner, 1979) or, less commonly, through identity theory (i.e., individual-level identity; see Stryker, 1968). However, important distinctions between the two frameworks have often been overlooked; the two theories have often been conflated in fandom research. Scholars have suggested these theories are meant to occupy parallel – yet different – lanes (Hogg et al., 1995). Thus, such an oversight has created theoretical inconsistencies (see Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), as well as confusion over which framework should be applied for related inquiries, resulting in an ‘identity crisis’ in the sport academy (Lock & Heere, 2017).

Trail, Anderson, and Lee (2017) suggested the scale developed by Trail et al. (2000), though originally positioned within social identity theory, instead aligns better with identity theory. Trail et al. (2017) mirrored the suggestion of Lock and Heere (2017) that theoretical issues had arisen in the fandom literature as a result of confusion over identity theory and social identity theory. However, the positioning of Trail et al. (2017) may have amplified such issues. Though these scholars suggested role identity “represents how important being a fan of a particular team is to that individual” (p. 30), fandom of a particular team (i.e., social group) aligns more closely with the tenets of social identity. Indeed, as Trail and James (2015) noted, social identity is indicative of “identification with a collectivity or social category and (is) focused on category-based identities (e.g., Black or white, Christian or Muslim)” (p. 58). Fandom of a team represents a collectivity, whereas fandom of sport (broadly) should be understood by scholars as a role identity (Lock & Heere, 2017). Further, the scale developed by

Trail et al. (2017) explicitly includes a specific team in all measures (e.g., “I am likely to support the (team name) football team in the future”).

In concluding their review of the extant fandom literature, Lock and Heere (2017) highlighted the pros and cons of both the identity theory and social identity perspectives. Thus, they called for scholars to carefully consider the differences between the two theoretical frameworks when designing studies pertinent to sport fandom. They concluded that each approach is “well suited to certain problems” (p. 5), and suggested that studies centered on an individual’s various identities (i.e., one’s role identities, such as *sport fan*) should draw on identity theory, whereas studies centered on *group* identity – and the related effects upon individuals’ beliefs and behaviors – should instead build upon social identity theory.

These guidelines echo the suggestions of Hogg et al. (1995), who outlined the differences between the two social-psychological theories and noted that identity theory is better positioned for “analysis of the impact of chronic identities on (mostly individualistic) outcomes” and excels in “its emphasis on interpersonal social interactive contexts” (p. 267). On the heels of a literature review of symbolic interactionism in sport fandom and an examination of the initial formation of fandom, Jacobson (2003) concluded that both role identity and social identity influence behavior, given fandom’s positioning as both an internalized (i.e., self-focused) and public (i.e., others-focused) identity. In sum, both frameworks are relevant for inquiries of fandom, but scholars have suggested the two should not be viewed as equivalent. Consistent with these perspectives, this dissertation is grounded in identity theory.

In recent years, sport scholars have shown increasing interest in exploring the relationship between multiple identities. For example, Graham and Dixon (2014) conducted a comprehensive literature review on fathers serving as sport coaches. These scholars, though not

explicitly leveraging identity theory (instead, they used family systems theory), examined the interaction between these two role identities. Hyatt et al. (2018) studied ‘reverse socialization’ in sport fans who are parents, noting that children often lead their parents to develop new fan affiliations. Mansfield (In Press) examined new parent sport fans adjusting to the major life change and identified two groups: ‘Maintainers,’ who responded to the introduction of a central new role identity by maintaining their fan identity; and ‘Modifiers,’ who responded by de-escalating their fandom. In sum, however, knowledge of role identity in the sport literature is lacking (Lock & Heere, 2017).

Investigating the relationship between role identification as a sport fan and as a health-conscious individual is the premise of this dissertation. The present work, however, is far from the first examination of the relationship between sport fandom and individuals’ well-being.

### **2.3 Effects of Fandom on Well-Being**

As Lee, Cornwell, and Babiak (2013) noted, sport has long been noted as a powerful vehicle for promoting social well-being, but “there has been little theoretical and empirical evidence to substantiate these claims” (p. 37). Indeed, whether sport promotes positive social outcomes remains up for debate (Zeigler, 2007).

Scholars long ago argued that investment in sport may yield negative effects for consumers. When Zillmann, Bryant, and Sapolsky (1979) published their influential review on fandom, they noted “the discussion of spectatorship amounts to a nearly universal condemnation of the phenomenon” (p. 246). Indeed, many early sport scholars believed fandom to be a “waste of time” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). However, much remains unknown about how fandom impacts individuals’ overall well-being. Following a systematic meta-analysis of 119 studies on fans, Kim, Magnusen, Kim, and Lee (2019) observed that, although examinations of well-being

are “growing in popularity in the broader study of management and marketing, there is a noticeable absence of theoretical exploration and a parallel lack of empirical investigation about how sport spectating can help enhance the well-being of sport fans and communities” (p. 130).

Countering the ethos of early sport scholarship, Wann (2006) developed the Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model, which suggests fandom facilitates social connections that yield well-being effects. Fandom is a social activity (Holt, 1992), and it leads to more frequent interaction with friends (Delaney & Keaney, 2005). Further, social activities are linked to positive psychological effects (see Eastman & Land, 1997; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Network embeddedness through fandom can facilitate feelings of emotional support (Katz et. al, 2019). Team identification appears to be more closely linked to well-being than general sport fandom (Wann, Dimmock, et al., 2003; Wann et al., 2004), suggesting it is beneficial to identify with an ingroup (i.e., to invest one’s spectatorship resources into a focal team, which promotes community between fans sharing the group identity).

Consistent with early sport scholars’ beliefs, however, a mounting body of scholarship on fans has also demonstrated fandom can yield negative effects. Indeed, a growing literature has focused on the downsides of fandom. Research has linked fandom to laziness (Meier, 1989), spectator violence and aggression (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999; King, 2001; Wann et al., 2005), desire to cheat (Wann, Hunter, Ryan, & Wright, 2001), rioting (Lanter, 2000), addiction (Quirk, 1997), and even depression (Wann, Friedman, McHale, & Jaffe, 2003).

Banyard and Shevlin (2001) examined 65 fans of two relegated English Premier League teams to understand the relationship between team failure and psychological distress, surveying these fans within two weeks of the given season’s conclusion. These scholars found a significant degree of distress – a degree similar to what has been reported by individuals surviving natural



disasters and physical threats. Thus, the psychological impact of sport fandom on highly identified individuals is far from trivial. The negative outcomes of sport fandom are often related to one's *degree* of fandom with the given team; as Zillman et al. (1979, p. 256) observed, "the spectator's disposition toward a player or a team appears to determine the degree to which he or she will enjoy or deplore great and poor play."

Larkin (2017) illustrated how team identification can foster collective narcissism. Indeed, individuals can become narcissistic about group identities (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) in addition to their own identities (Thomaes, Bushman, De Castro, & Stegge, 2009), though an individual could be narcissistic about one and not the other (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Highly identified fans also 'blast' outgroup members (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980) and view their fellow supporters as special and unique (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Though sport fandom appears to boost self-esteem and mental well-being through relationships in some circumstances (Wann, 2006), it could also foster an unhealthy desire to *constantly* boost self-esteem, a classic trait of narcissism (Baumeister & Vohs, 2011). Narcissism spawns a number of undesirable traits, such as entitlement, egotism, and insecurity. The fragile, collective sense of the ingroup can be vulnerable to any challenges that threaten the group identity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Likewise, the emotionally charged atmosphere of sport fandom can have negative effects. For example, White, Katz, and Scarborough (1992) found a significant relationship between the outcome of American football games and the frequency with which women are admitted to emergency rooms due to being assaulted by males.

Given the wealth of compelling literature demonstrating both the benefits (see Wann, 2006) and downsides (see King, 2001) of fandom, it is clear that the effects of fandom vary based on the context. Lee et al. (2013) suggested some forms of engagement with sport provoke

positive outcomes and some provoke negative outcomes. Likewise, Chalip (2006) argued that many effects of sport are situationally dependent, varying from consumer to consumer.

A wide body of scholarship has contributed to the growing understanding of this issue. However, though sport scholars have devoted significant attention to evaluating the social and psychological effects of fandom, work examining fandom and *physical* health is, by comparison, limited.

## **2.4 Sport Fandom and Health**

The WHO (2003) states there are three categories of well-being: physical, mental, and social. While the latter two have been explored extensively in the sport literature (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, 2006), work pertinent to the former is limited. This is despite Chelladurai's (1992) suggestion that 'consumer health/fitness' should be a core dimension of sport management.

Inoue et al. (2015) conducted a frequency analysis of the extant scholarly sport literature related to physical well-being from 1990-2014. These scholars observed "a lack of interest in the topic among sport management scholars," and argued that "it is only appropriate that sport management scholars get involved in studying the relationships between spectator sport and population health" (p. 715). Several years later, the same group of authors (Inoue et al., 2019) noted that interest in this domain since their previous publication had increased, but concluded that work specifically on the physical well-being of *fans* remains limited.

Inoue, Sato, and Nakazawa (2018) analyzed the relationship between live sporting event attendance and self-rated health, a robust mortality risk predictor. These scholars collected national surveys in Japan at four points over 12 years (2000, 2004, 2006, and 2012), finding a positive correlation between such attendance and perceived physical well-being. In fact, those

who had attended a live sporting event within the past year self-rated their health 33% higher than those who had not. The scholars thus theorized that any potential short-term negative effects of fandom (e.g., the stress of the game, consuming unhealthy foods while at the venue) were offset by the long-term positive effects (e.g., emotional support, social connections). They noted, however, that multiple factors specific to Japan may have impacted this relationship, calling for future researchers to examine the relationship between sport spectatorship and health in different contexts.

Similarly, Lau et al. (2015) examined the impact of the 2006 World Cup on Hong Kong males, conducting two phone surveys separated by one month. These researchers observed positive emotional changes among participants as a result of the tournament, which afforded opportunities for socialization. However, they also found an uptick in engagement in unhealthy dietary habits, such as eating fast food or frequently eating snacks, following the soccer tournament. Thus, these scholars suggested sporting events and public health have a “double-edged (both positive and negative) relationship) (p. 1982).

The review of Inoue et al. (2015) included 20 studies that examined the linkage between sport spectatorship and engagement in unhealthy habits and behaviors (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption, gambling), and 16 such studies provided conclusions indicating sport spectatorship increases the likelihood of consumer engagement in unhealthy practices. Indeed, prominent sport scholars have suggested fandom may be detrimental to one’s physical health (Zeigler, 2007). Nonetheless, Lee et al. (2013) theorized that “it may be possible for spectators to gain appreciation for the relationship between sport and health through viewing” (p. 28). Consistent with these scattered findings, scholars have argued the impact of fandom upon consumer health

is contextually dependent, varying based on design and implementation (Berg, Warner, & Das, 2015; Chalip, 2006).

Health-related activities are one of the primary vehicles for corporate social responsibility in sport (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Berg, Warner, and Das (2015) conducted a case study of community physical activity programs tailored to combat obesity. They found that (1) hedonic rewards and (2) the value of socialization were vital benefits experienced by participants, indicating the need to emphasize such components rather than merely physical health or appearance when promoting health programs through sport. Similarly, Rowe, Shilbury, Ferkins, and Hinckson (2013) proposed a conceptual framework to provide sport scholars with direction for encouraging participation in sport.

Priest, Armstrong, Doyle, & Waters (2008) conducted a database search to understand research on policy interventions to promote health through sport organizations. They did not find any examples of an intervention with a measurable positive impact and concluded any related evidence was anecdotal. Hills, Walker, and Barry (2019) examined the relationship between sport organizations and physical health promotion through the prism of shared value (Kramer & Porter, 2011), emphasizing both social and economic outcomes. Hills et al. (2019) concluded that “sport managers can effectively promote health when the professional sport organization is concurrently attempting to deliver social and business value” (p. 126). Further, their findings indicated sport-sponsored physical activity programs create greater financial outcomes for the organization than health outcomes for the participants. Likewise, other scholars (e.g., Murphy & Bauman, 2007; Weed et al., 2015) have contributed sport research focused on physical activity outcomes. However, many individuals view sport as a means of entertainment to be consumed passively rather than as a venue for active participation (Lim et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence for a relationship between fandom and physical well-being, largely published in disciplines outside of sport management, is mixed. For example, fans' heart rates rise during sporting events, which mimics the effects of a cardiovascular workout but also increases the risk of individuals experiencing a heart attack (Waters & Nattel, 2017). Kloner, McDonald, Leeka, and Poole (2009) examined death rates among fans following their favorite team's success or failure in the Super Bowl, concluding the negative emotion and stress of a loss may have explained increases in cardiovascular and total deaths. Additionally, sport may inspire activity; for example, 16% of French viewers of the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games felt stirred by the events to exercise (Lardinois, 2014). Such boosts in motivation to exercise, however, appear to be fleeting (Hammond, 2016). It seems viewing a tremendous athletic achievement may spur you to go for a run tomorrow, but it likely will not impact your behavior in a month's time.

It is also important to consider food offerings at live sporting events. In 2013, the Melbourne Cricket Ground sold more than 300,000 meat pies, 95,000 jelly doughnuts, and 40,000 pizzas (Rolfe, 2014). Ireland and Watkins (2009) conducted focus groups with season-ticket holders of an English Premier League team, separating these groups by gender. They found a "high level of dissatisfaction with the food and drink supplied" (p. 682); female fans in particular desired healthy options. The female fans in this study felt alienated by the 'masculine mentality' of live sport consumption, and felt high-quality and healthy food "should be part and parcel of the event of the day" (p. 684). Participants also expressed concerns about the lack of healthy options to feed children. Indeed, the foods typically served at sport venues are high in caloric content (Platkin, 2006; Zimmer, 2009). For example, Yankee Stadium vendor Johnny Rockets offers burgers and vanilla milkshakes that contain over 1,000 calories apiece (Johnny Rockets, 2009).

Sukalakamala, Sukalakamala, and Young (2013) examined college students' perspectives on food and beverage offerings at sport venues. They found these younger consumers – who attended an average of nine sporting events per year – were dissatisfied. Participants were critical of the variety, price, quality, and healthfulness of the options provided to them; but their biggest concern was the lack of health. In general, sport consumers' food intake at live events mirrors the consumption of fast food patrons (Dumanovsky, Nonas, Huang, Silver, & Bassett, 2009; Sukalakamala et al., 2013).

Lee, Heere, and Chung (2013) found sport consumers experience a stadium through physical senses. Indeed, the sensory experience plays an important role in the sport consumer journey, impacting both team identity and team loyalty. These scholars suggested that “sport teams may be able to use food and beverage as a competitive advantage to differentiate them from their competitors” (Lee et al., 2013, p. 212). A number of European countries are spearheading the movement toward healthy stadia (Drygas et al., 2011); indeed, a Healthy Stadia Network has been established (Crabb & Ratinckx, 2005).

The degree to which an individual identifies with a team may also play a role in physical health outcomes. For example, Sweeney and Quimby (2012) examined team identification and health behavior in a university population (including students, staff, faculty, and administrators). These scholars found highly identified fans have significantly higher BMIs than less-devoted fans. Further, such individuals displayed less healthy food behavior, including more fast food consumption and less vegetable consumption. There were not, however, notable differences in exercise behavior between the two groups. Sweeney and Quimby (2012) called for future research to seek “an understanding of sports fans' attitudes about health-related behaviors and health in general” (p. 7).

Cornil and Chandon (2013) leveraged archival and experimental data to illustrate how fans consumed more food, and less healthy food (i.e., higher in calories, containing fewer nutrients), following a loss by their favorite team. This effect was most pronounced in cities that were theorized (based on rankings from online sources) to have the most committed fans. Thus, the work of Cornil and Chandon (2013) suggests one's level of identification with the team does play a role in health outcomes related to sport fandom.

This is likely because highly identified individuals view the team's outcomes as reflective of self, which impacts self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976), and, consequently, one's ability to self-regulate (Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992). This effect may also be tied to fans' mood; positive affect is often tied to healthy eating, but negative affect generally has the inverse result (Macht, 1999, 2008). However, the healthfulness of fans' behavior also varies based on the closeness of the game (i.e., the degree of competitiveness) and pregame expectations for how the game will unfold (i.e., fans' sense of whether it will be a competitive matchup; Cornil & Chandon, 2013).

Additionally, scholars have demonstrated a relationship between fandom and increased alcohol consumption (e.g., Card & Dahl, 2011; Neal, Sugarman, Hustad, Caska, & Carey 2005; Rees & Schnepel, 2009), and alcohol is linked to negative health outcomes (Room, Babor, & Rehm, 2005). Further, scholars have established a connection between sport spectatorship and fans' hormones, such as cortisol and testosterone (e.g., Bernhardt, Dabbs Jr, Fielden, & Lutter, 1998; van der Meij et al., 2012). These studies showed that such hormones, which are central to health (Steiner, Dunn, & Born, 2003; Vina, Borrás, Gambini, Sastre, & Pallardo, 2005), fluctuate based on the outcome of the game and one's degree of identification with the team. Thus, one's identification with sport entities could, it seems, have tangible effects on physical well-being.

Scholars have also employed the lens of sponsorship to examine the role of individual athletes in promoting healthy behavior. Professional sport entities often endorse products (e.g., snack foods and alcoholic beverages) that fall well below national standards for nutrition and health (Bragg et al., 2013) – for example National Basketball Association (NBA) legend Michael Jordan was a longtime endorser of McDonald's (Mack, 2010) – and this has a demonstrated effect on fans. Athlete endorsements prompt consumers to overestimate the nutritional quality of foods (Flint et al., 2015). Further, a prominent athlete's endorsement of nutrient-devoid snacks (e.g., junk foods) often leads parents to perceive such products as nutritious, influencing the meals they provide to their children (Dixon et al., 2011).

The American Academy of Pediatrics examined 512 brand endorsements by 100 prominent athletes, finding 79% of the endorsed food products and 93% of the endorsed beverage products were unhealthy (Bragg, Yanamadala, Roberto, Harris, & Brownell, 2013). The three biggest athlete offenders were Peyton Manning (e.g., Pepsi), LeBron James (Sprite), and Serena Williams (Kraft Oreo). Further, the consumers most often influenced by such commercials were between 12-17. For professional athletes, “endorsing garbage food to increasingly obese and sick viewers” is “a tradition that carries on” (Riches, 2015).

Likewise, sport organizations have made similar sponsorship decisions. Maher, Wilson, Signal, and Thomson (2006) found ‘unhealthy’ sponsorships (e.g., those associated with unhealthy food, gambling, and alcohol) are more than twice as common as ‘healthy’ sponsorships at the top levels of sport.

For example, the International Olympic Committee has partnered with McDonald's and Coca-Cola, provoking scrutiny from both consumers and public health organizations due to the perceived lack of alignment (O'Reilly, 2012). The 2012 London Games included four



McDonald's restaurants in the Olympic Park (Ho, 2012). Given the connection between athletics and health, such partnerships have been described as 'incongruous' (Collin & Mackenzie, 2006). Though such relationships infuse the sport industry with revenue and boost sponsoring companies' market share (Stotlar, 1993), benefitting both entities from a financial perspective, individuals involved in the sport community (e.g., athletes and parents) have espoused frustration over these partnerships (Kelly et al., 2012). Much like in the higher levels of sport, many youth clubs have failed to adequately implement physical well-being into their organizational ethos (Kokko, Kannas, & Villberg, 2009).

In sum, an emerging body of scholarship has explored the relationship between sport fandom and physical health outcomes, but findings are scattered. Sport management scholars have in recent years shown increasing interest in exploring physical well-being, but work investigating such outcomes for sport consumers (fans, in particular) is surprisingly limited (Inoue et al., 2019). Following their examination of the role of fandom in food consumption, Cornil and Chandon (2013) noted that "more research is therefore needed to identify the precise mediating roles of emotions, *identification*, and self-threats" (p. 1944, emphasis added). Likewise, Inoue et al. (2015) called for sport management scholars to advance "theoretical understandings of why and how this relationship (between fandom and physical health outcomes) occurs" (p. 716).

In this dissertation, I aim to answer such calls. To make an original contribution to the literature that is needed on both theoretical and practical levels, I examined individuals who are both (1) self-identified sport fans, and (2) self-identified healthy individuals.

## 2.5 Health Identity

Increasing awareness of obesity has led many consumers to adjust their lifestyles (Ogden et al., 2006) and to express support for policy changes geared toward health (Schmid, Jeffery, Forster, Rooney, & McBride, 1989). In consumers' pursuit of physical well-being, food consumption plays a vital role (Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarubin, & Wrzesniewski, 1999). Scholars have long noted that food encapsulates much more than a vehicle for energy that sustains human life. Indeed, it stretches far beyond its simple components of calories, macronutrients, and micronutrients; Barthes (1975) suggested an entire 'world' is signified by food. Food behaviors are viewed as reflective of identity – of one's entire self, life setting, and hierarchy of values (Caplan, 2013). The French politician Brillat-Savarin (1826) famously observed, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are." Or, as one might hear in everyday conversation: "You are what you eat."

Healthy behavior is most prevalent among consumers who identify as 'health-conscious' (Sparks & Guthrie, 1998), as the identities within one's self-concept shape his/her behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The relationship between identification and health behavior has been demonstrated in a range of studies examining the food consumption of adults (Sparks, Shepherd, Wieringa, & Zimmermanns, 1995), college students (Armitage & Conner, 1999), and children (Dennison & Shepherd, 1995). Health-conscious self-identification has also been shown to influence exercise behavior (Theodorakis, 1994).

Health decisions and beliefs are shaped by not only internal forces (e.g., self-identity) but also external forces including gender roles, culture, and societal structures (Caplan, 2013; Murcott, 1983). Much like external identities play key roles in fan identification (James, 2001; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010), the same is true in health behavior (Contrada & Ashmore, 1999;

Oyserman et al., 2007). Indeed, though one's body is generally viewed as a matter of personal responsibility (Askegaard, Gertsen, & Langer, 2002; Puhl & Brownell, 2003), consumption decisions are influenced by external factors. In explaining differences in food behaviors, researchers have consistently noted the salient influences of – among other things – setting (e.g., Shettleworth, 1975), historical context (Caplan, 2013), and relationships (Goody, 1982; Mennell, 1996; Mintz, 1995). Examining health behavior leads to “a significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of the society or societies under consideration” (Levi-Strauss, 1965).

Food behaviors become entrenched in one's sense of self, developing early in life; this can largely be attributed to the influences of family (Charsley, 2002) and the media (Caplan, 2013). Interactions with peers also play a salient role in this process. Stead, McDermott, MacKintosh, and Adamson (2011) conducted focus groups with young consumers (age 13-15), exploring their perspectives on food. These scholars found such consumers used food as a socialization tactic, viewing their consumption decisions – for example, choosing to eat a banana or a bag of Doritos – as central to constructing their desired image among classmates (i.e., their external identity). These individuals aimed to conform with social standards and thus – given the social context – believed it best to make *unhealthy* food decisions, viewing the consumption of more nutritious foods as ‘uncool,’ both emotionally and socially risky as they attempted to gain status among their peers. Stead et al. (2011) also found that, even at this young age (i.e., middle school), consumers judged others on a moral level based on their food decisions, believing that one's choices (e.g., banana or Doritos) extend to other areas of life. Consistent with this logic, anti-fat attitudes are societally pervasive (Robinson, Bacon, & O'Reilly, 1993), though public ‘fat-shaming’ has become socially taboo (Kasardo & McHugh, 2015).

Similar to the work of Stead et al. (2011), Chapman and Malean (1993) found Canadian teenagers viewed foods as falling into one of two categories: junk food or ‘good’ food. Whereas junk food was associated with care-free fun and freedom, the latter was associated with parental restraint and structure. Though the teenagers in the study expressed concerns about the potentially negative effects of their food behaviors (i.e., gaining weight, developing acne), they chose to consume unhealthy foods as a form of rebellion against the ‘boring,’ rule-following confines of adulthood. Children often view consuming unhealthy foods, such as sweets, as a means of resistance against adult norms (James, 1998). Thus, food behaviors are understood to be reflective of identity and values from an early age (Caplan, 2013). Children as young as 7 believe low weight is ‘good’ and excessive weight is ‘bad’ (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001), and eating behaviors are viewed as a central component of *who one* is.

Consumers begin to understand the complicated psychological conflict associated with food behaviors and body weight management at an early age. Younger individuals are confounded by an apparent paradox, attempting to reconcile social development with food behavior – they view both healthy eating *and* carrying excessive body weight as unfavorable. It is evident, then, that food plays a nuanced role in the socialization process of adolescents and in the psychological development of young consumers’ respective identities.

The social aspect of food assumes a different angle for adults, with older consumers instead feeling pressured to make *healthy* decisions to avoid judgment (Dragone & Savorelli, 2012); the perception of what is ‘cool’ makes a 180-degree turn. Despite changing pressures, however, the role of food does not become any less complicated as consumers age; in fact, it often becomes more complicated (Köster, 2009). Consumers may spend a lifetime wrestling with ideas imposed by society, and eventually internalized, about what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’

food, battling the personal discourse of which foods and drinks ‘should’ be consumed and how such decisions reflect on one’s identity (Askegaard et al., 2014). In other words, consumers (often subconsciously) debate: *Am I a lesser person because I chose the Doritos over the banana? What does my decision communicate to others, and what does it say about my self-worth?*

When individuals’ actions fail to align with generally accepted standards for healthfulness, they often feel pangs of guilt and regret (Kuijer & Boyce, 2014; Ramanathan & Williams, 2007) and blame their lack of self-control (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Obesity is represented in society as reflective of an individual’s character, and carrying excessive weight is understood to represent negative traits such as laziness, immorality, lack of self-discipline, and greed (Campos, 2005; Gard & Wright, 2005; Murray, 2005, 2008). Individuals perceive healthy eaters as more attractive, more financially successful, and more intelligent (Barker, Tandy, & Stookey, 1999). Healthy eaters are also considered more righteous because of their perceived ability to resist temptation (Steim & Nemeroff, 1995); indeed, morality is often tied to physical appearance (Featherstone, 1982; Shilling, 2003). Such attitudes, though shown to be pervasive through a substantial body of academic research, often only come to light through methodologies such as the implicit association test (Chambliss, Finley, & Blair, 2004).

Additionally, when discussing obesity and physical health, it is imperative to consider demographic characteristics. Health outcomes often vary based on ethnicity (Courtenay, McCreary, & Merighi, 2002; Gordon et al., 2013), sexual orientation (Valanis et al., 2000), geography (Dummer, 2008), and socioeconomics (Ferrie, Shipley, Stansfeld, Smith, & Marmot, 2003). Further, a higher level of education tends to manifest in more critical attitudes toward unhealthy food (Dave, An, Jeffery, & Ahluwalia, 2009). Physical health behavior also differs by

gender. Men tend to eat less nutritious foods, visit doctors less often, and smoke more often than women (Anderson, Winett, & Wojcik, 2007; Pinkhasov et al., 2010; Sánchez-López, Cuellar-Flores, & Dresch, 2012; Softer, 2010).

Further, scholars have increasingly noted a relationship between masculine ideologies and engagement in health practices. Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek (2007) recruited men from internet listservs and illustrated how conformity to masculine norms impacted their health behaviors. Houle et al. (2015) offered a holistic evaluation of nutrition, physical activity, stress management, interpersonal relations, health responsibility, and spiritual growth. These scholars found men of higher socioeconomic status and higher education level tend to engage in more health-promoting behaviors, whereas men of lower income and less education – who also more strongly endorse masculine norms – tend to adopt less healthy lifestyles. However, two areas of masculinity – avoidance of femininity and toughness – yielded positive *physical activity* outcomes. Indeed, physical fitness is viewed as a way to earn respect (Thiel, 2007), which may explain why men, despite their less healthy overall lifestyles, are more likely to engage in exercise than women (Softer, 2010). Participation in physical activity is often viewed as a way to ‘be a man’ (Robertson, 2003).

Men also tend to be less psychologically healthy (Callaghan, 2006), perhaps in part because they possess less supportive social networks (Führer & Stansfeld, 2002). Thus, masculine ideologies play an important and complicated role in health. Of note, other identities are entangled in such a relationship. For example, men who prioritize their family are likely to engage in a healthy lifestyle (Hooker et al., 2012). Participation in physical activity through sport is largely dominated by young, well-educated, economically advantaged males (Bennett,

Emmison, & Frow, 2001). Indeed, sport engagement is unevenly distributed across social groups (Spaaij, 2012).

In sum, a potpourri of diverse sources influence body weight, food consumption and activity level, and overall physical well-being. When evaluating health behavior, it is important to consider – among other things – demographics and the impact of other identities. Though sport scholars have begun examining the relationship between fandom and physical well-being, there has not yet been an exploration of the relationship between fan identity and health identity, two identities that may coexist within an individual's salience hierarchy.

## **2.6 Literature Review Conclusion**

Each of these literature streams plays a foundational role in this dissertation. The integrated theoretical framework is represented in Model 1 (Appendix A).

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INSERT MODEL 1 HERE  
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In the following chapters, I present the three studies I completed. I begin each chapter by presenting the purpose and methods of the respective study, as well as the research questions driving the given inquiry. Next, I share what I discovered. In concluding each section, I present theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research. I conclude this dissertation by discussing its significance for sport management.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH STUDY 1

#### 3.1 Introduction

Identity theory has been leveraged in examinations of fandom prior to this project, including work regarding points of attachment between consumers and sport brands (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005; Shapiro et. al, 2013; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). However, research exploring the negotiation of *multiple* role identities in fandom is largely limited. Examining the interface between one's 'multiple selves' – indeed, understanding how the other identities in an individual's life impact his/her fan identity and subsequent sport consumer behavior – represents an area of need in sport management (Lock & Heere, 2017).

Thus, with Study 1, I focused on the individual, unique lived experiences of health-conscious sport fans (i.e., individuals who possess *both* health identification and fan identification). My aim was to explore fan (role) identification rather than team (group) identification, as I sought to highlight the consumer-to-sport relationship (and its effects on the self-concept) rather than the consumer-with-group dynamic (Heere, 2016). Through this work, I strived to expand the foundation of previous fandom research that had been built upon identity theory (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Mahony, 1995; Sutton et al., 1997; Wann, Fahl, Erdmann, & Littleton, 1999). However, given the 'identity crisis' in sport management (Lock & Heere, 2017), I also aimed to expand theoretical understandings of the optimal approach for fandom inquiries (i.e., the instances in which identity theory and social identity theory are most appropriate; see Hogg et al., 1995).

Lock and Heere (2017) suggested fan identity is best described through Burke and Stets' (1999) conceptualization of role identity: "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role



(e.g., sport fan) or situation (e.g., supporting a team), defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation” (p. 349). Thus, I explored such a ‘set of meanings’ for highly identified health-conscious sport fans. I recruited individuals who consider both fandom and physical health to be central pieces of their social-psychological self-concept.

### **3.2 Research Question**

Through the completion of Study 1, I aimed to answer the following research question:

**RQ1:** How do health-conscious sport fans understand the relationship between these role identities?

### **3.3 Participants**

Salience hierarchy negotiation is a complex process that varies between individuals (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann, 1987). The exploratory mindset and flexibility inherent to qualitative work make this approach well-suited for inquiries of identity, a construct that is best understood when context and nuance are emphasized (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Thus, to engage with the questions driving this study, I employed an interpretive mode of inquiry (Sparkes, 1994). This paradigm is founded upon the belief that knowledge is a subjective construct (Amis & Silk, 2008). Smith (1993) clarified that “the task for interpretivists is to elaborate what lies beyond epistemology and beyond the idea that there are special, abstract criteria for judging the quality of research” (p. 150).

Instead of prioritizing the survey of a certain number of individuals and searching for precise, externally valid truths (i.e., adopting the positivist approach; see Creswell, 2014), interpretive research seeks a deep understanding of an undefined number of subjects and does not aim for generalizability (Adler & Adler, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Accordingly, to locate participants for this project, I utilized a combination of personal network referrals and

snowball sampling. This strategy allowed for the inclusion of interviewees “with whom trust, empathy and a shared past” is established (Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009, p. 80), mimicking the approach of other recent qualitative work exploring the confluence of fans’ identification with sport entities and their other identities (Delia & James, 2017; Mansfield, In Press).

By adding snowball sampling, I was also able to include subjects unknown to me. This ‘mixed’ approach is consistent with the qualitative best-practice guidelines shared by Taylor (2011), as it creates a combination of objectivity and interpersonal rapport. This acts as a ‘checking mechanism’ for qualitative trustworthiness while simultaneously facilitating the ‘rich, thick description’ needed to gain deep theoretical understandings (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Interviews were conducted either in public settings (e.g., on a university campus) or via telephone. Following governmental social distancing guidelines resulting from the coronavirus pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), all interviews took place via phone. The inclusion of remote-communication technology also helped to facilitate recruitment from diverse contexts and fan bases.

### **3.4 Procedure**

Data collection was completed in two phases. First, participants completed a brief online survey determining their eligibility for the study and gauging the degree to which they base their self-concept upon fan identification and health identification. Items for this survey were combined from existing instruments of health-consciousness and sport fandom – drawing upon the health-consciousness scales of Dutta-Bergman (2004) and Gould (1988), as well as the sport fan identity scale of Trail et. al (2003) – with minor modifications implemented to align with the questions guiding this research. Though sport scholars have developed many widely varying scales to measure fans’ degree of social-psychological identification (see Lock & Heere, 2017),

the items presented in Trail et. al (2003) were determined to align best with the identity theory foundation of the present study (see Trail, Anderson, & Lee, 2017). Thus, the survey protocol for the first phase of Study 1 is presented in Appendix B.

Likert-scale items on the screening survey ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To be selected for an interview, a participant was required to score a 4 or above on *both* health identification and fan identification. In other words, if an interested party scored a 5/5 on health-consciousness but a 3.75/5 on fandom, that person was not invited to participate. After 92 individuals completed the survey, eligible individuals were invited to participate in the second phase of this study.

Once suitable participants had been identified, I conducted semi-structured long interviews (McCracken, 1988). This design emphasizes patience and intimacy, allowing researchers to spend significant time with subjects to more fully understand their perspective (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Interviewees are encouraged to express their lived experience in their own words (Amis, 2005). I was driven to draw out each participant's 'personal experience narrative' (Denzin, 1989), or his/her own unique story and perspective on the research questions.

Given the recommendations of Stryker and Serpe (1994) for work rooted in identity theory, I asked participants about the identities in their respective salience hierarchy and how they understand the various pieces of self – their fandom and health-consciousness, in particular. Thus, I was especially interested in exploring interviewees' perspective on the relationship (if any) between these two role identities. I asked questions such as, "Which role is more important to the way you think about yourself: sport fan or healthy individual?" and, "How, if at all, does your interest in health affect your behavior in a sport fan context (e.g., while attending a game)?"

The interview protocol – which was crafted based on the foundational works of identity theory (e.g., Mead, 1934; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) as well as recent work on multiple identities in sport fandom (e.g., Mansfield, In Press) – is presented in Appendix C.

Participants were advised that all data from these interviews would be used anonymously; thus, each interviewee received a pseudonym. Subjects' voices are leveraged in presenting findings “to tell as much of their collective and individual stories as possible” (Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002, p. 136).

In sum, my goal was to expand the scholarly understanding of role identity negotiation in sport fandom and the relationship between fandom and health by sharing sport consumers' narratives, understandings, and interpretations (Creswell, 2014). To do so, I focused on each individual's experience and patterns shared across their experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). A thorough data analysis process was employed to identify such patterns (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis has long been the most scrutinized aspect of qualitative research (Miles, 1979). Motivated to optimize trustworthiness and credibility, I implemented a multifaceted analytical approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Materials consisted of audio-recorded interviews, transcripts, and researcher memos (collected after each conversation).

Transcripts were evaluated both on an individual and collective basis (Fournier, 1998), with analysis performed through open and focused coding (Saldaña, 2016). In this system, general themes are identified in the open phase; these themes are grouped into more specific subsections in the focused phase. For example, the open codes ‘family influence,’ ‘youth sport participation,’ ‘high school fitness training,’ and ‘community acculturation’ were grouped into one focused code: ‘identity socialization.’

Though related literature shaped the interview protocol, I did not enter analysis with a priori themes, consistent with the recommendation of Strauss and Corbin (1998). Analysis took place simultaneous to collection, with findings organized between interviews. This approach allowed me to “switch between the forest and the trees” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 210), both digesting each interviewee’s perspective and contemplating its broader theoretical meaning.

Shortly after each conversation, I engaged in memo-writing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With emphasis on ‘reflexivity,’ memo-writing helps enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research by preserving important interview details and allowing scholars to examine their own biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, I employed member checking of transcripts (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). I asked participants to inspect their respective file and ensure it accurately reflected their perspective. Most interviewees granted approval; a few requested minor changes and additions, which were implemented. Finally, I employed peer debriefing with uninvolved colleagues throughout data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ultimately, I interpreted individuals’ responses in an effort to theorize (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I aimed to contribute to the growing literature streams on role identity negotiation in sport fandom and the relationship between fandom and physical health.

### **3.6 Findings**

Participants described being socialized into both fandom and health-consciousness by their families and the broader social worlds in which they were raised. For example, socialization into both identities often occurred through individuals’ athletic experiences. Interviewees suggested their early-life experiences as members of sport-focused communities (e.g., teams, families, and geographic regions) shaped their interests in both fandom and physical well-being.

Role identification is often evident through behavior (Heiss, 1981). Thus, in addition to completing the pre-screening measurement, participants demonstrated the centrality of their fan identity and health-consciousness by verbally describing behavioral commitment to both domains. For example, interviewees often described possessing high nutritional standards – if not commitment to a particular dieting methodology – as well as detailed workout programming. Likewise, participants demonstrated their devotion to fandom by describing how their favorite teams’ fortunes impact their mood and displaying consumer avidity (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2011). For example, Gabriella said she would “probably die a (Buffalo) Bills fan.” In sum, it was evident all participants were highly committed to both pieces of self. These were not ‘big sport fans’ who somewhat cared about their health, nor were they highly health-conscious individuals who somewhat cared about fandom; they clearly valued both pieces of self immensely.

As I sought to understand participants’ identity work, I asked them to share their perspective on these two roles (their fandom and health-consciousness), focusing on both identity centrality and salience (see Reed, 2002; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Qualitative research is ‘full of ambiguity’ (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 3), and matters of identity are ‘messy’ (see Ashforth et al., 2008). Nonetheless, there were commonalities across their accounts.

Interviewees described two distinct experiences. Some participants suggested the two identities compete for salience (i.e., one or the other must be chosen at a given time); their accounts indicated they often experience identity conflict (Backhouse & Graham, 2012). However, others explained that they view the roles as mutually supportive, complementary pieces of self; these participants’ accounts were instead indicative of identity integration (Ebrahimi, Kouchaki, & Patrick, 2019). I labeled these groups ‘Segmenters’ and ‘Synergistics,’ respectively.

Participants did not *always* describe experiences aligning with one group or the other, reflecting the dynamic and idiosyncratic nature of identity (see Swann, 1987). Indeed, given the ‘messiness’ of this subject matter, they sometimes described weaving between modalities. Nonetheless, in the course of interviews, it became clear that each participant gravitated toward one experience or the other. Below, I expound upon the identity work of highly identified health-conscious sport fans.

### 3.6.1 Segmenters

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The metaphor in Model 1 (Appendix D) depicts the first group of respondents, Segmenters (n = 9). When probed about their fandom and health-consciousness, these participants described struggling to engage with both roles simultaneously. They sensed that they faced an either/or decision: *either I can engage with my fan self, or I can engage with my health-conscious self. I must choose.*

Given the centrality of both identities – the valuation placed on both pieces of self – individuals expressed feeling tensions when this type of identity work occurs. They noted these tensions are most apparent in consumer sport contexts (e.g., at games or watch parties). For example, Doug shared:

With playing sports, 90% of the time, health-consciousness follows, the two almost go hand-in-hand. But if you’re a viewer, totally different – it’s almost the exact opposite. You have beers and wings and pizza. It’s almost the exact opposite.

Likewise, Billy said when he pictures a sport fan, he envisions “the most unhealthy person ever.” Thus, given their prioritization of physical well-being, Segmenters see the two pieces of self as contradictory, competing forces. Zillman et al. (1979) suggested fans are “depicted as passive and lazy (the proverbial corpulent beer drinker in front of the TV set)” (p. 247). Segmenters’ perspective on fandom aligned with such a depiction. These interviewees often said unhealthy behaviors – unhealthy food and alcohol consumption, in particular – are foundational to fandom. To them, it did not make sense that ‘fandom’ and ‘health-consciousness’ could coexist simultaneously. Though they valued both identities, they did not see the two as compatible. As Teddy explained:

We’re talking about having a Super Bowl party, and no one is going to be bringing carrots and celery; we’re going to order pizza and wings. So the environment that our fandom creates is directly attached to poor eating habits.

Segmenters often described ‘turning off’ their health-consciousness while consuming sport and later attempting to ‘work it off.’ For example, Doug said he de-emphasizes his physical well-being while consuming sport (when his fan identity becomes salient) and attempts to later compensate for the behavior (when situational cues indicate ‘de-escalating’ his fan identity, and escalating his health-conscious identity, is an appropriate response). Thus, his health-consciousness and fandom are situationally separated pieces of self; he only activates one identity at a time. He shared:

When we tailgate, we get there around 9 or 10 a.m., we’re drinking, and we’re probably not having a salad. Probably having pizza, grabbing burgers, wings. It definitely conflicts. Even sometimes on Sundays at my house, we’ll order trashy food to watch the game and have a couple drinks. I guess the way I think about it is, I want to do it, but in the back of my mind I think, ‘I’ve got to work it off tomorrow.’ Tomorrow morning I’m going to work this off, get some good food in me.



Participants often spoke of pursuing recovery from their behavior in fan contexts. Jed said he almost always eats in an unhealthy manner while consuming sport, telling himself he can compensate for his behavior after the fact. However, he added that, given his knowledge of nutrition and fitness, he “knows that isn’t really true.” He elaborated:

It’s rare that there’s a food experience around sports that is healthy, like I would eat on a Tuesday night during the week. It’s like burger, hot dog, sausage, Chick-fil-A platter – it’s pretty unhealthy. When I’m consuming sports I tend to, and might even enjoy, consuming unhealthy foods...I do feel tensions. I enjoy some adult beverages sometimes, so in terms of the physical aspect, drinking beer and eating chicken wings watching an NFL (National Football League) game is probably not great for my health...you’re watching a game and eating unhealthy food, or sitting on a couch instead of being out and about. I think there are definitely negative health effects from being a big fan.

Segmenters often described coming to terms with the idea that their fandom impairs their physical well-being; it was a trade-off they felt was necessary. Jake explained that when he decides to engage in fandom, “I know going in it’s not going to be the best for me.” He will often eat a chicken finger basket or pizza while watching the game, but will try to “make up for that decision” by engaging in extra workouts that week.

Reflecting the nature of life, manifestations of identity are dynamic (Swann, 1987). Thus, Jake explained that, earlier in life, he attempted to maintain the salience of his health-conscious identity *while* engaging in fandom. He brought his own food in Tupperware to both live games and watch parties, packing items such as chicken breasts, protein bars, shakes, and bottles of flavored water. However, he shared that this decision resulted in conflict with other fans:

I would get comments about it all the time. People would be like, ‘Why can’t you eat our food? Do you think you’re better than us?’ Then there’d always be the comments like, ‘Oh, have a cookie, have a piece of cake, have a cupcake’...It would quickly escalate and frustrate me, because why can’t you just let me live the way I want to live? Then when I’d occasionally cave, it would flip to, ‘Oh, you broke your diet, you didn’t follow through’ – so it was like a lose-lose situation for me.

Thus, Jake described learning that he could only be one or the other (i.e., only one of the two identities could be salient): fan *or* health-conscious. Asked why he does not integrate the two (i.e., instead of all of one, have some of both), he elaborated:

It's a case-by-case basis on which one I'd choose over the other...I like to be fully invested in whatever I'm doing. Going to the gym and sitting on an exercise bike while I watch the game – to me, that feels like giving 50% to two places instead of 100% to one. If I give 50% to two things, I feel like I got nothing out of it. I'd rather commit to something fully.

Segmenters said poor health behavior and fandom go 'hand-in-hand,' often discussing how the spectator sport atmosphere dramatically lowers their inhibitions about physically unhealthy behavior and leads to food and alcohol binges. As Kevin explained, "You don't want to watch the game and be eating celery sticks and carrots; it's not fun that way." Marvin elaborated on this mentality:

Diet-wise, when you sit down to watch sports, it's usually with a beer and pizza or something like that. The culture of watching a game, or even going to a game, tailgating, I haven't seen that done in a nutritionally healthy way...it seems like the culture of being a fan includes overeating and drinking a lot. I used to really just allow myself to enjoy it. More recently, I've started to feel pretty guilty about it. Maybe that's because I'm 30 now, and I'm old enough to where if I overeat, I can feel it for a couple days. And it's like, *Did I really have so much fun doing that that it's worth feeling crappy for a couple days?* I'm leaning toward 'no' at this point. I could see myself in the future enjoying fandom without eating like 20 wings.

Marvin's words underscore the dynamic nature of identity; though he has situationally separated these two roles, turning off his health-consciousness, he hopes for a future in which the two are integrated. Consistent with his narrative, Segmenters often referred to experiencing guilt, frustration, and negative self-talk after de-escalating their healthy self while engaging in fandom.

In other words, they feel the social setting prompts them to make fandom salient and to de-escalate health – to Segment the pieces of self, selecting only the one deemed most situationally appropriate. However, the centrality of their health-consciousness yields negative

effects on their self-concept when the setting changes. Indeed, when an individual does not perform well in an identity of self-ascribed value, self-esteem suffers (Callero, 1985). Molly described her thoughts while consuming foods and drinks that do not align with her usual standards at sporting events:

I feel guilt all the time. I think about how the nachos have a whole heck of a lot of calories. There's no balance in the meal. I'm always thinking of how many calories are in the food or how long it'll take me to work it off...I know a soda is 140 calories, and I know what it would take for me to burn that soda off.

Thus, Segmenters often described internal turmoil, struggling to reconcile two identities that are both valued yet feel like opposing forces. As a result of this cycle of health-consciousness de-escalation and self-criticism, these participants often said they have altered their sport consumption to avoid the predicament (i.e., to avoid contexts in which demands for the two identities compete). For example, they frequently noted reducing their in-person attendance at live events. Billy shared that he is not only driven to circumvent the nutritional dilemma, but also to evade being physically inactive for prolonged periods:

It's made me watch less in person. I might not go to a game because it's healthier to watch it from home, or it might even be healthier not to watch it at all and follow on my phone. Fitness has taken over to where I can't sit down and watch football all day long – I'll feel lazy. Or if I'm worried about how much sleep I'm getting, maybe I'll miss a Wednesday night game to get some sleep. So health takes over a little bit.

In other words, as Billy's health-conscious identification has increased, his fan identity has decreased. Consistent with the Segmenter outlook, Teddy said he has learned over time he cannot be 'both' healthy and sport fan at the same time. For example, he shared an anecdote from the recent NFL playoffs. His favorite team, the Buffalo Bills, were competing against the Houston Texans, and he and his wife hosted a viewing party for friends. Teddy ordered pizza and chicken wings and purchased beer, but "I didn't plan on having any. I'd had a good workout that

day and felt good.” Of note: he did not plan on having *any*; he adopted the all-or-nothing approach of Segmenters. He prepared chicken and rice for himself and resolved to ‘eat clean’ so he would not feel guilt after the game.

However, his willpower was not to be sustained. Early on, the Bills were performing well, and Teddy ate his pre-planned healthy meal. In the second half, though, the Texans began to come from behind. Following a dramatic conclusion, Houston emerged victorious. Teddy’s vexation over his team’s collapse led him to binge on the pizza, chicken wings, and beer. Indeed, Segmenters often spoke of binge eating and drinking as a result of their fandom. He shared:

I was just like, ‘You know what? I deserve this. I need this for myself.’ That can be an aspect of the fandom that correlates back to health and has a connection to mental health as well – when I see the Bills lose when I feel they shouldn’t, I lose myself. I let myself give in to the good feelings that the food gives you, and the next day I feel bummed out that I did that. So is that a reflection on me, or is that subconscious reaction to the fandom?

Participants across both groups consistently expressed a belief that loyally supporting sport teams and the healthfulness of their behavior are related. For example, Brandon noted that when the Boston Red Sox (Major League Baseball) are performing well, he feels extra motivation to select nutritious options; during the Red Sox’s 2018 World Series run, he reached his lowest-ever body fat percentage. However, when the team struggles, he lacks motivation and is more prone to select unhealthy options. Though team identification was not the focus of this study (as I focused on the higher-level sport fan *role* identity), such anecdotes are relevant to the research question fueling this study. Further, stories like Brandon’s are consistent with the suggestions of Cornil and Chandon (2013) and Sweeney and Quimby (2012) that team identification impacts health behavior.

Segmenters also expressed frustration at the lack of healthy options available in fan settings, which they believed precipitated the process of poor physical health behavior

manifesting in regret. Interviewees were further dissatisfied with the price of the few relatively nutritious options that are available. Segmenters were unhappy with the sport industry for its (perceived) failure to prioritize fans' health. For example, Kevin explained he had recently attended a Boston Celtics (National Basketball Association) game. He was frustrated that the nachos he ordered were his healthiest option at the venue ("at least there was some protein") and was equally bothered by their \$12 price tag. Teddy explained a similar train of thought:

I don't want to spend \$25 on a meal I can make at home for way cheaper that's a whole lot better without all the guilt and negative effects on my health. When you're out interacting with fans, I'm definitely looser with my commitments to health...I don't go to a lot of games. We mostly watch here or at a friend's house, where I have a whole lot more control and you're in a much more positive situation in terms of decision-making.

The perceived conflict between these role identities has negatively impacted individuals' sport consumption. Segmenters often described watching games at home and at friends' homes (instead of in person), leveraging highlight platforms such as YouTube, and following on social media. These individuals noted that they *wanted* to watch full games and attend in person (i.e., to engage in more avid sport consumer behavior), but they also wanted to attend to their physical well-being, and they did not feel the identities could coexist. Teddy explained:

If you're committed to the health aspect of your life, you either have to learn that's going to be an environment where you have to work twice as hard to work off those calories or make better decisions, or maybe you just have to avoid it...fandom and health directly contradict each other pretty much every time.

In sum, Segmenters often expressed feeling they must 'choose' between the two central role identities; taking a right or left, turning toward fandom *or* health-consciousness. They did not feel both selves could be salient at the same time. They described Segmenting their two roles as a result of this identity conflict, situationally de-escalating either health (i.e., 'turning off' their

health-consciousness) or fandom (e.g., reducing their sport consumption). However, a different lived experience – one that challenged the Segmenter orientation – also emerged in interviews.

### 3.6.2 Synergistics

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INSERT MODEL 2 HERE  
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The metaphor in Model 2 (Appendix E) depicts the second distinct experience described by participants: one whereby their two central role identities coexist without conflict. These interviewees said they feel no need to choose between engaging with one identity or the other, as both may be engaged simultaneously. I labeled this group Synergistics (n = 8). Their experience was indicative of identity integration (Syed & McLean, 2016), as they described the two pieces of self as existing in harmony.

These participants described enjoying fandom *while* maintaining care for their physical well-being and eschewed the suggestion that the pieces of self may be incompatible. They explained that when they are engaging in fandom, their health is not first and foremost on their mind (i.e., it is not the active ‘window’ on their computer), but it remains a ‘process’ running in the background (i.e., they do not exit the program). They did not feel a need to turn off their health-consciousness; instead, they described wearing part of this ‘hat.’ Whereas Segmenters shared all-or-nothing thinking, Synergistics displayed a both/and mentality. For example, consider Gabriella’s account:

I don’t binge-drink or binge-eat. I always get something if I go to a game, but it’s usually something like a roast beef sandwich. It doesn’t really conflict with my health...I’ve never been like, ‘I can’t believe they only have a hot dog at a baseball game.’ I’ve never been nervous I can’t eat anything...but with some people, like one of my friends, it’s crazy how much they lose self-control when they’re watching sports. He does the typical

things like going to the games and drinking 20 beers, and when they're not playing he barely drinks.

Synergistics often described engaging in behaviors *merging* their interests, cultivating settings conducive to both fandom and health-consciousness. For example, Chris said he hosts watch parties at his home for fellow Pittsburgh Steelers fans during the NFL season. He prepares meals that he believes all attendees, health-conscious or not, will enjoy – foods themed in accordance with the Steelers' given opponent that week (e.g., barbecue ribs for the Steelers' matchup with the Kansas City Chiefs). Given his health-consciousness, he takes steps to enhance the health of the food. Chris shared:

I think I've always found ways to bring health and fandom together in a balanced lifestyle. If the Steelers play the Bills and I'm going to make chicken wings, we just make sure there are lots of carrots and celery, so all of the tastes are there, and we deep fry them in a cleaner way. But I try not to make it too much of a big deal – just eating what other people eat, but finding ways to integrate more whole foods into every meal.

Synergistics often utilized a term Chris mentioned: 'balance.' These fans noted they strive for a degree of levelness between their fan and health-conscious roles. Lisa said both interests could be taken to problematic extremes. Scholars have provided evidence that backs up this perspective; fandom can – in extreme cases – lead to violence and aggression (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999) as well as depression (Wann, Friedman, McHale, & Jaffe, 2003), and health-consciousness can lead to orthorexia (Sánchez & Rial, 2005). Lisa shared:

I try to never let either interest, my fandom or health, get out of control. I don't want to be like, 'I can't go out with my friends because I have to work out,' because that's when it becomes an unhealthy addiction...I think overall, as long as you can balance it out, I think it's good to have both. I don't think it's good to be extreme in either one. I think it's all about finding that balance and lifestyle so you can support both in a healthy way.

Whereas Segmenters often focused on the deleterious effects of their health behavior in fan settings, Synergistics emphasized the *value* of fandom, in particular stressing the social benefits (see Wann, 2006). From their perspective, engaging in the socialization inherent to fandom involves sharing foods with other spectators. Synergistics described sharing foods with fellow fans, yet maintaining health boundaries (i.e., limiting their unhealthy consumption) and seeking ways to amplify the healthfulness of their behavior. Brandon explained:

With fandom, it's the social thing – drinking beer, eating wings, it's just kind of what you do. It's just part of the experience. It's something everyone does, almost a pastime. You go to Fenway (Park), you get a Fenway Frank (hot dog). Eating unhealthy foods isn't something you *have* to do, but it makes you more included in the experience...I'm not going to get seven beers and two Fenway Franks and pretzels and cotton candy. Maybe I'll get a bottle of water and one Fenway Frank.

When Synergizing at a tailgate, an individual's plate would likely include some typical 'fan foods,' but their portion sizes would be conservative, and they would also consume some healthier fare. These individuals often described packing nutritious snacks, but also eating some less nutritious foods brought by others or from stadium vendors. Again, their thinking was not 'all or nothing' (i.e., *all* healthy behavior or *all* unhealthy behavior), but 'some of both.' They sought the value of *both* fandom and health-consciousness, and thus they aimed for balance.

For example, Heather said she packs apples when she attends games, but also brings wine and cheese to share with others. She described enjoying refreshments others had brought, allowing her to socialize with fellow fans, yet doing so in moderation. "The tailgate fare is definitely part of the fun," she shared, adding that she "enjoys the daylights out of it" and sees fandom as "a social emotional boon." She explained that her perspective on physical well-being had transformed over time, giving her greater freedom in social settings like that of sport consumption:



In the '90s, our definition of health was that you were not overweight. But lots of us who were not overweight and could run and play sports – and we weren't physically ill, like we didn't have cancer or M.S. or something to contend with – were mentally or emotionally ill.

Indeed, Synergistics often extolled the mental and emotional benefits of fandom (see Wann, 2006). Given these benefits, Dennis said he views his fan identity and health-conscious identity as “complementary, like salt and pepper” – a description far different from the Segmenter philosophy. He explained:

The bargain I've dealt with myself is, when I'm eating with myself, I'll try to do the most healthful things I can, but when I'm with friends, I'm not going to restrict what I eat. It sounds bad, but I don't have many social outings, and when I partake in these foods with people, it's even more special and makes me enjoy them more...it's like Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has this magical aura or mystique around the foods we eat. And my appreciation of food, my appreciation of community – it's like a braided rope. They grow together.

Synergistics were also keen to emphasize athlete 'role modeling effects' (see Inoue et al., 2015). From this angle, viewing extraordinary physical achievements (e.g., LeBron James dunking a basketball) can motivate fans to be physically active (e.g., to go to the park and play basketball). Participants often said viewing sporting events or athletes training inspires them to exercise, and learning about athletes' diets inspires them to eat healthfully. Gabriella explained:

When you read and follow people in sports, you hear about them doing ballet and dance for flexibility and cross-training. That stuff interests me, and how physically fit these people are – what it took for them to go into the sport. It definitely blends that way. Because I'm a fitness person, I think about that stuff. The athletes doing these crazy workouts, it always is interesting to me. Like when I'm watching the Olympics, I like hearing about the workouts they did to get ready.

In sum, though Segmenters indicated their health-consciousness and fandom exist in conflict – particularly emphasizing the difficulty of their identity work in fan-related contexts – Synergistics shared a different experience. They described engaging with both identities

simultaneously and feeling no internal conflict. They shared experiences of turning neither right nor left, but instead driving straight ahead into both fandom and health-consciousness. Thus, they viewed their two roles as intermingled, peaceful allies, both contributing to their overall well-being. Though these two groups differed in orientation, all participants' accounts indicated their identity work is heavily shaped by the social context.

### *3.6.3 Social Context*

In the course of interviews, it became evident each participant gravitated toward one outlook or the other. However, whether these individuals achieved identity integration or dealt with identity conflict appeared to be heavily influenced by the social setting. As Lisa (Synergistic) explained of her health behavior in fan environments: "It depends on where I'm going and who I'll be with. But it's always a thought in my head: What things can I do to make it healthier?" Similarly, consider how Johnny (Segmenter) explained his experience managing health-consciousness and fandom:

It depends on my mood. If it's the Super Bowl and we want to eat good, we eat good; or if we want to eat garbage, we eat garbage. It depends on who I'm watching with and just depends on my mood, to be honest...If you go to a football game, you go tailgating, it's about alcohol, it's about food – that comes with that territory. I just think people want to have a good time, to be honest.

Interviewees often noted sport nurtures a celebratory environment, much like a holiday, and suggested celebrations tend to involve unhealthy traditions (e.g., attending a birthday party involves eating cake). Thus, they believe involvement in this culture (i.e., engaging in behaviors associated with fan identification) often entails taking part in such a celebration. Marvin explained:

Fan culture is kind of celebratory. It's an excuse to be with your community, be with your friends around a common interest. Post-college, once you aren't living with your friends, it can be a tough thing to schedule time with friends. Having a reason to get together –

fandom does that. When you're gathered together with all your friends, it feels like a celebration, and usually celebrations involve good food and good drinks.

Gabriella said she is able to keep both selves active regardless of the setting. However, she shared that many fans in her social circle lose control of their health behavior when engaging in fandom. She explained:

I think people tend to be less health-conscious when they're watching sports because it's like a gathering. Think of the Super Bowl – people get together and we just binge-eat while we're watching crazy athletes on TV. People like to celebrate, and that's what they do when they celebrate: eat and drink. Think about it: you go to a baseball game, you've got to get the hot dog or the Italian sausage. I don't know where that came from, but people who go to sporting events definitely tend to eat less healthy.

Additionally, consider the anecdote Jake shared of being chastised for packing healthy foods when he watched games with friends. In this situation, other fans were commenting on Jake violating their expectations of how a sport fan should behave, echoing interviewees' suggestion that unhealthy behavior is baked into fandom. Thus, the negative social feedback led to a change in Jake's behavior. Instead of ceasing to pack foods, though, he chose to stop attending the watch parties. He said he felt "my personal boundaries weren't being respected." In making this decision, his actions seemed to be shaped by both his salience hierarchy (i.e., which identity was more valued) *and* the social context (i.e., the value placed on the relationships and social experience).

Identity negotiation is often rooted in socialization, occurring between individuals (Jenkins, 1996; Swann, 1987). Indeed, participants consistently alluded to the powerful influence of their social connections, explaining that these relationships impact both their fandom and health behavior. Teddy explained that "when it comes to fandom, probably 75% of the football games we watch with other friends." Thus, it is essential to note that the identity work examined

in this study did not merely involve a focal actor (i.e., an ego), but also that actor's social connections (i.e., his/her alters).

In sum, it was evident these individuals' social networks and the settings in which they consume sport impact their identity work. Relationships were vital to these individuals' experiences and represent an area ripe for future research. In the following section, I discuss implications of these findings.

### **3.7 Discussion**

Scholars have called for sport researchers to expand understandings of role identity in sport fandom (Lock & Heere, 2017). Thus, I conducted interviews with 17 highly identified health-conscious sport fans, aiming to understand their perspectives on related identity work. By examining commonalities across experiences, I discovered two distinct perspectives. Some participants shared experiences of identity conflict, whereas others shared experiences of identity integration. Segmenters described an all-or-nothing outlook, yet Synergistics took a some-of-both approach. Both groups' experiences were heavily shaped by the social setting.

#### *3.7.1 Theoretical Implications*

##### *3.7.1.1 Role balance*

Though participants weaved in and out of both modalities, it was evident that they all broadly aligned with one viewpoint or the other. This begs the question: What determines whether an individual is a Segmenter or Synergistic? As discussed above, both individual and social factors must be considered.

Marks and MacDermid (1996) argued individuals who have 'equi-weighted' role identities experience more positive life outcomes. These scholars demonstrated individuals who view their identities in a relatively nonhierarchical manner reflect 'role balance,' which is "the

tendency to become fully engaged in the performance of every role and role partner with an attitude of attentiveness and care. Put differently, it is the practice of that evenhanded alertness known sometimes as mindfulness” (p. 421).

When individuals are role-balanced, the potential for identity conflict dissipates – and more positive life outcomes, including higher self-esteem, are achieved (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Likewise, Horowitz (2012) suggested individuals of “an integrated selfhood” – those who possess “relatively harmonious schematizations of self” (p. 4) – experience more positive self-views and emotional governance.

Through my interviews with health-conscious sport fans, some participants (Segmenters) described their identity work through a zero-sum lens: *In a given setting, either I can be a sport fan or I can be health-conscious*. This aligns with James’ (1890) meditation that “the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list (of identities) carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation” (p. 310). However, others (Synergistics) described the two roles as harmonious, coexisting pieces of self: *I can be both a sport fan and health-conscious*. Thus, one must not be chosen. The Synergistic orientation was reflective of role balance. Consistent with Horowitz (2012), they seemed more mentally at ease; discussing the identity work of negotiating fandom and health-consciousness did not seem to trouble them.

Segmenters’ experiences were different, indicative of identity conflict (Backhouse & Graham, 2012). Ebrahimi et al. (2019) found that when one’s identities are not viewed as supporting each other, individuals feel inauthentic and unethical. This may be the impetus for the feelings of guilt and negative self-talk Segmenters described, and may also explain why many such fans described altering their sport consumption, such as by avoiding live settings or watching highlights instead of full games.

The differences between those who are role-balanced and those who experience identity conflict offer an interesting direction for future inquiries of multiple identities in sport fandom. For example, consider the work of Mansfield (In Press) on new parent sport fans. In this study, ‘Maintainers’ alluded to sharing fandom *with* their children (i.e., embodying both roles simultaneously). As Mansfield (In Press) observed, “Maintainers refused to view their identity negotiation as zero-sum” (p. 8). In other words, for these individuals, neither fan identity nor another central role identity (e.g., parenthood) was deemed “less worthy of one’s alertness” (Marks & MacDermid, 1996, p. 421). Other fans, however, seem to possess an all-or-nothing outlook.

Role identity remains largely unexplored in sport fandom (Lock & Heere, 2017), and understandings of multiple identities within fandom are just beginning to be formed. However, as sport scholars continue to engage with identity theory and expand understandings of fans’ identity work, researchers should critically examine the implications of role balance for sport fans. It appears there are, broadly, two types of sport fans: those who see their fan identity as a ‘self’ that can only operate on its own, and those who see their fan identity as capable of coexisting with their other central identities.

#### *3.7.1.2 Fandom and physical well-being*

Inoue et al. (2015) called for further illumination of the question: Is fandom beneficial or detrimental to individuals’ physical well-being? The growing evidence, including the present study, suggests an answer: *It depends*. Indeed, scholars in the health sciences have illustrated that healthy behavior is dependent on context and design (e.g., Askegaard, Gertsen, & Langer, 2002), and sport scholars discussing health have mirrored this suggestion (Chalip et al., 1996).

As represented in Wann's (2006) Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model, and echoed by these findings, fandom facilitates social connections. Relational well-being is crucial to physical well-being; an exhaustive body of evidence has demonstrated as much (see Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). Thus, fandom may positively impact individuals' physical health. Dennis, for example, said he views these roles as "complementary, like salt and pepper."

However, as evidenced by Segmenters, the sport environment *may* lead fans to overindulge in unhealthy behaviors (Ireland & Watkins, 2010). Depending on the frequency and intensity of such behaviors, fandom may negatively impact individuals' physical health, as seen in Sweeney and Quimby (2012) – not to mention the fans' psychological well-being, as evidenced by the guilt Segmenters described. The fortunes of an individual's favorite team may also play a (positive or negative) role in health outcomes (Cornil & Chandon, 2013). As Teddy shared: "when I see the Bills lose when I feel they shouldn't, I lose myself. I let myself give in to the good feelings that the food gives you." Thus, team identification is unavoidably involved in the relationship between fan and health role identity negotiation.

In sum, it seems fandom can yield *both* positive and negative physical health outcomes (Lau et al., 2015). Consistent with TSSR, sport management researchers should focus on how to achieve the former, improving the quality of fans' lives. Further, the industry should take accountability for the culture that has caused some health-conscious fans to perceive conflict between their fandom and prioritization of physical well-being. As Chalip (2006) suggested: "Although sport can promote health, we are not designing, managing, or marketing our sport organizations in ways that enable them to contribute to the promotion of public health" (p. 5). In the below section, I expound upon changes the industry could make to rectify this issue.

### 3.7.2 Managerial Implications

#### 3.7.2.1 Creating a healthier culture

Consistent with the perspective of Stryker and Serpe (1994), participants were asked which role they view as more imperative to their self-definition. Their answers varied. For example, Teddy answered, “Absolutely healthy individual, without a doubt. Health is by far the larger aspect of my structure of being.” Jed replied, “Sport fandom is more important to me.” Segmenters like Teddy and Jef often delivered expedient responses; Synergistics, however, seemed to struggle with the question, often challenging the framing and saying they could justify either answer.

Participants were also asked for their perspective on the sport industry. Segmenters, in particular, often described their frustration at the lack of healthy options provided to fans in sport contexts. Further, these individuals routinely chastised the industry for partnering with corporate entities offering unhealthy products (see Bragg et al., 2013). Interviewees suggested the industry prioritizes revenue over consumer well-being. Consider Doug’s point of view: “It’s just funny – how can an organization and these athletes who are so health-conscious have a representative that’s the exact opposite?”

Consistent with their both/and thinking, Synergistics described hoping for a future in which sport fans are encouraged to choose healthier options *and* can continue enjoying ‘fan foods’ that have become hallmarks of the sport fan experience. For example, consider Lisa’s perspective:

(Sport stadiums) have chicken tenders, fries, nachos – all the stuff people look for – but I think if they had other options, people could be like, ‘I’m going to have a few drinks, but instead of these nachos, I’ll have some veggies and dip.’



Synergistics did not discuss altering their consumption; they seemed more at peace with the industry's efforts to cater to fans' physical health. Gabriella praised major sport leagues for what she perceived as increasing efforts to promote physical well-being. She noted, for example, that she had recently seen more gluten-free options offered to fans. Similarly, Ryan sang the praises of programs like NFL Play 60.

Identity conflict harms individuals' physical health (see Allen & Armstrong, 2006), which may explain why Segmenters unanimously said their fandom has a negative impact on their health. Though Synergistics have found ways to harmonize and balance the two pieces of self, and do not believe their fandom is an impediment to their health, *both* groups suggested the sport industry could take steps to better serve fans' physical well-being. For example, Jed explained:

I think it probably leaves a bad taste in the health-conscious person's mind. The things that go along with fandom I think are not things a 'crunchy' person wants any part of: the food, the obsession, the slovenliness, like the Hogettes at a Washington Redskins game sloshing beers and yelling at each other. I would think it probably is a negative thing in their mind. The sports industry at large really caters to the guys who go all-in without regard to their health. I think they do that because it works. We all worship things. In the same ways that sex sells, sports sells, too. They know they can hook people with it, and people come back for more of that experience.

Consistent with Jed's perspective, participants often noted poor physical health behavior is ingrained in fan culture as a result of strategic organizational decision-making. Given the sport industry's surge (Statista, 2018), managers may be resistant to modifying their approach.

However, consumers change; so too must businesses (McCallum, 2001).

Health-consciousness is becoming increasingly embedded in society (Askegaard et al., 2014), and other industries have adapted. For example, consider fast food. Such restaurants have not removed traditional offerings – McDonald's remains home of the Big Mac – but have added

new options to appeal to an expanded consumer base, as well as long-standing consumers whose priorities are shifting. Through strategic implementation, corporate change can be achieved without the ostracization of core consumers (Cespedes, Dougherty, & Skinner III, 2013). Perhaps even the “guys who go all-in without regard to their health” could be prompted to make minor changes if the environment were modified to more effectively promote physical well-being.

What changes, then, may be possible for sport organizations? Consider the live consumption setting, a frequent topic of conversation in the present study and a pillar of fandom (McDonald, Karg, & Vocino, 2013). Within venues, portion sizes could be adjusted, and nutrition facts could be provided (Wellard et al., 2015; Williams & Williams, 2013). Teams could also maintain traditional ‘fan foods’ while adding healthier fare to the menu (e.g., vegetable ‘dippers,’ chicken kabobs, smoothies, or protein bars). Sport consumers have specifically noted their desire for salads, wraps, and fresh fruit (Sukalakamala et al., 2013). The issue is not precisely ‘what’ teams serve, but rather that they consider, in the name of stakeholder well-being, the changes – even minor adjustments – that may be possible.

The economics of offering healthier options may be a concern. However, teams may increase profit margins by ‘bundling’ value meals, such as a wrap, fruit, and bottled water (Yadav & Monroe, 1993). Further, the cost may be offset by drawing in an expanded consumer base. Indeed, sport organizations have underestimated the general public’s desire for healthy options (Crisp & Swerisson, 2003). As Brandon shared:

Sports are trying to attract a younger crowd especially, and a lot of younger people are more health-conscious...so I think if they don’t get on board and try to provide healthier options, they might struggle with that. There definitely have to be examples of people who don’t go to games because of the food. I’m sure there are people who don’t even consider going to games, like, ‘Oh, I’m not going to have anything I can eat there.’ Maybe it’s not their main reason for not going, but it’s just another thing that adds on.

Indeed, such a sentiment seems to describe why many Segmenters have de-escalated their live consumption: given their all-or-nothing orientation and the culture of fandom, they do not feel they can be both selves in consumer sport settings. Crabb and Ratinckx (2005) outlined a vision for a future sport consumption venue “which promotes the health of visitors, fans, players, employees and the surrounding community...a place where people can go to have a positive, healthy experience playing or watching sport.” Such a destination would benefit the well-being of all fans, health-conscious or not. Given calls for the sport industry to consider its impact on obesity (Zeigler, 2007), fan culture must be evaluated.

#### *3.7.2.2 Examining sponsorship decisions*

Sport organizations should also critically consider their corporate partners. Sponsorship appeared often in interviews and can be central to establishing a harmonious relationship between physical health and sport (Crisp & Swerisson, 2003). However, Drygas et al. (2011) observed many sport marketing arrangements give “fans contradictory messages concerning healthy choices” (p. 157). Indeed, Johnny explained:

If you’re at a sporting event or watching on TV, you’ve got multiple beer ads. If it’s not a beer ad, you’ve got the McDonald’s commercial or Papa John’s commercial. So they’re really not promoting or being sponsored by healthy options.

This issue is prominent and has tangible effects on consumers (Bragg et al., 2013). Of note, the industry has previously changed its sponsorship strategy in light of changing consumer demands and mounting medical evidence; until the mid-1990s, tobacco companies often sponsored major sporting events (Crisp & Swerisson, 2003). Today, such a decision would appear reckless.

Few sport organizations currently demonstrate care for fans' physical health (Drygas et al., 2011). Adaptation, however, is a hallmark of industry advancement (McCallum, 2001). The argument that spectators' physical health deserves thought is not merely an altruistic one. From a business perspective, failing to remedy this shortcoming may be short-sighted, given the growing population of health-conscious consumers (Askegaard et al., 2014). Even among the highly identified fans in the present study who care deeply about fandom, some participants noted dwindling sport consumption as a result of their growing health-consciousness. For the sport industry to succeed in the decades to come, this issue will likely require greater attention.

### **3.8 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Geography is the most noteworthy limitation of this study. All participants were from North America. Health-conscious fans in other cultures may have different experiences. For example, Billy shared that the Western culture of indulgence and fandom converge to create a gluttonous environment: "If you go international and watch a soccer match, I don't even think they sell beer in the stadium, and the food they have is like peanuts and sunflower seeds. But here, it's like an All-American thing."

However, Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Assollant, and Kada (2011) argued sport fans share many common characteristics across contexts. Further, research from other continents indicates unhealthy behavior is an issue in sport fan settings around the globe (Parry, Rowe, George, & Hall, 2018). In fact, Parry et al. (2017) noted North American sport organizations offer fans healthier options than teams in other regions.

Additionally, though qualitative designs are often best for matters of identity (see Chaitin, 2004), a broader, quantitative supplement would be needed to generalize findings. I aimed to address this limitation with Study 3 of this dissertation.

Further, participants recalled their experiences of identity work in detail, but I was not present with them when such work was salient. They may have forgotten important details, a shortcoming of interviews as a research method (see Alsaawi, 2014). Accordingly, scholars should consider following fans and speaking with them *during* such moments of identity work (i.e., the researcher may be embedded with health-conscious fans at sporting events). This would align with Hyatt and Foster's (2015) recommendation to examine fan identity work in the moment.

### **3.9 Study 1 Conclusion**

I entered Study 1 motivated to understand how health-conscious sport fans negotiate their multiple psychologically central role identities. Through interviews, two groups emerged: Segmenters, who value both pieces of self yet view them as separate 'hats' that must be worn at different times; and Synergistics, who view the identities as integrated and capable of being worn simultaneously. Segmenters had an all-or-nothing orientation, whereas Synergistics displayed both/and thinking. These individuals' experiences were shaped by both individual (i.e., psychological) and social (i.e., sociological) factors.

This project adds to a growing literature on multiple identities in sport fandom. It also furthers understandings of the relationship between fandom and physical well-being. I make my biggest theoretical contributions with this study by advancing understandings of role identity work in sport fandom, by clarifying the relationship between fandom and physical health, and by introducing role balance to the sport management literature. As identity theory becomes more heavily integrated into sport consumer behavior inquiries, I encourage scholars to continue exploring this construct, critically examining the salience hierarchy and its applications to sport consumers.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH STUDY 2**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

To extend and supplement the findings of Study 1, I conducted a second study that examined the role of sport fandom in consumers' physical well-being from a personalized perspective. Specifically, I completed a 'reflexive autobiography' of my own identity work as a highly identified sport fan and health-focused individual; both identities are central to my self-concept.

I was driven to complete this study because varied social environments and contexts necessitate examining fan identity negotiation in the moment to obtain the most robust understandings, consistent with the suggestion of Hyatt and Foster (2015) and the limitations of Study 1. Indeed, Syed and McLean (2016) observed that understanding multiple identities "may require methods that contextualize individuals' identities within their everyday lives" (p. 7). I also sought to understand the history of these identities within my self-concept over time (Swann, 2005). The purpose of this study, then, was to examine one health-conscious sport fan's (my own) negotiation of these psychologically central role identities both in the moment, as this negotiation was made salient, and over time. The design of this project allowed for in-depth data collection in varying social contexts, including both 'live' settings and memories captured reflexively (Carrington, 2008).

#### **4.2 Research Questions**

Through the completion of Study 2, I aimed to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do health-conscious sport fans negotiate their multiple identities in the moment and over time?

**RQ2:** How do contexts and relationships impact this identity work?

Some fans' identification grows stronger over time (Lock et al., 2012), but others' weakens or even disappears (Hyatt & Foster, 2015). Thus – given the sport industry's reliance on consumers – it is important for scholars to evaluate the variables that contribute to divergent experiences of fandom. I endeavored to add to an emerging literature exploring the challenging nature of maintaining fan identity throughout life (e.g., Mansfield, In Press) by exploring my own fandom. A case study containing three accounts of my experience in varied environments – with snapshots and reflexive logs collected during a one-year period from 2019-2020 – was collected and analyzed.

#### **4.3 Procedure**

Autoethnography was originally conceptualized as 'insider ethnography' (Hayano, 1979), describing the act of conducting research on cultures in which the investigator is a member. In the years since its introduction, however, "the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 449). Though often varying in their approaches, autoethnographers generate data through first-person observation and documentation of lived experiences. Thus, as Ellis (2004) suggested, this method is "part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture" (p. 31) and "something different from both of them, greater than its parts" (p. 32).

This first-person account was employed to provide detail and an 'inside look' to better understand the shades of grey associated with fan identification, particularly for those negotiating multiple identities in the course of life. Indeed, autoethnography is particularly useful for examinations of multiple identities in sport fandom (Delia, 2017). Scholars have begun incorporating more qualitative research in sport management (see Giardina & Newman, 2011;



Delia, 2015; Delia, 2017) and have called for researchers to embrace alternative qualitative methodologies (see Frisby, 2005; Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). Indeed, autoethnography has increasingly appeared in the discipline (see Laurendeau, 2011; Newman, 2011; Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013).

Reflexive autobiography allows a single researcher to explore his or her own mind. Though this method is idiosyncratic by nature, its aim is to connect the researcher's experience to a broader issue (Ellis, 2004). Gould (1995) extolled the worth of a researcher who possesses knowledge of the domain examining his/her own lived experience:

Researcher introspection...facilitates probably better than any other approach a direct, extensive focus on the rich and specific aspects of one consumer's life and benefits from the researcher's being an especially "knowing" subject. While it has limits, its potential lies in providing fresh, novel insights for emergent theory building, cross-sectional consumer studies, and analyses of researcher processes. (p. 721)

Qualitative work allows readers to draw their own conclusions about generalizability, but that is not the priority (Duff, 2006). Though a non-traditional approach (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016), personal narrative research provides a nuanced perspective on a question that has not yet been sufficiently addressed in the literature (Holman Jones, 2007). In sport, "studying oneself and one's experiences with a phenomenon may inform theory" (Kerwin & Hoeber, 2015, p. 499). Indeed, intimacy is not a bug but rather a feature of qualitative work (Sparkes, 1994). Thus, I sought to connect my own lived experience to the broader research questions driving this dissertation.

Despite its strengths as a research method, reflexive autobiography is not always appropriate in sport management (Carrington, 2008). Evidence-based research (EBR) remains hailed as the 'gold standard' (Denzin & Giardina, 2006) in both sport and non-sport disciplines.

EBR connotes credibility because of its proposed objectivity, but interpretivism argues there is no mode of inquiry void of subjectivity (Woodside, 2006). Autoethnography is thus a “response to the alienating effects on both researchers and audiences of impersonal, passionless, abstract claims of truth generated by such (positivist) research practices and clothed in exclusionary scientific discourse” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 450). Any form of research contains subjectivity (Davies, 1999) because each researcher brings experiences into the examination, and these experiences filter his/her design and findings. As Sparkes (1995) wrote:

No textual staging can ever be innocent. Whose voices are included in the text, and how they are given weight and interpreted, along with questions of priority and juxtaposition, are not just textual strategies but are political concerns that have moral consequences. How we as researchers choose to write about others has profound implications, not just for how readable the text is but also for how the people the text portrays are ‘read’ and understood. (p. 159)

Thus, autoethnography embraces the inevitable subjectivity of research to connect an autobiographical experience to a scholarly issue. This is a deeply personal form of research, a methodology which “is sensitive to how reality is socially constructed” (Denzin, 1997).

As Hyatt and Foster (2015) observed, it is optimal to examine fan identity work in the moment, as it occurs. The personal nature of this study offers one way to do so. This study provides a familiarity and reflexivity that facilitate greater understanding of the nuanced interplays between multiple identities (see Stryker & Serpe, 1994). I employed “mindful self-observation” (Gould, 1995, p. 720) through a process of reflexive journaling (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). I specifically evaluated contexts in which I was immersed in a social environment pertinent to the inquiry (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998).

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

I sought to optimize trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given my role as both investigator and research subject, this process was unavoidably ‘messy’ (Denzin,

1997). In evaluating autoethnography, however, one must remember the words of Devault (1997):

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past 'as it actually was,' aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. (p. 261)

Thus, I sought the 'truths of my experiences' through year-long memo-writing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in the process of which I strived to embrace 'reflexivity,' or critically reflecting upon oneself and lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this exploration, I considered my own present experiences (i.e., what was occurring) while contemplating their broader meaning in light of the research questions (i.e., how these experiences and my internal dialogue could be connected to the theoretical questions fueling this inquiry). My knowledge of theory was discussed within this project, as I engaged in this study from both "an academic and fan perspective" (Delia, 2017, p. 3).

Data for this project were analyzed through open-focused coding (Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed these self-generated journaling logs through an inductive mindset, striving to identify patterns and threads across my experiences. I reviewed each piece of data, applying themes such as 'identity salience' and 'identity negotiation' to relevant sections. Codes were refined and organized as the data exploration unfolded (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

Though I strived to provide robust explanations from my lived experiences, I also reduced findings to several key themes, per the recommendation of Creswell (2013). Thus, not all data captured for this autoethnography are presented; only three snapshot logs were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Logs were captured through note-taking via

phone and computer. Most often, logs began with brief descriptions of events and direct quotations; when I reached a computer, I would type full accounts of the experiences.

Through this first-person research project, I aimed to illuminate the negotiation of fandom and health-consciousness from one consumer's point of view, presenting my own journey to inform the theoretical questions underlying this dissertation. This intimate perspective – glimpsing inside the mind of a fan at key moments of identity negotiation – was selected to supplement the external data-aggregation strategies of Study 1 and Study 3, offering a more holistic account of the experiences of health-conscious sport fans.

#### **4.5 Findings**

Participants in Study 1 shared their perspectives to interview prompts but occasionally struggled to remember precise details of their in-the-moment experiences related to the research questions. This is an oft-cited shortcoming of the reflective interview research method (Alsaawi, 2014). Further, identity is a dynamic construct that fluctuates based on numerous variables, including seasons of life (Hall, 1968) and changing external events (Anthis, 2002). Thus, with Study 2, I chose to examine my own experience as a health-conscious sport fan. Both health identification and fan identification are central identities within my self-concept.

To convey my own identity work, I provide a first-person research account that combines reflections on life experiences with present-day snapshots. Thus, this design may be considered a combination of reflexive autobiography (Carrington, 2008) and autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2007), though the manifestations of personalized research are largely similar (Ellis, 2004). This dualistic methodology was employed to provide the most robust theoretical explanations.

In this study, I review my personal history negotiating fandom and physical health and share three snapshots collected within a one-year time frame: one from May 2019, the second

from December 2019, and the final from April 2020. Though other experiences were documented throughout the year, these snapshots were identified as the most relevant to this research aim because of the salience of identity work. Further, the settings were chosen because they involved differing fan affiliations and social contexts. Indeed, accounting for a range of circumstances – while simultaneously facilitating ‘rich, thick description’ (Jacobs & Schwartz, 1979) – was one of the primary reasons I employed this methodology.

I now share direct passages from my lived experiences. Though I have made minor edits to these narratives for the sake of brevity and clarity, the accounts that follow are largely unfiltered. In conveying these instances of internal discourse, I have strived to embrace reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by acknowledging and engaging with my own awareness of empirical, theory-driven literature.

#### *4.5.1 Snapshot 1: May 2019*

It seems fitting that this, like so many sport management research projects, begins at the North American Society for Sport Management’s annual conference. It is the second day of the 2019 iteration, during a muggy week in New Orleans, Louisiana. Yesterday, I was thinking about how my fandom and health-consciousness have seemingly been wrestling with each other lately. I started reflecting on this tension on my flight to New Orleans from Western Massachusetts; I grabbed a notebook and the words flowed onto the page.

I have been preparing for the upcoming comprehensive examinations in my doctoral program, and I have observed growing interest from sport scholars in role identity negotiation (e.g., Lock & Heere, 2017). As I thought about my experiences managing multiple role identities – the different aspects of ‘Aaron’ that exist in my various social worlds – the wheels in my mind

churned. I started thinking about my own negotiation – specifically, how I have sought to balance my fandom and health-consciousness.

When we landed, I sent a text message to my advisor, Matt, telling him I had a research idea I hoped to discuss later. I recalled him telling me about the ‘lightbulb’ moment he had as a doctoral student down in Texas when he discovered his dissertation topic. Could this be my own such moment?

Later that evening (last night), in a room of sport scholars dressed in formalwear and sipping cocktails at the NASSM opening reception, I told Matt about my airborne journaling exercise. I told him how – seemingly because of my growing desire in recent years to be healthy, because of my increasing prioritization of physical well-being – my fan identification and sport consumer behavior have been diminishing. See, my daily thought used to be: *Plan around the game; everything else is peripheral. You are a sport fan.* My fan identity dictated my behavior and self-definition. Fandom was everything to me.

But these days, things have changed. I now find myself planning around health behavior, like when in the day I will exercise and what and when I will eat. As I have been studying identity theory (e.g., Stryker & Serpe, 1994), I recognize these are two role identities in my self-concept – and they seem to be existing in competition. As one has gone up, the other has gone down. Is that correlation or causation?

Fandom has been my ‘thing’ for as long as I can remember – my defining trait both in my mind and in social circles. It has been how people describe me: *Aaron is the sport guy. You can talk to him about any topic in that domain.* A questionable play call, dramatic off-the-field narratives, which third receiver to slot into your fantasy lineup – I lived for the dialogue. That

love led to me professionally pursuing this field, sport management. Much of my life has revolved around athletics.

But in recent years, I have begun questioning the role of fandom in my life. I have questioned the *value* of being a fan – what does it actually offer? When I am on my deathbed, will I be glad I was a fan? And my sense is that this new fan identity experience has happened at least in part because of my increasing interest in physical well-being.

I feel conflict between my fandom and health-consciousness.

*If I go to the game, my only food options will be unhealthy. If I stay up late to watch the game, I'll lose sleep. If I engage strongly with my favorite teams, I'll become over-stressed, impacting both my health and my performance in other important roles like husband and employee. If I act like a fan, I won't be healthy, and health is more important.*

Fandom used to be one of my most psychologically central identities; I was an avid consumer. As a child, I would ask for only sport-related gifts for holidays. Receiving tickets or a jersey was like hitting the jackpot. Now, I cannot recall the last time I made a sport-related purchase.

Why have I gone from an ‘allegiant’ fan (Funk & James, 2001) to one who is, by almost any definition, casual?

Shortly after I shared these thoughts with Matt at the reception, he introduced me to Laurence Chalip, a senior scholar in the field. It was serendipitous; there could have been no better sounding board as I conveyed my budding research interest. Chalip graciously listened and encouraged me to read *Mind, Self & Society* by George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1934), an influential voice in the creation of identity theory.

“It was the single most impactful work I have ever read,” Chalip said. His interest convinced me there could be meaning to this work. As our conversation concluded, Chalip said, “If you approach the question the right way, the potential for contribution is enormous.” I repeated that phrase to myself the rest of the night. This study began the moment he said “enormous.”

The next matter was determining the appropriate research methodology for engaging with this idea. This was something personal to me – how could I understand it from an academic angle? How could I contribute something bigger than myself, something that could relate to other people and inform scholars? Matt mentioned a colleague who conducts autoethnography, noting that this research medium seems to be well-suited for examinations of identity.

I was hesitant. I knew I would receive strange looks, if not outright criticism, from skeptics. I pictured a positivist scholar scoffing at my work, declaring, “You can’t learn anything by studying yourself!” But Matt knows research; at this very conference, he will be honored for his publication proficiency. Accordingly, I am giving this first-person exploration a shot. If worst comes to worst, this journal will never see the light of day, and maybe I will learn some things about myself.

Now, just one day after that conversation at the opening reception, I have found myself experiencing a prime example of the identity work I want to understand. It is exactly the type of situation I was journaling about on the plane. In this moment, my fandom is competing with my health-consciousness. It feels like I need to choose one or the other.

A colleague has invited me to join a group of conference attendees going to a New Orleans bar to watch Game 1 of the 2019 NBA Finals. This prospect is intriguing for multiple reasons. First, I am both a lifelong basketball fan and lifelong fan of the Toronto Raptors, who



are competing in the franchise's first championship series. Though my identification with the Raptors – like my fandom in general – has waned in recent years, they remain my favorite NBA team. I would love to watch the game; I would love to see Kawhi Leonard go toe-to-toe with the Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry. I would love to see the diehard fans in 'Jurassic Park' out in full force. I would love to see my team on the biggest stage. Nobody believes in Toronto. We have been underdogs for so long.

As I have this thought, I recognize that I am Basking In Reflected Glory (BIRGing; Cialdini et al., 1976). I have not watched many – if any – Raptors games this year, yet here I am referring to the team as 'we.' I feel ashamed of my fair-weather fandom. I have not been a 'real' fan in years...it is only right that I refer to the Raptors as 'they' during this series, using psychologically distancing pronouns.

Attending this watch party appeals to my identity as an academic, too. Mingling with scholars I respect from around the world would expand my professional network, leading to potential research collaborations. I enjoy conversing with sport management colleagues and learning more about their interests, and I would love to build new and deeper relationships. I am confident that by attending this event, my chances of career success will be enhanced.

Going to the watch party seems like a no-brainer. It will allow me to support the Raptors, to watch a game I have been anticipating and engage with my fan identity. Further, it will likely mark a step forward in my career. It aligns with two of my most valued identities.

And yet I am struggling with the decision because it does not align with my health-consciousness.

I now monitor daily health metrics (step total, calories, etc.) like I once tracked sport metrics (league standings, player statistics, etc). When I was a child, relatives bragged about my

ability to recall sport information on command. I read the sport pages of the newspaper every morning. Allegiant was not a strong enough word to describe my fandom. I was a junkie.

Fandom has seemingly receded at the same time that health has become one of my most valued identities. Now, when I consider plans – travel, my work schedule, this watch party – I think about my health. If it will be impossible for me to eat healthy food or will negatively impact my exercise regimen, I generally either avoid the opportunity or make special accommodations. For example, before traveling, I research nearby gym facilities and secure a guest pass to a local gym. I do not commit to something without first considering its impact on my health.

As I weigh attending tonight's gathering, I run through a flurry of thoughts related to my varied interests. I recognize that I am engaged in identity work, as I feel I must make a decision that impacts numerous valued pieces of self. How should I behave tonight? Which 'self' should be activated?

I first filter this thought through the lens of health-consciousness. Going out to a bar to watch the game will constrain my dinner options; there will likely only be unhealthy food. I go online and check the menu for the restaurant, and my suspicions are confirmed. My healthiest option (based on my standards, though everyone's perception of health seems to be different; see Pollan, 2008) would be barbecue pork – ouch. High in sugar and fat. I could eat much healthier in a different setting.

Also, the game will conclude well later than my normal bedtime. Given this season in my academic career, NASSM marks a crucial professional opportunity. I want to be my sharpest for the conference – to be 'dialed in' during presentations, to have energy to socially mingle and the extra boost of gusto needed to approach a scholar I have not met and introduce myself. Thus,

sleeping and eating well are vital to my performance. I also aim to get to sleep early during NASSM so I have sufficient time in the morning to meditate, exercise, and eat a nutritious breakfast – normal components of my life at home – before 8 a.m. sessions begin. I am driven to maintain these practices even while – or, especially while – at the conference.

As usual, I made workout arrangements for this week. Because I am not staying at the conference hotel (frugality is essential as a doctoral student), I asked Matt for an extra key so I could patronize its gym. He gave me one at last night's opening reception, allowing me to exercise in a nice facility each morning – and also noted that this request should be included in my autoethnography.

This morning, I woke up at 4 a.m. First things first: pre-workout nutrition. After rehydrating, I ate a protein bar and banana. I then took my daily supplements; my seven-day pill separator contains Vitamin D, magnesium, and fish oil, among other things. With my preliminary routine checked off, I walked to the hotel gym, engaging in a low-intensity cardio warm-up. The partiers were still out having a ball at the bars.

While Bourbon Street bumped, the hotel gym was empty. I worked up a sweat while weightlifting. As I walked back to my room, sporting my workout apparel, I received a few unexpected comments. One man yelled from across the street, "How much do you bench press?" Another asked if I would be his personal trainer. Another said, "I didn't know Captain America would be here." *They're drunk*, I reminded myself – yet their comments made me feel respected, as if others admire my commitment to health. Abiding by consistent disciplines like this is central to my self-esteem.

I used to care this much about fandom.

I think through all of this, reflecting on the morning, as I debate whether to attend the watch party. So many identities to consider: Raptors and sport fan, sport management scholar, health-conscious individual. It feels like I cannot properly engage with all of them, at least not at the same time. All of these identities are important to me. I want to enjoy fandom while furthering my career while achieving peak health. But it doesn't feel possible. Something has to give. Life is a game of trade-offs.

After much deliberation, I make a decision. I start by 'loading up' (Martin & O'Neill, 2010), eating a healthy dinner in my hotel room – shrimp and salad, purchased from a nearby supermarket. Then I head out to meet my colleagues for the game. With this choice, I get fandom and career, I tell myself. With the other, I only get health. Two is greater than one. And by eating now instead of at the restaurant, maybe I'm actually getting all three.

Seated outside at the New Orleans restaurant, my colleagues and I engage in a number of intellectually stimulating conversations. We talk about what we've been working on lately, and an exciting research opportunity arises. I receive career advice from more experienced scholars. I meet new connections. I sense that, by attending this event, I am indeed furthering my career. I feel validated. This was the right decision.

The game tips off as I converse with colleagues, and I feel a rush of excitement – finally, the Raptors in the Finals. I dreamed of this moment as a kid. But I feel that I cannot truly be my 'fan self.' I am too cognizant of what my peers will think of me. Leonard, the new star who has fueled the Raptors' playoff run, drills a 3-pointer and Toronto races out to an early lead; the team's rabid fan base is shown on camera having a heyday. I want to celebrate, too – I am excited, given my identification with the Raptors – but I make a conscious effort to suppress my emotion. *Don't act like a fan*, I tell myself. *People won't take your research seriously.*

I avert my eyes from the big-screen TV, focusing on the conversation. In this moment, I am prioritizing my academic identity over fandom. I thought I could engage with both pieces of self in this setting, but maybe that isn't possible.

Several people ask which team I am rooting for. I tell them I grew up in Western New York and the Raptors were the closest NBA team – plus the franchise has never won a title, whereas the Warriors have recently won two – so I am on Team Toronto for this series. My answer masks the full truth. The truth is that I wore a Vince Carter Raptors jersey so often in my childhood that friends called me 'Aaron Carter.' The truth is that my first email username was 'nbaobsessor15' – with the 15 representing Carter's jersey number. The truth is that, when I had the opportunity to meet Carter last year, I was physically shaking with nervous excitement. I was a diehard fan, and my fandom stuck with the team well after Carter left.

As a boy, I read practically every article on TorontoRaptors.com, anxiously waiting each morning as the dial-up internet loaded. I would peruse mock drafts for months before the event. I vividly remember the feeling of elation when the team selected Morris Peterson in 2000 and Chris Bosh in 2004. I was allegiant – there was no questioning that...but life has made fandom more complicated. As I have gotten older, other identities have escalated in importance. My fan identity is still important to me; it's something I will always value – but it has undoubtedly de-escalated. This process has occurred as other identities (health, scholar, husband, etc.) have been established and become central to my self-concept.

While conversing with colleagues at the bar, one prompts me to "have a beer." I'm used to hearing this type of thing. I say "no thanks," telling him I don't drink alcohol. Another colleague says she respects that. I explain that I choose not to consume it for health purposes. I feel validated in this explanation, like my authentic self has started to come through. I sense that,

in this small way, my colleagues have gotten to know more of the ‘real me’ by glimpsing my health-consciousness, despite my repression of fandom.

It seems I always feel this way – liberated, energized – when I talk with others about health. It’s the topic area I think of most often. I used to feel that same rush with fandom. It doesn’t give me the same sensation anymore. Why do I care so much less now?

Throughout the watch party, I sip on soda water with lime (sticking with my ‘don’t drink your calories’ philosophy) and, consistent with my plan at the start of the night, resist ordering food. Given my desire to get to sleep at a reasonable hour, I leave at halftime. I make the 30-minute walk back to my room instead of hailing an Uber. *Health and frugality trump convenience*, I tell myself.

Back at my hotel, I check my FitBit and feel satisfied as I see ‘18,543.’ I think about how the ‘old me’ – the fan me – would never have cared about things like step count. I think about how ridiculous it would have sounded. Who cares about walking, especially when the NBA Finals are on and the Raptors are playing?

Yet eating unhealthy food and sitting for hours while scrutinizing some of the healthiest people alive, world-class athletes – these are the actions that now seem ridiculous to me. They strike me as reflective of the behaviors that have created the physical health epidemic in society today. I think about my loved ones who have struggled with health problems such as obesity and cancer as a result of their suboptimal lifestyles. I will not go down that same road, I tell myself.

Arriving back at my hotel, I turn on the TV and watch the third quarter. Finally, I feel I can be my ‘truest’ self. I have already furthered my career while sticking to my health principles – and now I can focus on the game. I can escalate my fan identity. The Raptors go on a run to

start the second half, and I pump my fist and excitedly text two friends. I think, Game 1 is ours! but quickly catch myself. BIRGing again. Don't be a fraud. Game 1 is theirs.

As I watch the second half, I eat Greek yogurt and nuts, purchased earlier from the supermarket. Much better than binging on beer and barbecue. I also grab my notebook and plan my workout for the next morning, when I will repeat this morning's routine, heading back to the hotel gym before 8 a.m. sessions.

The teams trade baskets; the game goes back and forth. The defending champion Warriors are favored to win the title, but the Raptors – the Raptors! – are looking in command. This is a crucial matchup; if Toronto establishes momentum early in the series, things could get interesting. Yet, as exciting as this is, it's getting late. I knew this could be a dilemma when I headed back to my hotel.

As I weigh my next course of action, I again evaluate my priorities – fandom, health, career. How to juggle these pieces of self?

*Two is greater than one. By turning off the game and going to sleep, I would miss a fourth quarter my 'fan self' badly wants to watch – but I'd further my health and career. I'd be rested for another great day at the conference. And I could always watch the highlights in the morning.*

I elect to go to sleep.

I am cognizant of the self-negotiation that is happening. In this moment, I am consciously prioritizing my health and career identities. Fandom still matters to me; it still plays a role in shaping my behavior. I would normally choose behaving in accordance with this identity given the gravity of tonight's game.

However, two is greater than one. That means for tonight, I must ignore my fan identity. It's warranted in the name of allowing two other valued pieces of self to prosper.

I turn off the lights.

#### *4.5.2 Snapshot 2: December 2019*

It is a cold night in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as we pull into the Heinz Field parking lot ahead of a Sunday Night Football game between the Buffalo Bills and Pittsburgh Steelers. My friends have gathered in The Steel City to celebrate the 30th birthday of our friend Andrew, the Best Man in my wedding. More than 20 of us have traveled in from across the United States – Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Texas, Illinois, New York, Ohio, and more – to celebrate Andrew this weekend. And, of course, we are celebrating in the most ‘Andrew’ fashion possible: by attending a Buffalo Bills game.

He and I became close friends through high school basketball. Early in our playing careers, we bonded during time spent on the end of the bench. Over the next few years, largely because of our tireless training together, we evolved into key players. Andrew also got me a job working with him at a local restaurant. During our seemingly endless hours together in high school, there was one constant subject of discourse: sport.

We would talk about basketball, football, hockey, baseball – you name it. We loved the Bills, yes – I recognize now that we bonded through our shared team identity (Wann & Branscombe, 1994) – but our friendship was predicated on a mutual love for all things sport-related. Beyond a team identity, we shared a general passion for sport.

Andrew shares that bond of fandom with many of the individuals here tonight; we are all united through that common identity. For example, Scott and Andrew connected through their love for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, particularly the Irish football team, when they were roommates at Notre Dame. Shaun and Andrew bonded through their love for the Pittsburgh Pirates when they were coworkers in Pittsburgh. Almost every person here would self-identify as



a highly devoted fan of at least one team. Some people don't 'get' why fandom matters – and, as evidenced by this project, I often question it myself – but the people here do. This is a sport fan social gathering.

As we pile out of our vehicles, we start unpacking. Scott and Shaun unload a grill. Andrew's younger brother, Jared, pulls out a cooler, pouring in a bag of ice. People fill it with beverages. The party has begun; the fan experience has commenced.

Soon, everyone but me is drinking alcohol. The social context dictates I should – what NFL fan at a tailgate doesn't at least crack open one beer? – but, as usual, health remains on my mind. I feel that if I drink alcohol, it will compromise my health. It's not just about the drink(s). There could be ripple effects. With my inhibitions lowered by the intoxicant, I might eat unhealthy foods tonight and feel lethargic tomorrow, leading me to forgo exercise and generally have an unproductive day.

Further, this decision would likely harm my self-esteem; by drinking, I would feel I let myself down. My daily behavior aligns with my identification as a health-conscious individual (Oyserman et al., 2014). It filters most of my decisions. I simply can't 'stop' being health-conscious...though sometimes, like tonight, I wonder if caring less about health would make me a more enjoyable social companion.

In Western New York, where I met most of the people here tonight, alcohol is integrated into the culture. That may be an understatement; people take pride in how much they drink (as evidenced by the 'Bills Mafia' subculture). They also take pride in their unwavering, often irrational, support of this football team (see Mansfield, Delia, & Katz, 2019). Being from Buffalo comes with behavioral expectations: you drink alcohol, you support the Bills relentlessly, you eat chicken wings, you do not complain about the weather, you are proud of where you come from

and don't let others talk down about it. These ideologies are defining traits of identification with Buffalo. Most of the people in our group have ties to this culture – ties likely playing a role in their decision to grab a Labatt Blue from the cooler.

But the alcohol consumption tonight is, of course, not *all* about Buffalo. Sport fandom seems to go hand-in-hand with alcohol and, more broadly, with physically unhealthy behavior. I recognize that by choosing not to drink, I am the odd one in this culture.

I am a fan – it is part of my identity – so it would make sense to act like a fan. I know role identification often dictates behavior (Heiss, 1981). Further, all of my friends are doing it, and I want to blend in with my peers, to feel in tune with the community. My fan identity says, “do it!” But my health-conscious identity has driven me to eschew unhealthy behavior, regardless of the social environment. Sometimes it's tempting to join in when I am around sport fans – not because I want alcohol, but simply because I want to fit in, to feel that social cohesion, to embrace our shared identity – but I resist the pressure. Health matters too much to me.

Though my friends have learned not to expect to see a beer in my hands – they've learned health is one of my most valued identities – the jabs are still inevitable. I equate it to projection, but maybe that's just me trying to feel better about my behavior. Maybe I *am* too uptight. Ahead of tonight's game, while mingling with friends, I consume a zero-calorie 'natural' energy drink – given that the game is expected to run past midnight, well later than my usual bedtime, and I want energy to enjoy the moment.

“That's going to do more harm to your body than one of these,” Andrew's wife, Heather, quips about the beverage in my hand, motioning to her beer in comparison. I feel defensive. My gut says to shoot back: I know every ingredient in the drinking I'm consuming. I know its

caffeine content and source of artificial sweetener. I am confident it won't harm my health. The same could not be said for beer.

This rebuttal seems ridiculous, but I also feel offended that she would question my behavior. Does she think she knows more than me about health? Does she think I didn't weigh my health before making this decision? My identification as a health-conscious individual feels threatened.

As I debate how to respond, I recognize this as a moment of identity work. My next action should be shaped by the self-identity that becomes activated. I weigh the social context – this night is about the birthday boy, my best friend, and Heather has organized his party – and quickly determine sniping back is far from appropriate. My vulnerable, valued health identity compels me to respond defensively, to fire off a smart-aleck retort...but my friend identity wins this battle for salience. I smile and say, "Maybe you're right."

I have gotten accustomed to comments from others about what I put into my body. While out to eat, I often order salads. Through years of healthy eating, my body has adapted to genuinely enjoy health foods – a plate of vegetables sounds delicious to me – but others don't get that. They think I'm repressing myself. They assume I *want* unhealthy food. I encounter fit-shaming (Chauhan, 2016) in many social contexts, but especially when I engage in fandom.

No wonder I think twice before attending sporting events. In this setting, negative comments about my health-consciousness are prevalent. I have often wondered why that is. Maybe my health-oriented behaviors, like eschewing alcohol, are seen as not 'manly,' and maybe acting in a traditionally 'masculine' fashion is an expectation for sport fans. But in my mind, discipline is the hallmark of masculinity.

The food options for tonight's game are standard fare for the consumer sport environment: most of my friends have packed burgers, hot dogs, chips, and cookies. I've brought healthier food: chicken sausage to put on the grill and deli meat to snack on after the game. I look around at those surrounding me – eating unhealthy foods, drinking beer – and think, *Is this a vital component of fandom? It just doesn't make sense. We are here to celebrate the athletes' physical achievement, and we are immersed in gluttony.*

I feel a rush of pride as I think, *Being healthy reflects well on your character.* Why do I feel the need to socially compare myself and denigrate the other fans around me? I recognize this social comparison may result from my drive to feel optimally distinctive (Brewer, 2001). My desire to feel that I have achieved a delicate balance – accepted by the group because of our shared fan identity, but different from others in the community because my health-consciousness stands out – may well play a role in this process. Given the negative comment from Heather, my reaction may also be fueled by my desire to protect my self-esteem (Vignoles et al., 2006), which I know can spur hostile responses (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999).

My mind shifts to the game and my Bills team identity. This is a big matchup – with a win, the team could cement its place in the playoffs for only the second time in 20 years. My friends have traveled far and wide for this game, and they represent a broad spectrum of NFL fan bases. Nonetheless, everyone – in the spirit of supporting Andrew – wears Bills gear tonight. Even my wife Elisabeth, whom I would classify as an 'attached' fan (Funk & James, 2001) of the rival New England Patriots, wears Bills apparel. As we tailgate, friends question her loyalty to the Patriots with friendly jabs. Her behavior seems to reflect the powerful influence of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) – the drive to assimilate to group culture. In a different setting (e.g., around her family members back in New England), there's no way she would sport Bills

apparel – but she wants to fit in here. She is adapting to the social context and wants to feel accepted by the others present.

I recently read that, largely because of the diminishing role of religion in society, more and more people are turning to fandom for a sense of community (Anderson & Stone, 1981). I understand why; fandom has a special ability to forge bonds. I discuss this with Shaun, who has asked why I am the only one in our group not wearing any team merchandise. I sport a UMass sweatshirt, winter coat, and jeans; I am not representing the Bills through my clothing, despite my identification with the team. But everyone else here is practically covered head-to-toe in blue-and-red apparel. Andrew wears an ostentatious leather Bills jacket. Most others are in Bills jerseys – many of them throwbacks to players of yesteryear – and hats.

*Why, Shaun asks, are you not supporting the Bills? Aren't you a fan?*

I try to explain my rationale, but I am not sure I know the answer. That is part of the reason for this project, after all. I *am* a Bills fan, yes. It is part of my identity. I have been a Bills fan for as long as I can remember. In photos from my earliest years of life, I was usually wearing the team's merchandise. I have ridden roller coasters with this team. When Buffalo lost to Tennessee in the 2000 NFL playoffs, I bawled. It was one of the most emotional moments of my life. Then I suffered through 17 straight years of postseason-less Bills football, watching every single game, dreaming of the playoffs. My emotions each Sunday were dependent on the team's outcome.

But, as I explain to Shaun, my other roles in life have begun interfering with my fandom. Career, health, family – it has all gotten more complicated. Though I still pull for the Bills, and I still watch practically every game, I no longer feel the same emotional attachment to the team. As I have become more interested in, for example, my work as a sport marketing scholar, I have

de-escalated my Bills fandom; the two have at times seemed incompatible. The same goes for my health-consciousness; my growing interest in this piece of self has seemed to negatively impact the centrality of my fan identity.

Despite all of that, ‘sport fan’ is still part of my self-concept. It’s just different now. I redirect the conversation with Shaun, telling myself, *Take off your researcher hat and enjoy the moment.*

While mingling with other fans, though, I keep thinking about theory. I can’t get my mind off of my multiple identities. I think about how I want to contribute to the discourse on identity work in fandom, how I want to use this project – looking into my own,  $n = 1$  experience – to illuminate directions for future fandom work. And then I pull myself back to reality.

*Snap out of it, I tell myself. Your priority needs to be ensuring Andrew has a great time, which means acting as a friend and fan. Stop thinking about health. Stop thinking about research.*

I often struggle with this type of self-balance. How do I reconcile all these valued selves?

Prioritizing work, for example, often means missing a game I would like to watch. It often means reading a research study when I would prefer to text about fantasy football with friends. I routinely sacrifice sleep for work, which in turn hinders my health. Further, my schedule during school semesters is sometimes overcrowded, which leads to health sacrifices – like forgetting to eat, or working out for only 30 minutes instead of my usual hour, or listening to the audio of a research article instead of music when I am exercising. Artificial intelligence-narrated research doesn’t fuel deadlifts quite like Slayer.

Everything overlaps, everything mixes, and too much of one thing always seems to mean too little of another.

My health identity is too central to my self-concept for me to ignore it outright in any setting – as evidenced by my behavior tonight – but career often achieves salience when it competes with other roles, such as health. Likewise, my career often trumps my fan identity. Nonetheless, *none* of these central identities ever fully disappears. They're always there with me...to different extents.

Tonight, I've reminded myself, friendship and fandom are the two identities that should be salient – for Andrew. For my best friend, with whom I originally bonded over fandom. Sport was the foundation of our relationship. Nonetheless, I cannot just ignore my health-consciousness or career, or pretend they aren't part of me. Maybe they de-escalate in salience, but they never diminish in centrality, regardless of the social context.

I take extra measures to be healthy when social circumstances make it difficult. For example, today I woke up two hours before my friends in the Airbnb we've rented. I went for a long walk – hitting my Fitbit goal for the day, even on a weekend with friends – and then prepared a healthy breakfast, an omelet with turkey. As Heather, the next person to wake up, walked downstairs and saw me, she remarked about how she *just knew* I would find a way to be healthy. Health-consciousness is part of both my private identity (self-concept) and external identity (how others define me). Andrew joked with Jared that I am the real-life version of Chris Traeger, a high-energy health nut on the TV show *Parks & Recreation* who exercises religiously, takes copious vitamins, and says he wants to live until he's 150.

As I survey the scene at the tailgate and bite into my chicken sausage, I feel secure in how I am balancing my identities. I think, *I am enjoying the fan atmosphere, building relationships with friends, and still being mindful of my health – I'm not gorging myself with unhealthy foods*. In this moment, my identities feel integrated (Syed & McLean, 2016).

That feeling of symmetry doesn't last long, though. Social context is never static. As we enter the stadium, things change.

In the first half, as my friends snack on nachos, I eat two protein bars that Elisabeth and I snuck into the stadium in our pockets – I always try to plan ahead for this type of scenario. In the second half, however, we both get hungry. We walk around the Heinz Field concourses looking for healthy options at the concession stands, but the healthiest refreshment we can find is a hot pretzel. She can tell I'm disappointed. She cares about her health, too, but not to the same extent I do.

I search for the pretzel in MyFitnessPal. *320 calories and 70 grams of carbohydrates with only 4 grams of fiber? Empty calories with little redeeming nutritional value. No wonder sport fans are so unhealthy.*

However, my internal cynic quiets as I consider the implications of this small decision for the *other* identities in my salience hierarchy. I think about how, if I don't address my hunger, I'll likely lack energy to participate in Andrew's big night. I'll be distracted by thoughts of food. I think about how Elisabeth, who loves fandom simply for the social experience, would enjoy sharing a pretzel with me, and how eating food is often a social experience (Mintz, 1995). I think about how I want my wife and best friend to think of me as fun – and who wants to hang out with someone who can't even enjoy a delicious snack at a football game? Is a pretzel actually going to impede my health, or am I just 'obsessive' (Ayo, 2012)? A wealth of literature has established that relationships are among the preeminent indicators of one's psychological and physical health, anyway (Compton, 2005).

I also think about how this is a special occasion not just because of Andrew's birthday, but also because of the Bills' recent success – our team is on the brink of a playoff berth! I



question my pronoun choice, but this time speaking in the possessive feels justified. I may not be wearing Bills apparel, but I still watch every game. I need to enjoy this special moment with my fellow fans. When you celebrate, you shouldn't obsess over your physical well-being. I need to de-emphasize health for tonight. I won't go crazy; I'll just slightly remove my health identity hat.

I resolve to eat the pretzel, feeling good about the decision for a moment – until I realize it costs \$8. I think, *I could get a full, nutritious meal outside of the stadium for the same price, and I wouldn't have to deal with any of this identity work. Other people could eat what they want and I could eat what I want, for a much lower price. Maybe I should stop going to games altogether.*

As we settle back into our seats, however, I am reminded why I treasure fandom – and live sporting events. The Bills-Steelers matchup is a thrilling game, filled with drama and social connection. With high-fives, hugs, and groans, fans of both teams cheer passionately. Sometimes, they get too passionate; we witness a fist-fight between Bills and Steelers fans a few rows in front of us. As security escorts the belligerent fans from the stadium, I recognize this over-aggression as a commonly discussed dark side of fandom (Wann et al., 1999). In this moment, an identity I do not even possess yet – future father – comes into focus. I imagine myself holding my child close to my side and think, *Between the unhealthy food culture and over-the-top fan aggression in this environment, I don't know if I'll want to take my kids to games someday.*

The thought is startling. Being a fan has been vital to me for so long. I have so many positive memories from attending games with loved ones, including those we are making tonight – I know I will treasure this memory. Other venues of shared interest just don't create bonds like

fandom does. There's so much more emotion in this context. There's so much more *life*. There's so much more opportunity for relational development. Fandom is so good!

I can't – I won't – ever swear off fandom, no matter how much I care about health, career, family, or other roles. My fan identity is ingrained in me. It was, and continues to be, central to my self-concept. Maybe it is less central than it once was...but it is still one of my most valued pieces of self.

I love connecting with others through our shared fandom...but I *also* love taking care of my health. I want to be around for a long time – maybe not for 150 years like Chris Traeger, but long enough to maximize my impact on the world. Beyond adding years to my life, though, I want to add *life to my years*. Offering value to society is one of my core motivations. And fandom often feels in conflict with that. Its value-add seems intangible.

Being with others when I consume sport often leads to less-healthy-than-usual consumption, which creates moments of internal turmoil. When I watch at home, I can easily eat in a healthy manner. Sometimes I even exercise while watching the game. In these situations, I feel I can be my truest self – sport fan *and* healthy individual. I often think, *This is the right setup – now I can serve both of my interests. Now I am actually mimicking the athletes we all admire. This is how fandom should be.*

But can one actually be a 'real fan' in isolation? I doubt it. I think back to a study from Anderson and Stone (1981); I think about my advisor's work (e.g., Katz et al., 2017) – fandom is *about* social connection. This setting tonight – the community, the feeling of belonging, the friendships – is the primary reason you do it. As I grew up, fandom was foundational to many of the most valuable relationships in my life, like my friendship with Andrew. If you are a fan in private, then – if you are the sport fan who doesn't watch games with fellow fans – you miss out

on *so much* of its value. If you do not share your fandom with others, I would question what value you really get from it at all. Is the entertainment that worthwhile? Couldn't you get the same thing from Netflix?

As the game heads toward its conclusion, the Bills are pulling away for an important victory. I look down the row at Andrew – he is beaming. He belts out the Bills rallying cry “Shout Song.” *I think, There’s no way he would be enjoying this experience as much if he were just a general sport fan or if he were watching the game alone. He’s loving this moment because he’s a Bills fan and he’s sharing this moment with others who share that team identity.*

As he sings, I think about how Zillman et al. (1979, p. 256) suggested, “the spectator’s disposition toward a player or a team appears to determine the degree to which he or she will enjoy or deplore great and poor play.” That is undoubtedly the case for Andrew – and I wonder if I have been missing out on the social-emotional benefits of fandom (e.g., Wann, 2006) by de-escalating my fandom, specifically my team identification. I am happy, but I’m not feeling the same emotion he is.

I know he is excited about the victory – he is, after all, one of the most loyal Bills supporters I know – but I also know that the communal experience of this weekend matters to him even more. This weekend was centered on Andrew, and the venue of fandom is what brought us all together. It gave us an event to base our plans around; it gave us an excuse to get together; it gave us a source of camaraderie. I am so grateful for fandom and the ways it has enhanced my life. Social health is vital to overall well-being (Vaillant, 2008), and fandom is a vehicle for socialization.

The game concludes, and we head out of the stadium. Between the tailgate and the action on the field, it’s been eight hours since we pulled into the parking lot. I see many fans already in

the early stages of a hangover. I again feel proud of my healthy behavior – *those who drank earlier weren't being respectful toward their future selves*. We wait outside of the stadium for the parking lot to empty, and Bills fans passing by give my friends high-fives. Some even give hugs. Simply wearing the same-colored laundry creates an instant bond, a feeling of togetherness – and I recognize I have chosen to let some of that slip. Given that I'm not wearing Bills apparel, I'm not getting hugs from strangers.

I think about social identity theory.

*There is undoubtedly value in studying sport fans through this lens. Tribalism clearly is involved – the idea of us-versus-them, in-group versus out-group, 'we're on the same team.' It's why strangers hug each other; they share a group identity. But there is also value in examining the other roles in fans' lives – like my career identity, health identity, friend identity, husband identity, and others. There's value in both social identity theory and identity theory when it comes to understanding fans. As Lock and Heere (2017) suggested, it's not a matter of one framework being 'better' than the other.*

I again catch myself – *take your researcher hat off*.

While we wait for the traffic to dissipate, everyone gathers around our vehicles and enjoys postgame snacks. Most of those in our group, including Elisabeth, eat Chips Ahoy. Her food behavior in the fan environment, both tonight and during other sporting events, is less healthy than her normal consumption – she would not ordinarily eat cookies – but she seems to have a good perspective on health. She doesn't experience any of the identity work I do. She just enjoys a few cookies while socializing with friends. She doesn't eat a whole bag. It's no big deal. I reach into the cooler, grabbing the deli meat I purchased before the game, and – of course – here come the comments.

“When I think of you, I picture someone who never puts anything unhealthy in his body,” my friend Jake says. “So I'm mind-blown by seeing you eat this nasty, super-processed deli meat.”

I again feel my health identity is threatened. Is he questioning my health awareness?

I want to tell him how this was a calculated decision, how I have researched deli meat and concluded concerns about nitrates and sodium are overblown, how it's ironic that someone who's eating Chips Ahoy is chastising my food behavior – but I again check myself. *He doesn't mean any harm*, I think. *Your friend identity is what matters right now, anyway*. I laugh off the comment: “nobody's perfect.”

We pile into an SUV, and Elisabeth is squeezed in between me and Andrew. My best friend has a stocky build – his frame has changed since our high school basketball days. Someone makes a comment about all the intoxicated drivers who are probably on the road. “Be careful,” one friend implores Jared.

“If we get into an accident, you'll have cushioning like an air bag on one side,” Jared says to Elisabeth as he drives, teasing his big brother. “It's like you're nestled in between a marshmallow and a boulder.” The car erupts with laughter, and I feel a rush of self-esteem, just like when I received the positive affirmations in New Orleans. Despite the jabs I inevitably receive for healthy behavior in some social contexts, positive comments always make me feel validated for prioritizing health. *I would never want to be compared to a marshmallow*, I think.

I reflect on all the identity work that occurred this evening.

Fandom matters – tonight was Exhibit A of why. Shared Bills fandom and love for consuming sport created valuable memories and social bonds. But my other central identities matter, too, and sometimes fandom seems to impede engagement with them. For example, I lowered my health standards tonight as a result of the setting at the stadium. Maybe this wasn't a big deal, but I can't see myself doing this often.

In the future, I'll make these identities work together as best I can – I'll keep going to meaningful games, attending big sporting events with friends to advance our relationships. But if nourishing the other central roles in my life necessitates consuming fewer games, that may be a necessary course of action.

I love being a fan, and I always will. But if engaging with important identities like career and health requires continually reducing my fandom, I may need to make that trade-off.

#### *4.5.3 Snapshot 3: April 2020*

It is a grey Wednesday morning, and light drizzle falls as Elisabeth and I step out of our Western Massachusetts home for a walk. Those of us in the Northeast expected the weather to have turned warmer by now, with spring break in the rearview mirror, but we remain bundled in heavy coats.

This is a strange time in society. In fact, there hasn't been a more unusual time in my life. Normal, everyday cultural functions have largely been shut down as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic. Many individuals' lives have been shaken.

Numerous industries – including sport – have taken economic blows heavy as haymakers from Mike Tyson. As someone whose life has largely revolved around the 'world' of sport, it is odd to be living in a world without live competition. All major U.S. sport organizing bodies have suspended play, and it's not clear when they'll be back. Some say a couple months. Others say a year. It all feels uncertain.

A year without sport? It's depressing to consider. And yet I know this prospect would have had a far bigger impact on my emotions earlier in life.

It's hard to fathom a fall without NFL football, but it seems unlikely that 'America's Game' will return in 2020. Pandemic notwithstanding, the league has continued to generate

plenty of off-the-field fodder; teams have been making splashy offseason personnel moves, like star quarterback Tom Brady signing with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and the annual draft is approaching, though it will be conducted online.

The NFL has not been the only source of sports news. In fact, my work as an editor for ESPN has been busier than ever. We are struggling to keep up with the news cycle. It's clear that much of this industry now revolves around aspects separate from play on the field. I received an email showing the ESPN.com engagement rate over the past month is down from our usual monthly rate, as one would expect – but only by 3%. The network's primetime TV ratings, in fact, were up 11% in comparison to this month in 2019. Coronavirus has illustrated that the sport industry is increasingly geared around 'watercooler fandom' (Raney, 2006), whereby people are fans not simply because of the games, but also because they want to engage in the related discourse. These circumstances have made it clear fandom doesn't just *stop* because there are no games being played.

It is easy to focus on the downsides of coronavirus, but the shift to social distancing has also had silver linings. Many individuals now find themselves with more free time. The requisite lack of socialization has given me an unexpected wealth of time to focus on my dissertation. That, coupled with the suspension of live sport, has led to me reflecting on my fan identity and how it has changed throughout the years.

Could there possibly be a better moment to document this journey?

As Elisabeth and I pull up the hoods of our coats, this project is on my mind. I ask her, *Why do you think I'm no longer the sport fan I once was? Why do you think I care so much less about being a fan?*

She mulls over the question as we begin walking. “I don’t think I knew you when you were really committed to fandom.” She collects her thoughts, then adds: “It would be easy to point to marriage and say your life really changed when you added this new part of life, but I think I missed that phase of your life entirely.” Her answer is surprising.

We met when I was 23. I am now 28. Has my fan identity really been fading for that long?

The rest of our stroll is mostly silent. We say ‘hi’ to the few passersby – they are walking at least 6 feet from us, consistent with the government’s new social distancing guidelines – but I am detached. I am caught up in thought about how and why my fandom has changed, and when it began changing.

It’s hard to believe I am in this situation today when I think back on my former commitment to fandom. My family would go to church every Sunday, but I couldn’t wait to leave and watch NFL football. I would practically sprint out of the sanctuary to sit in the car and listen to pregame coverage on the radio. Upon arriving at home, I would read the sport pages of the newspaper from front to back. I would spend my whole day watching games, lost in the action. This came on the heels of similar day-long consumption each Saturday – typically college football, college basketball, the NBA, some mixture. The day began with *This Week in Baseball* and ended with whatever late game was on TV.

I was enamored with all things sport-related. I loved visiting relatives who had cable because our visits would allow me to watch *SportsCenter* – and I’d watch the same episode multiple times throughout the morning. I loved watching Stuart Scott narrate highlights with an emphatic “boo yah!”



This was not merely a pursuit of boyhood, either, as my commitment stayed the same through college. Whether you describe it as fan identification (Lock & Heere, 2017), passion (Wakefield, 2016), avidity (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2011), or role commitment (Heiss, 1981), my dedication to this sphere of life was practically unparalleled.

I was a committed fan of multiple teams. The Bills have always been my main fan affiliation (perhaps because of their importance in my home region), but I've also – for various reasons – loved the Raptors (NBA), Buffalo Sabres (NHL), New York Yankees (MLB), Michigan State Spartans (NCAA Men's Basketball), and Florida State Seminoles (NCAA Football). I followed these teams religiously. I knew every player.

Now, having immersed myself in sport academia, I recognize that these were social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), or team identities (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). However, they all contributed to my broader role identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) as a sport fan. I cared deeply about each component of this self-identity, which was one of my most central roles. Today, however, my sport fan identity has de-escalated – as have each of those team identities.

In terms of both behavior (time spent on fandom) and self-ascribed value (how much I care about fandom), my fan identification has diminished. It isn't gone entirely. It just isn't the same – or even close to the same.

Sport scholars have called for researchers to consider why fans 'de-escalate' their identification (Hyatt & Foster, 2015) and to weigh how empirical sport research can benefit practice (Weese, 1995). Thus, during this coronavirus season in particular, I have been wondering: *How did my fandom become vulnerable? It once seemed bulletproof. I was the definition of a fan. It was central to who I was. Now, I hardly watch games. Could the industry*

*have done anything differently? Is this change simply reflective of new life circumstances? Are my experiences unique, or can they inform the broader discourse?*

As we walk, I reflect on Elisabeth's answer. I initially found it hard to believe she could have "missed that phase" of my life. But I am realizing my commitment to fandom did likely begin to change around that time – shortly after I graduated from college and moved out of my hometown, relocating to Amherst for a Master's program.

Scholars have suggested social touchpoints are key to maintaining fandom for displaced fans (Collins, Heere, Shapiro, Ridinger, & Wear, 2016). I may no longer have been surrounded by *Bills* fans, but I was studying sport management, and my closest friends in the area were huge fans. We didn't share a social identity – they cared about different teams – but we did share a role identity (Lock & Funk, 2016). We watched games together and were always talking about sport. I remember consuming events that year – those involving my favorite teams as well as general sporting events like the Super Bowl – and caring just as much as I ever had. Fandom still mattered immensely to me. It was still a core component of my identity.

It was at the end of that year in Amherst – the conclusion of my Master's program – that I met Elisabeth. I became committed to spending time with my new partner, which led to less free time for fandom. In a sense, I had spent much of my life in a relationship with sport, allocating much of my emotional 'budget' to fandom. It is not that she discouraged me from being a fan – in fact, she loved watching games with me – but my de-escalation likely started at that time because my focus shifted to a new area of life.

The alpha status in my salience hierarchy was passed from 'sport fan' to 'partner.'

Step by step, feet hitting the rainy pavement, I continue tracing the manifestations of my identity work chronologically. *Changes to my fan identity probably started then. But I know fandom mattered more to me early in our relationship than it does now. What happened next?*

Shortly after completing our coursework, Elisabeth and I moved to North Carolina, where I began building a career in the sport industry. Sport was once a hobby – of course, it felt more important than that in my mind (Kolbe & James, 2001) – but it quickly became my livelihood.

For example, my new position entailed selling broadcast software to sport TV networks. I had always loved watching the Super Bowl as a fan. But when I watched that year's iteration, I couldn't pay much attention to Cam Newton's play; I was mesmerized by the aesthetics of NBC's presentation. As I watched games, I became concerned that my company's product would malfunction and my phone would ring. It was routine for me to be watching a game as a 'fan' when a panicked client would call or email, leading me to quickly put on my 'employee' hat. Live sporting events became associated with anxiety.

This position, however, was just one of the sub-identities folded within my broader career role identity that had an impact on my fandom. I also began freelance sportswriting, which started as a method for earning extra income (to save for an engagement ring) but snowballed into a serious pursuit.

I enjoyed this role largely because it gave me an unexpected, exciting opportunity: to spend time with professional athletes. I loved just being in their orbit. Given how I had idolized these people, however, I was shocked by what I found. I quickly discovered that, despite their astronomical talent and hard-to-fathom net worth, they were normal people. One, an NBA All-Star, was struggling with romantic relationships. Unable to trust anyone because he felt chronically used, he couldn't discern who in his life was sincere. Another, an NFL Pro Bowler,

was obsessed with his public image. A chronic people-pleaser, he couldn't stomach the idea that some people simply didn't like him.

As a younger fan, I saw these people as superhumans; they had a savior complex in my mind. Getting to know them removed this facade.

Starting a career in the industry and seeing different sides of sport didn't kill my fandom – and many individuals working in sport remain avid fans (Swanson & Kent, 2015) – but did change it. The allure wasn't the same. As life went on, my feelings toward fandom became increasingly complicated.

As in Amherst, my closest friends in North Carolina were big sport fans – we shared a common role identity – and we would occasionally watch and attend games together...but I found myself increasingly choosing to spend time differently. As Elisabeth and I began planning a wedding, I also amplified my commitment to roles in some way *related* to this relationship – for example, career and health.

It was easy to see how investing in these pursuits would benefit my new co-pilot. Focusing on my career would help me provide more financially. Focusing on my health would increase the odds that I would be around to enjoy Elisabeth and the family we hoped to have in the future – and wouldn't burden them with concerns or costs related to my physical well-being. I wanted to do everything in my power to be physically capable in old age.

I started to care about saving for retirement and being able to play with my future grandkids. Prior to meeting Elisabeth, I would have said those things 'mattered,' but they were more of an abstract idea – something to think about down the road. Boring adult stuff. Thus, my career and health identities were lower on my salience hierarchy (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). They

became more important to me (their centrality heightened) as situational cues prompted me to begin weighing the down-the-road future – as I entered a new phase of life (Hall, 1968).

Recollections of my identity work flow through my mind as we reach the cul-de-sac, the point that always marks the halfway point of our walk, and turn around.

My behavior soon reflected my enhanced commitments to career, family, and health. I became serious about budgeting and paid off my student loans, as well as Elisabeth's, and both of our cars. In the expendable time I had formerly spent on fandom, I began working overtime and researching how to be physically healthier. I had never taken time to immerse myself in the subject and didn't have a healthy diet. But then I read my first health book (*The Paleo Solution*; Wolf, 2010) and thought, *It's time to start making changes. No more hot dogs and Oreos*. I began experimenting with different nutritional and exercise approaches and kept reading. I lost 40 pounds.

Likewise, I started reading books on finance and planning for the future. Books led to consuming this type of content on different platforms, like podcasts. Naturally, my 'recommended' YouTube page evolved. While I was becoming more focused on these new interests, my fervor for fandom waned. For example, I started to prefer listening to a health podcast and going for a run over watching a random NBA game on a Wednesday night.

I was still interested in fandom...but my commitment waned as my motivations changed. I didn't feel that I had the bandwidth for all of it.

Given my new prioritization of health, the food options at sporting events – something I had never thought about before – started to bother me. For example, Elisabeth and I attended an NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four, spending eight hours inside the Alamodome (San Antonio, Texas) on Semifinal Saturday. I remember walking around the concourse, looking for food that

would align with the new healthy diet I had begun following, but nothing fit the bill. Elisabeth wanted something healthy, too, but eventually settled for a fried chicken sandwich. I decided not to eat and sat through the games with my stomach rumbling.

When we exited the venue, a vendor outside was selling smoked turkey legs. *Finally, something I would eat.* Elisabeth laughed as she saw my face light up. It probably seems silly – why not just eat a fried chicken sandwich? – but I didn’t *want* to engage in unhealthy behavior. This moment changed my associations with fandom. It became clear that my long-held sport spectatorship may compete with physical health in my life – the two may not support each other. Being physically healthy, for example, might not be feasible at live sporting events.

Another major change to my fan identity occurred when I enrolled in my Ph.D. program in sport management and moved back to Amherst. As a doctoral student, I started reading literature on fans. In my first seminar, we read the seminal works on sport consumers, and I engaged in my first academic study. Examining fans from a detached-observer perspective – viewing them like bugs under a microscope – led to me questioning the logic of fandom. I donated all of my jerseys. *What really differentiates fans of one team from another? The place in the world where you were born? Why would I prefer Bills fans over, say, Kansas City Chiefs fans, or Liverpool F.C. fans for that matter? It’s all the same.*

Clearly, I didn’t feel this way earlier in life. The walls in my bedroom at my parents’ home remain covered with merchandise from my favorite teams. My sport fan identity *and* team identities (Bills, Raptors, etc.) were central to my sense of self.

Back then, I was Aaron Mansfield, sport fan. But as I grew up, I had become Aaron Mansfield, husband, scholar, health-conscious individual, and sport fan – among many other things. I had added more central identities.

While my fandom was fading, my commitment to health only grew stronger. I came to enjoy how rigorous devotion to training my body facilitated a reconnection with my athletic roots. I recognize now that this new pursuit allowed me to, in some way, resurrect my dormant athlete identity (Lally & Kerr, 2005) – a piece of self that was important to me for much of life. You might think fandom would do the same thing, but the more I researched health, the more engaging in fandom made me feel “passive and lazy” (Zillman et al., 1979, p. 247).

Back when I was an athlete, fandom seemed to support my athletic identity. Now, health seems to do that.

I have been silent throughout our rainy stroll, and nearing the end of our walk, Elisabeth can sense my earlier question is still on my mind. She resurrects the conversation. “You are different in many ways from the person you were when I met you,” she says. “You spend your time differently. For example, you were big into social media when we met, and now you almost never use it. I could see that playing a role in you caring less about fandom.”

It’s a valid point that I hadn’t considered. In this reflection, as much as I’ve tried to weigh socialization and how relationships have impacted my fandom, these connections are not limited to the physical world (Kraut et al., 1998). Indeed, I used to spend far more time on social media, a platform that scholars have noted plays a vital role in individuals’ experiences of fandom (Clavio, Burch, & Frederick, 2012; Katz et al., 2019). Social media wasn’t around early in my life, when I was most committed to fandom, but it *did* support my consumption throughout college and in graduate school. I regularly conversed about my favorite teams and general sport discourse with fellow fans online. It is plausible that my diminishing online social activity, like the many other variables I have discussed, played a role in my changing commitment to fandom.

As I have thought through my journey on this walk, I have realized that *so much* has factored into my identity work. There is no way to ‘control’ for everything to understand experiences of fan identity over time. Life is far too messy. There are far too many variables. Did my growing health-consciousness impact my fan identity? Yes, without question. But so did many other things.

The timing may seem odd, but this introspective exercise – coupled with the suspension of sport due to coronavirus – has resurrected my interest in fandom. For example, I have found myself texting more with friends about sport than usual.

“We’re going to appreciate it all so much when it comes back,” Andrew said in a message yesterday. “The sports calendar and coverage are going to be elite when it happens, too.”

Later that day, during a video call, my friend Tommy and I discussed our fandom. Tommy’s fan identification, like mine, has changed over the years – particularly following the birth of his two daughters. However, his commitment to this piece of self remains strong; despite his busy schedule as a parent and entrepreneur, he consumes games and related content more often than I do. He often organizes watch parties with friends. His life has become more cluttered with commitments, yet his investment in fandom has stayed the same...if not increased.

“In recent years, I’ve started thinking about the long-term effects of how I’m spending my time,” I told him. “I’m not just responsible for myself now. And 100 years down the road, when my life is over, will it really matter that I was a fan? Will that have made any positive difference in the world?”

He mulled it over.



“I see your point,” he said. “From that practical, results-oriented point of view, it makes sense. But I think fandom is about something less tangible: appreciating beauty in life. It’s like climbing a mountain or looking at a beautiful sunset. 100 years from now, will it matter in any quantifiable way that you did that? Probably not. But you and I both know it *does* matter, in some way.”

Given my interest in qualitative research, this perspective made sense. Maybe fandom doesn’t need to have quantifiable value. Maybe I don’t need to see a clear “if X, then Y” outcome to accept that it is worthwhile. Maybe, given my interpretive foundation (Sparkes, 1994), I should have known this all along.

Tommy continued: “I remember when the Patriots came back to beat the Atlanta Falcons and win the Super Bowl, I was rolling around on the carpet. I was experiencing so many powerful emotions. Fandom doesn’t make sense when you think about it objectively – it’s definitely irrational – but there’s something about that experience that matters and makes it valuable.”

With no live sport to consume, it was easier for me to resonate with his point of view. There *is* something beautiful in sport that can’t be easily described. I’ve been thinking about the clichés that “absence makes the heart grow fonder” and “you don’t know what you have until it’s gone” – maybe that’s what is happening. Maybe I am rediscovering my fervor for fandom specifically because it is missing from my life.

During this hiatus, I’ve also found myself consuming more sport-related content than usual, like documentaries. It seems ironic for me to be consuming *more*, yet for some reason that’s happening. I have been eagerly anticipating each new episode of the 10-part ESPN documentary series *The Last Dance*, chronicling Michael Jordan’s last season in the NBA, and

have sought out other sport documentaries. Sport-related videos have again started popping up on my YouTube feed.

I have more free time – but I have also started to feel more *interested* in fandom than I had in a long time.

At the same time, some aspects of fandom still don't appeal to me. I recently saw Bills fans making a fuss on Twitter because a national website had ranked Josh Allen, the team's quarterback, behind 23 other starting quarterbacks in the league. The fans were distraught. It was as if the writer of the article had slashed their tires. Just a couple days later on Twitter, I saw Bills fans and Minnesota Vikings fans engaged in an emotionally charged dialogue, exchanging insults over a recent trade between the two teams. Both times I shook my head and thought, *Fans can be so ridiculous. Why would you allow something so unimportant to ruin your day? Who really cares?* I flashed back to my thoughts from that first Ph.D. seminar: *What really differentiates fans of one team from another...it's all the same.*

This project has made me reflect on whether I should 're-escalate' my fandom when sport returns to societal prominence – *should I make a conscious effort to resurrect my fandom? Is it possible to 'will' myself into being a bigger fan?* Being a fan brought me so much joy in my younger years; it was tied to childlike wonder. Could that be rediscovered?

Fandom offered an escape from everyday life, and having something like that might alleviate stress, consistent with Wann's (2006) model of social-psychological well-being. As much as I care about my physical well-being, fandom is a communal pursuit (Anderson & Stone, 1981). Being a fan creates opportunities for socialization and feeling like something bigger than yourself, and those tie into health. Maybe I could use something like the joy Andrew was feeling

at the end of the Bills' win over the Steelers, or something like the intense emotions Tommy was feeling when the Patriots came back to win the Super Bowl.

Elisabeth and I finish our walk, opening the front door. "I wonder if I'll ever be a 'big fan' again," I say to her. "If I continue to work in the industry, is it inevitable that I'll always view sports through a 'work' lens? Could I ever recapture the magic? And would I need to decrease my commitment to new and important passions like health and career, or could I possibly make all of this work in harmony better?"

We hang our coats to dry.

"I could see you finding a way to balance it out more and caring more about fandom when we have kids," she says. "It would be a nice way for you to bond with them. I love picturing you taking them to games."

I sigh.

She has raised another valid point. I wanted this autoethnography to conclude with a neat ending, something conclusive – something I could say explains the de-escalation of fandom, or explains the relationship between health and fandom – but I am realizing identity work is the furthest thing from neat. Identity is dynamic because life is dynamic. Adding a parent role identity down the road *will* impact my fan identity, as I know from my own research (Mansfield, In Press), but it surely won't be the only relevant variable. My soon-to-commence faculty career will, too. And so will the sport calendar...and where we live...and many other things.

Life changes will impact my fan identity. My future as a fan is perhaps even less predictable than this pandemic.

Today, in April 2020, I am a sport fan – but not the fan I once was. Nor am I the fan I will be tomorrow. My commitment to this piece of self changes daily.

Only one thing is certain: my fan role identity has been – and will continue to be – unavoidably impacted by the other roles, circumstances, and relationships in my life.

## **4.6 Discussion**

Scholars have encouraged sport researchers to examine fan identity work in the moment, as it occurs, and have also called for working examining how such an identity changes throughout the course of life (e.g., Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Mansfield, In Press). Accordingly, I examined one fan's (my own) negotiation of multiple psychologically central role identities – health identity and fan identity – through autoethnography. It was evident that I often struggled to reconcile my fandom and health-consciousness, particularly in the spectator sport environment. This negotiation was highly dependent on centrality, the presence of social connections, and situational context. In the below sections, I discuss implications of this work.

### *4.6.1 Theoretical Implications*

#### *4.6.1.1 The dynamic nature of fan identity*

Understanding identity requires intimacy and capturing lived experiences in depth (see Ashforth et al., 2008). Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine one health-conscious sport fan's (my own) negotiation of these psychologically central role identities both in the moment, as this negotiation was made salient, and over time. To address this purpose, I conducted a self-examination, recording experiences within my daily life while also capturing memories of past experiences. Varying contexts and relationships yielded differing identity responses, as evidenced by my behaviors and self-dialogue. Further, changing life circumstances altered my perspective on fandom; the fan identity de-escalation I had experienced was not sudden, but instead was reflective of a process that had manifested over years and involved a wide variety of variables.

Jung (1971, p. 17) noted: “We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life’s morning, for what was great in the morning will be little at evening and what in the morning was true, at evening will have become a lie.” Though sport scholars have illustrated that fandom is a central, enduring identity for many individuals (Kolbe & James, 2000), my experiences echo the suggestion that fans’ degree of identification with sport entities is dynamic, perpetually changing throughout life (e.g., Delia & James, 2017; Funk & James, 2001; Lock et al., 2012; Mullin et al., 2007). All role identities are dynamic, yet fan identification may exist in an even greater flux given the sport industry’s ‘fluid nature’ (Zeigler, 1987, p. 21).

Hyatt and Foster (2015) provided a robust inquiry into the de-escalation of fandom. The findings of the present self-examination build upon this work in several important ways. First, Hyatt and Foster (2015) examined NHL fans, and – as they acknowledged – fan identity differs between contexts (i.e., NHL fans differ from fans of other sport properties). Additionally, these scholars’ examination was not longitudinal and involved reflective interviews, mimicking a limitation of Study 1 of this dissertation.

Further, Hyatt and Foster (2015) examined “how teams can end up losing their emotional grip on their fans” (p. 443), and the model that was proposed following these interviews was based upon team fandom (i.e., social identity). In fact, many of the de-escalated fans in this work noted they remain sport fans, but consume different sport products. The present study offers insight into sport fan *role* identity changes over time. I examined fan identity (i.e., sport fan) rather than team identity (e.g., New York Rangers fan). Hyatt and Foster (2015) noted:

Because fandom is not static, maintaining a strong fan identity to a team needs to be continually managed and developed. This sport fan ‘work’ offers a new direction to fan researchers who can study the microprocesses that fans use to reinforce and recreate their identities. (p. 457)

With the present study, I aimed to answer this call. It is clear some fans, such as myself, de-escalate their attachment to sport given changing life circumstances. However, recent statistics on the sport industry (Statista, 2018) indicate many fans are *escalating* their attachment to sport. The consistent theme is that fan identification is not a straight line; it changes throughout life.

My own history is certainly not indicative of all fans' experiences, but it provides detail to explain how some fans may come to de-escalate identification. Hyatt and Foster (2015) identified seven themes to explain de-escalation: sport in general, the sport itself, the league, the team, individual players, media, and life. However, it is important to highlight that not all factors hold equal weight for all fans. Indeed, it is likely that all (or at least many) de-escalated fans would point to 'life' as playing a role in their de-escalation, whereas only some would point to the other categories, such as issues at the team level. Only the first and final themes (i.e., 'sport in general' and 'life') appeared to be salient factors in my logs. Thus, future scholars should seek to better understand the nuances of the broad theme of 'life.' A typological subcategorization of life events/circumstances that lead to de-escalation would offer a useful contribution to the literature and help managers plan accordingly.

#### *4.6.1.2 Social context in fan identity work*

Identity work is not a solitary affair; it is not a solo activity (Jenkins, 1996). Indeed, this nuanced process relies on the social connections and environment that are present. This is true for consumers in both sport and non-sport contexts (Miller, 1962).

Social connections generate symbolic interactions (Mead, 1934). When two individuals' worlds intersect, then, 'two roads meet' (Swann, 1987). Thus, one of the primary aims of this study was to understand how varying social connections (e.g., friends, family, and strangers) and

environments (e.g., seasons of life, particular settings) impact the process of managing simultaneous fan and health identification. As I expected, these factors played vital roles in my experience.

My identity work was riddled with shades with grey, and these shades were amplified by relationships and context. For example, consider Snapshot 1. In this setting, as I debated the appropriate role-based behavior, I weighed my identities as a scholar, health-conscious individual, and sport fan. In deciding how to spend time that evening, I considered what my colleagues would think of me – how would they perceive me based on my role behavior?

Thus, my behavior was determined by *both* my self-concept (i.e., the identities atop my salience hierarchy) *and* by relationships (i.e., the other scholars at the watch party). I wanted the others at the conference to view me as professional, someone with whom they would enjoy collaborating. In this snapshot, multiple roads met – my own road and the roads of the others at the conference. After I decided to attend the watch party, some situational cues indicated fandom would be an appropriate identity response (i.e., I was surrounded by other sport fans at an event centered on the game), but others indicated career would be a more appropriate response (i.e., the others surrounding me were professional connections). I chose to de-emphasize fandom and instead wear my career ‘hat,’ masking my identification with the Raptors in the name of professional advancement.

However, illustrating the difficulty of exploring identity, this setting was not merely indicative of the negotiation of two identities (fandom and career). Those two identities spurred me to take part in the watch party, but not before I weighed the cost for my physical health, which nearly prevented me from attending, remained on my mind throughout the event, and spurred me to leave early. There were no situational cues indicating my health-conscious identity

should be salient (i.e., I was not surrounded by other health-conscious individuals or located in a setting centered on health), but its positioning in my salience hierarchy (i.e., its centrality) led to it impacting my behavior in all parts of the evening.

My emphasis on health led me to eat alone instead of dining with colleagues, which underscores scholars' suggestion that the long-held societal ritual of communal eating has become de-socialized as a result of growing health-consciousness (Mintz, 1995). In a similar vein, health-consciousness may pose a threat to the social fabric of fandom. I did not fully engage with the watch party, partially because of my career motivations, and partially because I did not feel being in that environment was conducive to physical well-being.

Thus, I made trade-offs to multiple identities throughout the evening. I attempted to make three central pieces of self – fan, scholar, and health-conscious individual – work together in harmony, but at each point in time, something de-escalated in salience. My identity response, then, was fueled by a combination of context, relationships, and psychological centrality – all three were involved at all times.

Though the process was dynamic, my general identity response in Snapshot 1 was to de-escalate fandom within my salience hierarchy and to prioritize career and health. Accordingly, my situational self-concept (see Stryker & Serpe, 1994) from this snapshot is represented visually in Model 3 (Appendix F).

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INSERT MODEL 3 HERE

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The importance of all three factors – social context, relationships, and psychological centrality – was also evident in Snapshot 2. In this setting, I prioritized my friend and fan



identities, broadly allowing my health identity and career identity to de-escalate. However, given the centrality of both identities, this decision did not come easily, and I did not simply ‘turn off’ either piece of self. In other words, I continued wearing part of each hat, as evidenced by their pervasive roles in the log.

For example, consider the moment in the Heinz Field concourse – I wanted to eat in a healthy manner, but felt my options were constrained. I did not want to disappoint others, namely Andrew and Elisabeth, so I chose to order a food item that conflicted with my health-consciousness. It was not a behavior consistent with my daily actions, but the combination of the setting and my other psychologically central identities spurred me to act out of accordance with my usual behavior – social context and relationships *overpowered* the centrality of my health identity.

Though at the start of the evening I prioritized health (i.e., I did not drink beer or eat anything that fell outside the realm of my standard diet), the environment eventually compelled me to de-escalate my health identity in the name of escalating fandom and friendship. Thus, my general situational self-concept from Snapshot 2 is represented visually in Model 4 (Appendix G).

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INSERT MODEL 4 HERE  
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If these events had taken place in different environments – for example, if I had watched this game at home with Elisabeth – other identities (e.g., health and spouse) would likely have been more salient. In different circumstances, I would likely have chosen different hats, or worn different ‘percentages’ of the hats. This underscores the difficulty of studying identity: one can

speak *generally* about his/her self-concept (i.e., ‘who I am’), but the reality of life dictates constant changes.

It should be noted that, as Oyserman et al. (2014) observed, “social determinants cannot cause individual action directly” (p. 206). However, the present narratives make clear that context plays a *pivotal* role in health-conscious sport fans’ negotiation of multiple identities; congruence between social determinants and one’s identities dictates behavior. Thus, a full account of such individuals’ identity work cannot be provided without consideration of the environment.

#### *4.6.1.3 Understanding fans’ multiple identities*

With this project, I aimed to clarify how health-conscious sport fans negotiate their two psychologically central role identities. Scholars have begun examining the relationship between fan identity and other psychologically central role identities (e.g., Mansfield, In Press). Such work addresses a gap in sport theory (see Lock & Heere, 2017). However, the findings of the present study infer the scope of such work should be critically evaluated.

In the course of these narratives, my other identities – namely my roles as a husband and scholar – were pervasive. I did not seek to examine my partner identity or career identity; I sought to examine fandom and health-consciousness. However, both my relationship and career played undeniable roles in my health and fan identity work. For me, it was not a matter of ‘negotiating Identity 1 (e.g., fandom) and Identity 2 (e.g., health),’ but rather ‘simultaneously negotiating Identities 1, 2, 3, and 4.’ I could not evaluate individual pieces of self without considering the overlapping impact of other roles.

Consider the following passage from Snapshot 1, as I debated attending the watch party: “*With this choice (attending the sporting event), I get fandom and career, I tell myself. With the*

*other, I'd only get health. Two is greater than one.*" In this moment, I was tallying my psychologically central identities. My behavior was dictated based on the decision that aligned with the greater sum.

I was performing what might be described as 'identity math.' This decision was not ultimately based merely on centrality – my health identity *may* have been the most psychologically central of any identity in my salience hierarchy in the moment, but it was outnumbered by two identities (fandom and career) that were less valued but still highly central. Similarly, as I watched the end of this event back at my hotel, my fandom was salient, yet I chose to go to sleep before the game's conclusion – because this identity was outnumbered by other roles that, while perhaps less salient in the moment, represented a majority. Two was greater than one.

Thus, identity work is not always a matter of which identity is more central to the individual (see Rosenberg, 1979), or of which identity is more salient given the environment (see McCall & Simmons, 1978). Sometimes, instead, it comes down to the interaction between *several* central identities and becomes a matter of identity math. Imagine, for example, that Identity 1 represents 30% of an individual's self-concept, Identity 2 represents 20%, and Identity 3 represents 11%. Though Identity 1 is 'highest' within the salience hierarchy (i.e., it occupies the greatest percentage of the self-concept), an individual may engage in a behavior *antithetic* to Identity 1 if it serves both Identity 2 and Identity 3 (i.e., if both are salient). In the case of this example, the 31% centrality outweighs the 30%. In situations of such narrow disparity, however, the focal actor will likely experience internal turmoil as a result of identity conflict (see Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This much was evident in my accounts; when determining my behavior based on identity math, I struggled with these decisions.

Social connections play a pivotal role in this process; for example, they impacted my decision to invest in career over fandom at the watch party, and my decision to invest in fandom over career at the Bills game. This insight is not limited to highly valued relationships, but also includes relationships with individuals who are related to one's most central identities. For example, in Snapshot 3, the athletes I reflected upon meeting were merely acquaintances. These were not the intimate relationships typically considered in matters of identity work (see McNulty & Swann, 1994), such as those relationships (e.g., friends, spouse) evident in Snapshot 2. Nonetheless, their *relation* to identities that were important to me (i.e., fandom and career) led our interactions to impact my identity work.

Scholars have visually represented the logic of identity math through the identity pie (see Kerpelman & Schvaneveldt, 1999). Sport researchers interested in future explorations of multiple identities in fandom should remain cognizant that all fans possess such a 'pie.' Humans are complex. Thus, sport scholars should not merely examine how fandom relates to one other identity (i.e., how one slice relates to another slice), but rather how fandom interacts with all other major pieces of self (i.e., how the slice of fandom relates to the other large slices).

My findings underscore the need to examine fans from a holistic perspective. Fans are not merely fans, nor are health-conscious individuals merely health-conscious individuals, nor are health-conscious fans merely health-conscious fans. They are many other things, and the self-concept evolves perpetually (Fox, 1997). This much is evident when comparing Snapshots 1-3; my own fan identity evolved throughout the year of data collection, and so too did my other central identities. In the future, then, scholars should explore "how all role-identities function together as a single structural unit" (Callero, 1985, p. 214).

As Myrdahl (2011) noted, it is useful to examine singular identities in isolation. Such an approach “does not preclude the fluidity” of identities, acknowledging they are dynamic and “produced, inflected and performed in relation to other identity categories” (p. 141). However, the impact of other central identities must, at the very least, be discussed.

It is important to note that “assessing the integration of more than two domains simultaneously appears to be a formidable methodological challenge” (Syed & McLean, 2016, p. 5). This is often because respondents – even, in this case, a research subject documenting and analyzing his *own* experience – struggle with unpacking how more than two of their identities may be related (Azmitia et al., 2008).

In these logs, I was prompted to negotiate my fan identity with several other identities in my salience hierarchy. Thus, the findings of the present work lend credibility to the use of identity theory as a theoretical foundation for inquiries of fandom and dictate the need to expand understandings of role identity interaction (see Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005) in related inquiries.

#### *4.6.1.4 Role identity centrality and behavior*

The snapshots in this study suggest an identity of greater psychological centrality is less likely to be affected by the environment. For example, consider my health-conscious identity. In Snapshot 1, my emphasis on health led me to avoid eating with colleagues and to leave the watch party prematurely; in Snapshot 2, such an emphasis led me to bring my own food both to the tailgate and into the stadium. In Snapshot 2, the context eventually ‘won,’ leading me to cede the *salience* of health for the evening in the name of friendship and fandom; nonetheless, it was evident that the *centrality* of health nearly prevented this from happening. Neither setting was

conducive to health-related behavior, yet my self-valuation of this identity led to it impacting my behavior in both contexts.

Similarly, the social context in Snapshot 2 did not dictate that my career identity should be salient. Nonetheless, given its importance within my self-concept, I still reflected on theory and discussed research at the game. These were not environmentally appropriate responses, but they were role identity appropriate (Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988). My behavior in these snapshots is consistent with the idea that individuals are motivated to verify their self-views and to act in accordance with their self-understandings (Schroeder et al., 2006). I saw myself in a certain manner; thus, I strived to act in accordance with the role identities composed in that self-concept, even when the setting warranted different behavior.

Individuals strive to integrate their multiple identities, feeling inauthentic when they do not (Ebrahimi et al., 2019). This appeared to be the case for me in Snapshot 1:

I explain that I choose not to consume (alcohol) for health purposes. I feel validated in this explanation, like my authentic self has started to come through. I sense that, in this small way, my colleagues have gotten to know more of the ‘real me’ by glimpsing my health-consciousness, despite my repression of fandom.

Similarly, in Snapshot 2, I felt I could not act as a health-conscious individual for the entire NFL game, and this caused internal turmoil. When individuals do not perform up to self-standards in valued identities – in other words, when their role performance is not up to par – their self-esteem suffers (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Individuals seek out opportunity structures that promote their self-views (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Thus, a health-conscious fan who does not feel able to perform adequately within that role in a defined social context (e.g., at a sporting event) is likely to avoid such an environment in the future. This was evident in my final thoughts in Snapshot 2: “I love being a fan, and I always will. But if engaging with important identities

like career and health requires continually reducing my fandom, I may need to make that trade-off.”

#### *4.6.1.5 Methods for understanding fan identity*

My experience underscores the difficulty inherent in conceptualizing identity. Indeed, the search for self-identity is complicated, involving desires for self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning (Vignoles et al., 2006). Some methodological approaches for understanding fan identity, then, may oversimplify its nuances. At different points of my life – and even at the times of these three snapshots – I would have provided different fan identity scores on scales attempting to quantify my degree of identification (e.g., Trail et al., 2000). Scholars have often represented sport consumers as a broad consumer group of ‘highly identified fans;’ however, even the most loyal fans seem to experience fluctuations in their degree of identification.

These personal narratives highlight the value of alternative qualitative methodologies for matters of identity in sport fandom. The approach employed herein facilitated deep introspection. It was only through this ‘self as researcher and research subject’ method that I was able to begin piecing together the story of my fan identity evolution.

My story came into clearer focus as data collection progressed; for example, in Snapshot 1, I struggled to explain why I was not wearing any Bills apparel. By the end of Snapshot 3, I had begun to more fully understand the ways in which other identities and circumstances had impacted my fan identity. Thus, given the complicated nature of identity, particularly as it pertains to multiple identities (Syed & McLean, 2016), future scholars interested in fan identity work should be encouraged to leverage personalized designs.

This autoethnographic design, and the benefits of a doctoral dissertation, afforded me the luxury of time to unpack and converse with others about my identity journey. Insights from this journey may be leveraged to understand other de-escalated fans, particularly those who prioritize health, career, and their close relationships. Consistent with the suggestion of Ashforth et al. (2008), the flexible design of this study – the unconventional, deeply personal autoethnographic approach (Ellis et al., 2011) – allowed me to demonstrate the many shades of grey encountered in inquiries of identity.

Quantitative designs have a valuable role in understanding fandom, as a long literature has demonstrated; however, so too do qualitative designs – even of the most unconventional type. Not every scholar needs to embrace autoethnography as a preferred research method, but scholars interested in personal examination should be encouraged to pursue this route (see Carrington, 2008). In sport management, paradigmatic differences should not facilitate warring factions but instead healthy dialogue and a recognition that all viewpoints offer value. Thus, I echo the suggestions of other sport scholars (e.g., Frisby, 2005) that critical, unconventional methodologies are beneficial to the discipline and should be encouraged. In the following section, I discuss practical implications of these narratives.

#### *4.6.2 Managerial Implications*

##### *4.6.2.1 Marketing to health-conscious fans*

Sport scholars have long implored researchers to make serving managers a focal point of their work (Weese, 1995). The present study gives sport organizations a direct lens into the lived experience of one health-conscious fan, and the findings yield insights that may be beneficial for teams seeking to appeal to such individuals.



Consider, first, food in the fan environment, a subject pervasive in these accounts. In fan environments, the lack of healthy food impacted my identity work. For example, the food options in Snapshot 1 nearly kept me from attending the watch party. I ultimately chose to attend the event because my career, fan identity, and related social connections were involved. However, if this were simply a matter of choosing between health and fandom, the account indicates I may have opted against attending the sporting event; the identity math would likely not have ended in the favor of fandom.

Similarly, food played a salient role in Snapshot 2. For example, I was surrounded by fellow fans at the tailgate who were drinking alcohol and eating unhealthy foods – behaviors typical in fan culture. This setting seemed to spur identity conflict, given my prioritization of both health-consciousness and fandom, as evidenced by this excerpt:

I want to blend in with my peers, to feel in tune with the community. My fan identity says, “do it!” But my health-conscious identity has driven me to eschew unhealthy behavior, regardless of the social environment. Sometimes it’s tempting to join in when I am around sport fans – not because I want alcohol, but simply because I want to fit in, to feel that social cohesion, to embrace our shared identity – but I resist the pressure. Health matters too much to me.

My internal dilemma at the game may seem to merely represent an ‘obsessive’ health consumer (Ayo, 2012), an outlier. However, this moment of introspection should be considered by sport teams because it represents a potential loss of revenue when considered on a broader scale. Population health-consciousness is growing year-over-year (Crawford, 2006); thus, more consumers are, like myself, identifying as health-minded (Oyserman et al., 2014). Accordingly, feeling constrained at sporting events – feeling one cannot behave in the healthy manner he/she normally would – may prevent health-focused individuals from attending games. Food

preferences often impact consumer behavior (Caplan, 2013), and it was clear the environment led me to consider eschewing live consumption.

Thus, teams should consider how they may convey their value to health-minded fans. Practical suggestions for potential concession changes are outlined in Study 1. Teams should consider not only what they may change organizationally (e.g., which foods are offered), but also what they may change in terms of marketing outreach. First, if a team *does* modify its approach to become more health-oriented, the franchise should highlight these changes in the media. Health-conscious fans would likely be drawn to such organizations, viewing such a move as (1) aligned with personal priorities, and (2) representative of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1999).

Teams should also consider alternative content-delivery approaches for health-conscious fans concerned about the live environment. Teams could stay engaged with health-conscious individuals through broadcasts and mobile technologies, yet such engagement may not be sufficient to nourish continued fandom. Community is a key component of fandom (Anderson & Stone, 1981), as evidenced by its saturation of these narratives. For example, consider my reflection in Snapshot 2: “If you do not share your fandom with others, I would question what value you really get from it at all. Is the entertainment that worthwhile?” Other health-conscious fans may feel similarly, questioning the value of sport fandom if they cannot enjoy it *with others*.

Thus, teams should consider what they can do to promote continued engagement with the team *and* relationships. One solution is to promote a sub-community of health-conscious fans. Fans of teams already possess multiple in-group identities (Lock & Funk, 2016); thus, a team such as the Bills could, for example, create a “Healthy Bills Backer” group. These fans could meet in an appropriate location – for example, a healthy restaurant – to watch Bills games. They

could unite around their shared interests, fandom and fitness. Likewise, the Bills could host a “flow during the game” event at a local yoga studio, or a “WOD (Workout Of the Day) with the Bills” event at a CrossFit box. Teams could even get athletes involved in these health-minded communities.

Additionally, given that health-minded consumers are avid consumers of online content (Dutta-Bergman, 2004), teams may also consider creating sub-groups of health-minded fans on social media, such as a “Healthy Bills Backer” Facebook group. Taking steps in this direction may promote identity integration (McLean & Syed, 2015), making fandom and physical health seem more harmonious.

Scholars have suggested teams should consider fans’ varying needs based on priorities and life circumstances (e.g., Mansfield, In Press). Just as not all fans are the same and do not experience fandom in the same way, not all fans should be marketed to in the same way (Katz et al., 2019). Teams cannot be ‘all things to all people,’ but they should consider what marketing changes may be conducive to their long-term viability as an organization. If adapting is necessitated by a changing consumer landscape – such as by population health-consciousness increasing (Ogden et al., 2006) – then teams should adapt. It is time for teams to begin thinking about how to reach health-minded fans.

#### **4.7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Autoethnography, by nature, suffers from a lack of generalizability (Ellis et al., 2011); the same holds true with the present work. Though there may be some carryovers, my experience should not be considered reflective of all health-conscious sport fans’ experiences of identity work. Indeed, as these narratives indicated, my own experience differed based on situational

variables. However, I was not seeking generalizability with this project – my goal was to add depth of understanding to the research question by employing an alternative lens.

The present study is also limited by being constrained to three snapshots. This was partly a pragmatic decision, as restricting the presentation of data to three instances of identity work allowed me to achieve greater self-reflection, emphasizing depth above breadth in data analysis. However, an additional approach would involve the disclosure of autoethnographic logs captured more repeatedly (i.e., sharing all of my experiences in the fan environment for a full year). Even better, scholars could collect such in-depth logs from *numerous* individuals and note themes shared across the experiences.

There are a number of additional ways in which scholars may extend these findings; generating future research directions is one of the primary contributions of this project. Relationships were a key theme in my identity work. Indeed, commitment to an identity is enhanced when a greater number of social ties are linked to the identity (Stets & Burke, 2014). Thus, an opportune next step would be to investigate the questions underlying this inquiry through network theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011), explicitly exploring how various social connections and different types of ties may influence behaviors pertinent to fandom and physical health.

Scholars have recently implored sport researchers to incorporate network theory into their research designs (Katz et al., 2019), as examining ‘only’ a fan ego (i.e., a focal actor) and not also his/her alters (i.e., social connections) captures only part of the story. If my story only involved me and failed to consider the other scholars at the watch party, my friends at the NFL game, or my relationship with Elisabeth, takeaways would be significantly different. A longitudinal design (i.e., with data captured throughout the course of a season or multiple

seasons, allowing for changing contexts, team outcomes, league/roster machinations, and relational variables) would be particularly illuminating.

Another intriguing question emerging from this inquiry pertains to personal characteristics: If a different fan experienced life circumstances similar to mine, would he/she experience a similar identity response? In other words, how much of fan identification comes down to life experiences and how much can simply be attributed to interpersonal differences? Scholars have examined various fan segments (e.g., Dwyer & Drayer, 2010; Funk, 2002), yet there is an opportunity to extend understandings of sport consumers by examining psychometric properties, such as the Big 5 (Zillig, Hemenover, & Dienstbier, 2002).

Additionally, scholars may consider leveraging personality-typing (e.g., the Enneagram of Personality or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; see Myers, 1962; Riso & Hudson, 1996) to discern how fan identification manifests for varying personality types. My experience as a sport fan was impacted not only by life contexts, but also by my core motivations and instincts as an ‘Achiever.’ For example, I noted in Snapshot 2 that “offering value to society is one of my core motivations.” It is plausible that individuals of differing disposition – with different core motivations – experience fandom differently; thus, research that paints portraits of personality type in sport fandom would be engaging.

#### **4.8 Study 2 Conclusion**

With this study, I examined my own experience as a health-conscious sport fan, conducting autoethnography. I captured live experiences in three different settings and reflected upon my broader history managing these two pieces of self.

It was evident that my fan identification was dynamic and perpetually in flux. I struggled to balance and integrate my fan identity and health-consciousness, yet other central identities

were unavoidably involved in this process. I attempted to make all of my psychologically central identities work together (i.e., to integrate the multiple identities atop my salience hierarchy), but often found it untenable; eventually, it seemed something had to give.

I resolved instances of challenging identity work by performing ‘identity math.’ Nonetheless, I never fully ‘removed’ any of these hats, given their centrality in my self-concept. In the future, scholars should not merely seek to examine the ‘negotiation of fan identity and identity X,’ but rather how fandom interacts with all other psychologically central role identities and how relationships and context impact this identity work.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH STUDY 3**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

For my final study, I applied a quantitative lens to the examination of health-conscious sport fans. Whereas the first two studies sought depth of insight, I aimed with Study 3 to understand the social-psychological intersection of health-consciousness and fandom through a broader dataset, allowing for contextual variances and more generalizability. Thus, I explored the relationship between these two roles through the lens of post-positivist inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

Given the findings of Study 1, I was particularly motivated in Study 3 to understand whether health-conscious sport fans experience identity conflict (Pratt & Corley, 2007). I endeavored to answer this question by comparing self-identified health-conscious sport fans to individuals with varying degrees of health-consciousness and fan identification. Thus, the purpose of Study 3 was to examine whether health-conscious sport fans perceived identity conflict. However, by employing an instrument that captured a plethora of data, including demographics and other theoretically relevant variables, I also aimed to more generally expound upon the relationship between sport fandom and health-consciousness, given the inconsistency of previous findings (see Inoue et al., 2015). I sought to accomplish these aims by surveying sport fans on Qualtrics, with 659 participants recruited through Amazon's online polling system, Mechanical Turk.

#### **5.2 Research Questions & Hypotheses**

Through the completion of Study 3, I aimed to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What is the relationship between fan identity level and health-consciousness?

**RQ2:** Do health-conscious sport fans perceive more identity conflict in the consumer sport context than sport fans who do not consider health part of their respective identity?

**RQ3:** How do demographic differences (e.g., gender, race, education) impact the relationship between health-consciousness and fan identification?

Given previous work on social-psychological identification in fandom and physical well-being outcomes (e.g., Cornil & Chandon, 2013; Sweeney & Quimby, 2012), I hypothesized the following:

**H1:** Sport fandom will be negatively related to health-consciousness.

Further, based on prior research on conflicting demands between multiple identities in fandom (e.g., Mansfield, In Press), the factors manifesting in fan identity de-escalation (e.g., Hyatt & Foster, 2015), and the common effects of identity conflict in the salience hierarchy (e.g., Hogg et al., 1995), I hypothesized the following:

**H2:** Health-conscious sport fans will indicate higher perceived identity conflict in the consumer sport context than sport fans with low or moderate health-consciousness.

Finally, given studies on fans' perceptions of food offerings in the sport spectator environment (e.g., Ireland & Watkins, 2010; Sukalakamala et al., 2013), I proposed the final hypothesis driving this study:

**H3:** Demographic variables such as gender, race, income, and education level will have significant effects on fans' degree of perceived identity conflict.

### **5.3 Participants**

MTurk was launched by Amazon in 2005. Through this platform, researchers post 'HITs' (Human Intelligence Tasks), and workers may accept such tasks in exchange for compensation. Respondents include more than 500,000 workers from more than 190 countries, primarily the



U.S. and India. Indeed, in this study, most respondents ( $n = 597$ ) were United States-based, and 62 were from India.

Participants were paid \$1 in exchange for completing one survey lasting roughly 15 minutes. I sought fans from a variety of geographic regions, supporting a variety of teams from different sport organizing bodies (e.g., National Football League, National Basketball League, etc.). Across 659 individuals, contextual variance is to be expected and is, in fact, encouraged; accounting for variance is one of the primary arguments in favor of the quantitative methodology, which often facilitates a more robust sample size (Creswell, 2013).

Additionally, a larger sample was sought for this project to allow for participants of varying ages, races, and socioeconomic statuses, for several reasons extending beyond generalizability of findings: (1) many previous projects focused on health promotion have reinforced racist attitudes, underscoring the importance of diversity in future related projects (Bunton et al., 1995); (2) poor physical health is unevenly distributed across demographic groups, and many minority groups feel discriminated against in health settings (Alegría, Pescosolido, Williams, & Canino, 2011); and (3) fandom is informed by a complex set of social structures and network influences that vary across settings (Bourdieu, 1984; Crawford, 2004).

## **5.4 Procedure**

Each fan engaged in this study completed one survey. Almost all items on this survey had Likert-scale response options (5-point scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree).

The opening of the survey gauged individuals' degree of fan identification. Given ongoing debate surrounding the appropriate scale for measuring sport fandom (see Lock & Heere, 2017), I did so by leveraging three different scales. First, participants completed a fan identification scale from Trail et al. (2000) that scholars have argued aligns with identity theory

(see Trail, Anderson, & Lee, 2017). Next, participants completed the team identity scale from Heere and James (2007). Finally, participants completed a role identity scale from Siebert and Siebert (2005), consistent with my aim to build this research upon identity theory; this scale was adapted to apply to sport fans. Given its high reliability score, the final scale was used as the primary measure for analysis.

The next phase of this survey gauged interviewees' health-consciousness (i.e., health identity) and health- and fitness-related behavioral patterns. Participants responded to health identity measures from Sparks and Guthrie (1998), followed by health-consciousness measures from Dutta-Bergman (2004). They also completed health-consciousness measures from Walker and Hill-Polerecky (1997). These items were packaged together because a robust scale for gauging social-psychological health identification has not yet been developed; this marks an area where future work is needed.

The next phase of the survey gauged the degree to which individuals perceived identity conflict. First, fans responded to measures regarding their fan identity and other roles in life (through measures adapted from van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). Next, participants responded to measures pertinent to the relationship between their fandom and physical health (through identity conflict measures adapted from O'Neil et al., 1986, and Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). Given the scope of this study, I aimed to understand experiences of identity conflict specifically within the consumer sport context.

Additionally, I sought to gauge a number of additional theoretical variables that, based on my understanding of the literature, may have impacted findings. Thus, participants were asked to complete measures related to locus of control (adapted from Spector, 1988), anti-fat attitudes (Crandall, 1994), ascription to traditional masculine norms (Thompson & Pleck, 1986),

achievement orientation (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002), role balance (Marks & MacDermid, 1996), and social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Participants were also asked how the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic had impacted their fandom and physical health, as data were collected in late spring-early summer 2020. The survey concluded with demographic questions.

In sum, qualitative work is often considered optimal for exploring identity (see Ashforth et al., 2008) and as such serves as the foundation of this dissertation. However, a long line of sport scholars have levered quantitative designs to better understand sport fan identity on a broad scale (e.g., Fink et al., 2002). Likewise, the quantitative lens has recently been employed by scholars conducting similar work examining the manifestations of fandom across contexts (e.g., Katz et al., 2019). Additionally, the expanded sample size of Study 3 allows for more generalizable findings, expanding upon the exploratory Studies 1 and 2.

## **5.5 Findings**

### *5.5.1 Research Question 1*

For RQ1, I hypothesized that sport fandom would be negatively related to health-consciousness. However, data did not support the hypothesis. In fact, the opposite was evident: sport fandom was *positively* related to health-consciousness.

As measures for this test, I used (1) fan role identity, drawing on an adapted version of the caregiver role identity scale of Siebert and Siebert (2005), and (2) health-consciousness, drawing on the health information orientation scale of Dutta-Bergman (2004). First, I tested whether the simple average of the fan role identity items could be used as a general measure for the dimension, conducting a principal component analysis to transform the six items into one factor. Each of the items had similar weights. The created factor score was then correlated with

the average score of the six items and yielded a result of 0.999. Thus, I concluded the simple average could be used as the measure. Reliability analysis also confirmed the composite measures had high reliability, as each measure had a reliability score greater than .7 (fan role Cronbach's  $\alpha = .759$ , health-consciousness Cronbach's  $\alpha = .822$ ).

I tested this relationship through a linear regression, with health-consciousness as the dependent variable and fan role identity as the predictor variable. A moderate relationship was observed ( $\beta = .561$ ,  $SE = .032$ ,  $t(664) = 17.483$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consequently, the R-square or  $R^2$  shows the value of  $R^2 = .315$ ,  $F(1, 664) = 305.669$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating 31.5% of variance in health-consciousness is explained by an individual's fan role identity score.

Table 5.1

*Regression Results of Relationship between Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness*

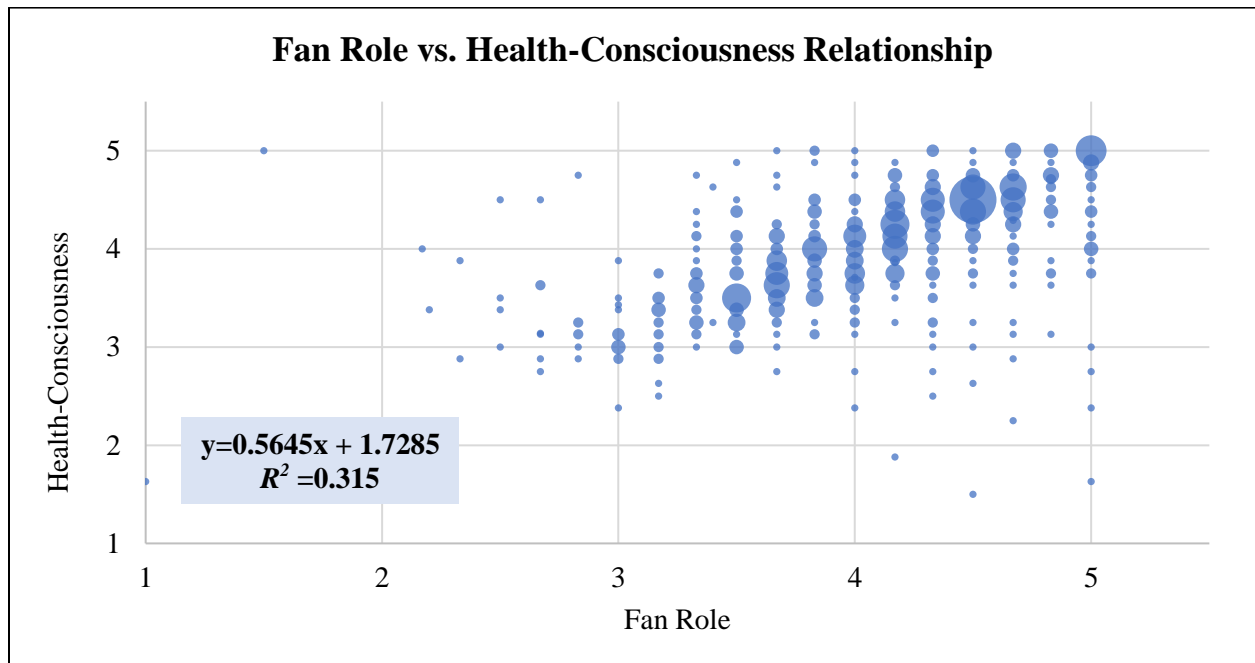
Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
Constant	1.725	.133		12.964**	.000	.315	305.669*	664
Average of FanRole items	.565	.032	.561	17.483**	.000			

*Note.* DV = Average of HealthCon items;  $N = 665$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

The relationship can be visually observed on a scatterplot, where the X-axis represents the score of each respondent on the fan role scale (the average of all fan role items) and the Y-axis represents the score of each respondent on the health-consciousness scale (average of all health-consciousness items). The size of the bubbles represents the frequency of that combination's occurrence. (This approach was necessary, because both scales yielded only a specific number of possible values, as they were averages of 5-point scale ratings. On a simple scatterplot, with

equal-sized bubbles, the combinations with a few and with many mentions would look the same.)

The trendline shows the relationship: mirroring the result of the previous linear regression, the slope (the unstandardized beta or  $b$ ) is 0.565 and  $R^2 = 0.315$ .



*Figure 5.1.* Scatterplot of Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness Relationship

I was also interested in whether demographic variables would impact the effects observed in RQ1. Would gender, for example, impact the relationship I observed between fandom and health-consciousness? Thus, I conducted a multiple regression analysis including gender, race (dichotomized as white/non-white), age, religion (measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1-very religious to 7-not religious at all), education level, annual income, and political orientation (measured on a 7-point bipolar scale from very conservative to very liberal).

Gender and education were shown to yield additional significant effects while controlling for fan role identity: women demonstrated higher levels of health-consciousness ( $b = .203$ ,  $SE = .063$ ,  $t(206) = 3.241$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and so too did more highly educated individuals ( $b = .116$ ,  $SE = .033$ ,  $t(206) = 3.520$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The only other variable to yield a significant effect was race, yet this was only observed at a 90% confidence level ( $p = .083$ ). Race had a negative effect; when individuals possessed the same degree of fan identification, white respondents demonstrated lower health-consciousness than non-white respondents. Age, income, political orientation, and religion, however, did *not* have significant effects on the relationship.

Table 5.2

*Regression Results of Effects of Demographics on Relationship between Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness*

Predictors or IV	$b$	$SE$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$R^2$	$F$	$df$
(Constant)	1.196	.275		4.349**	.000	.458	21.760	206
Average of FanRole items	.529	.045	.623	11.777**	.000			
What is your age in years?	.001	.003	.011	.213	.831			
What is your gender?	.203	.063	.170	3.241*	.001			
Race (white/non-white)	-.111	.064	-.095	-1.740	.083			
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	.116	.033	.198	3.520**	.001			
What is your annual income?	-.012	.012	-.058	-1.018	.310			

How would you describe your political orientation?	-.020	.018	-.066	-1.117	.265
How religious are you?	.009	.018	.032	.515	.607

*Note.* DV = Average of HealthCon items;  $N = 665$ ; \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Given these findings, I became interested in how, within this question, the effects of race and education may be impacted by gender. The relationship was stronger among men ( $R^2 = .494$ ) than women ( $R^2 = .315$ ). Among men, race ( $p = 0.01$ ) and education ( $p = 0.011$ ) played significant roles. Within race, the beta was negative ( $\beta = -0.155$ ), demonstrating that among men at the same level of fandom, white individuals possessed lower health-consciousness than non-white men. Further, when men's education was higher, so too was their health-consciousness ( $\beta = .155$ ). However, among women, these relationships were not significant. Thus, education worked in a similar way amongst men and women, but race yielded different effects (negative for men and positive yet not significant for women).

Table 5.3

*Regression Results of Moderating Impact of Gender (Men) on Effects of Race, Education, and Political Orientation on Relationship Between Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.406	.259		5.423**	.000	.494	35.582	146
Average of FanRole items	.559	.052	.645	10.777**	.000			
Race (white/non-white)	-.180	.068	-.155	-2.625	.010			

What is the highest level of education you have completed?	.089	.035	.155	2.564	.011
How would you describe your political orientation?	-.009	.018	-.030	-.509	.612

*Note.* DV = Average of HealthCon items;  $N = 665$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$ ; Selecting only cases for which What is your gender? = Man

Table 5.4

*Regression Results of Moderating Impact of Gender (Women) on Effects of Race, Education, and Political Orientation on Relationship Between Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.938	.533		3.634**	.001	.315	6.795	59
Average of FanRole items	.431	.085	.565	5.064**	.000			
Race (white/non-white)	.058	.127	.050	.459	.648			
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	.105	.067	.174	1.575	.121			
How would you describe your political orientation?	-.025	.031	-.088	-.808	.422			

*Note.* DV = Average of HealthCon items;  $N = 665$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$ ; Selecting only cases for which What is your gender? = Woman

To further validate these findings, I also examined the relationship between fan role identity and health-consciousness using other variables for health-consciousness. For example, I explored the relationship between fan role identity and health identity (Sparks & Guthrie, 1998), as well as the relationship between fan role identity and health promotion lifestyle (Walker &



Hill-Polerecky, 1997). Mirroring the results of the initial analysis, both showed moderately strong correlations; for fan role identity, the correlation with all health-related items was  $r(663) = .450, p < .001$ , and for health-consciousness, the correlation with all fan-related items was  $r(663) = .519, p < .001$ .

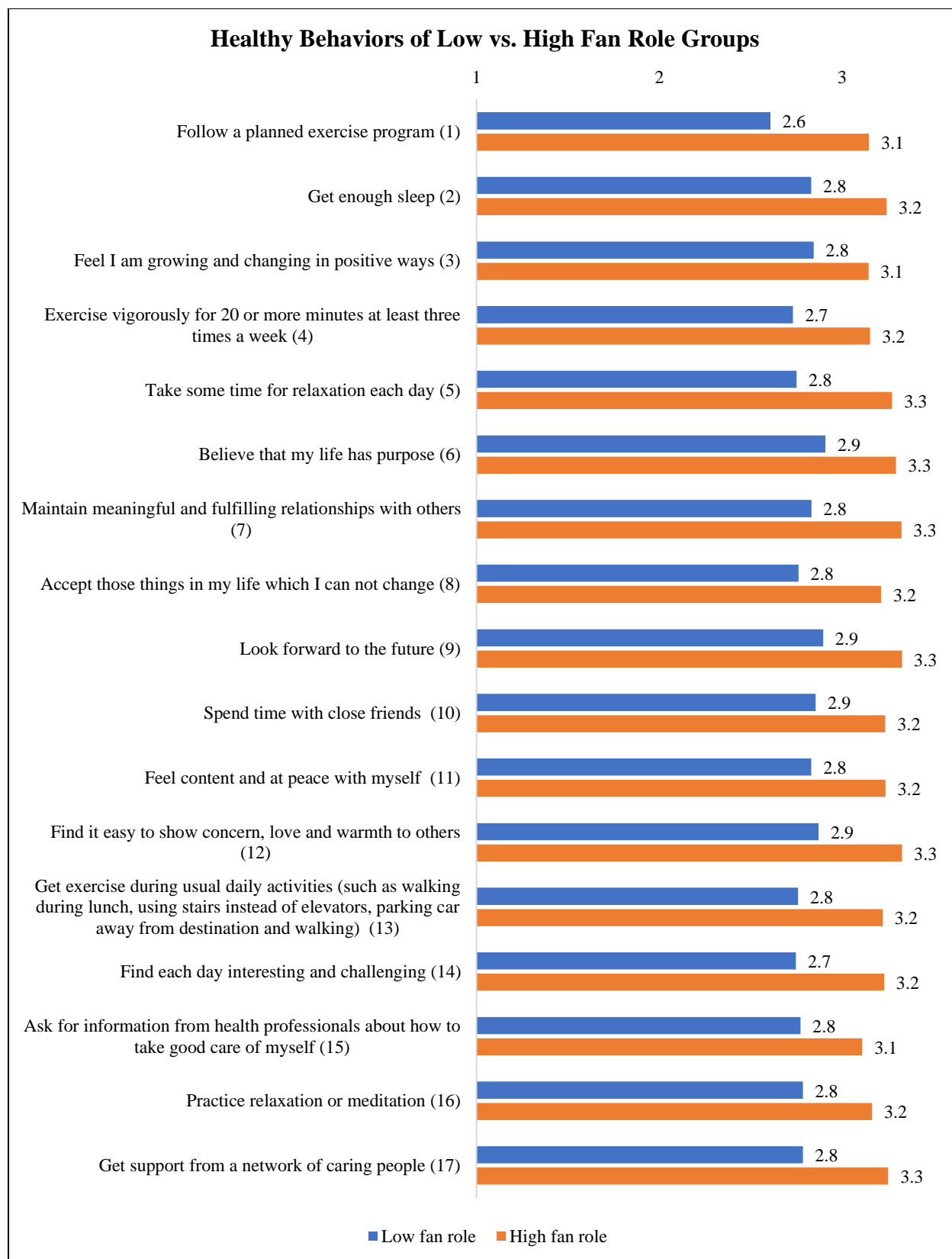
Table 5.5

*Correlations Between Fan Role Identity, Health-Consciousness and Other Variables for Health-Consciousness*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Average of FanRole items	1					
2. Average of HealthCon items	.562**	1				
3. AVERAGE FanID	.700**	.519**	1			
4. AVERAGE HealthID	.450**	.743**	.439**	1		
5. AVERAGE TeamID	.754**	.618**	.647**	.514**	1	
6. AVERAGE Walker (health practices)	.511**	.562**	.412**	.510**	.578**	1

*Note.*  $N = 665$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

Further, of note, those with high (i.e., above the  $M = 4.076$ ) scores for fan role identity reported higher frequency of engagement in healthy behavior, when compared to those with low (i.e., below-mean) scores for fan role identity.



*Figure 5.2. Healthy Behaviors of Low vs. High Fan Role Groups (Mean)*

As one would expect, the same relationship was observed for high and low health-consciousness (with the groups split by  $M = 4.029$ ): more health-conscious individuals engaged in healthy behaviors more often. This finding validates the measures used for health-consciousness as a proxy for health identification, given that role identification is often made clear through behavior (see Heiss, 1981). This relationship was universally observed across all healthy behaviors (all  $p < .001$ ) and also universally observed when tested among men only (all  $p < .01$ ) and women only (all  $p < .01$  except for 'Maintain meaningful and fulfilling relationships with others' ( $p = .014$ ) and 'Practice relaxation or meditation' ( $p = .011$ )).

Table 5.6

*Healthy Behaviors of Low vs. High Fan Role Groups (Male vs. Female)*

	What is your gender?			
	Man		Woman	
	Fan Role (high/low groups)		Fan Role (high/low groups)	
	Low fan role	High fan role	Low fan role	High fan role
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Follow a planned exercise program (1)	2.59	3.15	2.66	3.13
Get enough sleep (2)	2.79	3.25	2.93	3.24
Feel I am growing and changing in positive ways (3)	2.86	3.14	2.81	3.15
Exercise vigorously for 20 or more minutes at least three times a week (4)	2.78	3.18	2.64	3.07
Take some time for relaxation each day (5)	2.69	3.30	2.89	3.20
Believe that my life has purpose (6)	2.87	3.26	2.99	3.39
Maintain meaningful and fulfilling relationships with others (7)	2.71	3.32	3.08	3.35
Accept those things in my life which I can not change (8)	2.73	3.20	2.83	3.24
Look forward to the future (9)	2.87	3.35	2.96	3.27
Spend time with close friends (10)	2.84	3.20	2.89	3.35
Feel content and at peace with myself (11)	2.80	3.23	2.91	3.26
Find it easy to show concern, love and warmth to others (12)	2.79	3.32	3.04	3.34
Get exercise during usual daily activities (such as walking during lunch, using stairs instead of elevators, parking car away from destination and walking) (13)	2.75	3.22	2.77	3.22
Find each day interesting and challenging (14)	2.70	3.20	2.84	3.31
Ask for information from health professionals about how to take good care of myself (15)	2.72	3.06	2.88	3.26
Practice relaxation or meditation (16)	2.75	3.17	2.86	3.16
Get support from a network of caring people (17)	2.68	3.23	3.00	3.31

Likewise, I conducted this test by substituting team identification for fan role identification. The  $R^2$  improved to .381, again a moderate (but slightly stronger) relationship. Thus, fandom was again correlated with higher health-consciousness.

In sum, higher fan role identification was related to a *healthier* lifestyle and higher health-consciousness. Thus, H1 was not supported by the data, and in fact the opposite was observed: those who consider sport fandom part of their respective identity exhibit a higher level of concern for their physical well-being, both in terms of social-psychological health identification and in terms of direct health behavior.

### 5.5.2 Research Question 2

For RQ2, I hypothesized that health-conscious sport fans would indicate higher perceived identity conflict in the consumer sport context than sport fans with low-moderate health-consciousness. Unlike H1, data *did* support my second hypothesis. However, there was also a surprising twist in these findings.

To conduct this test, I first split respondents into 2x2 groups based on their fan role identity score (above or below the average threshold of 4.08) and health-consciousness (above or below the average threshold of 4.03). This resulted in a matrix with four cells: Low Fan, Low Health ( $n = 234$ ); Low Fan, High Health ( $n = 65$ ); High Fan, Low Health ( $n = 81$ ); and High Fan, High Health ( $n = 279$ ). Given the relationship between fandom and health-consciousness explained by RQ1, there were naturally more respondents in the high/high and low/low groups than in the low/high and high/low groups.

Dependent Variable: Perceived Identity Conflict

<b>High Fandom</b>	<b>High Health- Consciousness</b>
<b>Low Fandom</b>	<b>Low Health- Consciousness</b>

*Figure 5.3. 2x2 Matrix of Four Groups Based on Fan Role Identity Score and Dependent Variable (Perceived Identity Conflict)*

I next compared the four groups in terms of their perceived identity conflict in sport fan environments (i.e., at sporting events). The means were tested in pairs, with a two-tailed t-test between each pair. To conduct this test, I adapted the identity conflict scale of van den Bosch and Taris (2014). Subjects responded to measures such as “I behave in accordance with my values and beliefs in sports fan environments,” and “My behavior in sports fan environments reflects the ‘real me.’”

The Chronbach’s Alpha of this seven-item scale was 0.64. A principal component analysis, however, demonstrated that there were two dimensions within this scale. After dropping the first dimension and simply leveraging the final four items of this scale, which were worded in a similar manner, the Chronbach’s Alpha improved to 0.81. Thus, I used the final four

items of van den Bosch and Taris (2014) as the dependent variable. Subjects addressed measures such as, “In sports fan environments, I feel out of touch with the ‘real me.’”

Results of this analysis demonstrated that the High Fan, High Health group reported the highest level of identity conflict ( $M = 3.8$ ). Each of the other three groups reported a score significantly lower than 3.8 (as shown through a two-tailed t-test between each of the three groups versus the High Fan, High Health group, with all  $p < .05$ ).

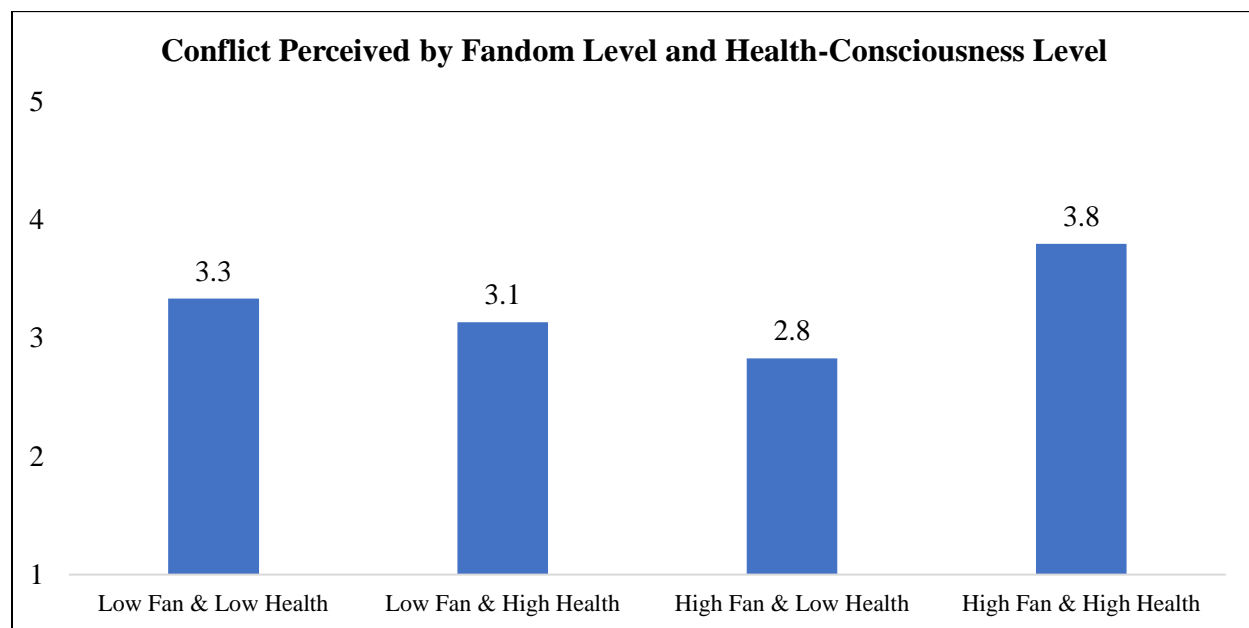


Figure 5.4. Conflict Perceived by Fandom Level and Health-Consciousness Level (2x2 Groups)

Thus, High Fan, High Health respondents indicated much more identity conflict than participants in any other group. Of the remaining three groups, Low Fan, Low Health individuals experienced the next-most identity conflict (3.3), followed by Low Fan, High Health individuals (3.1). Individuals high in fandom but low in health-consciousness reported the least identity conflict (2.8).

In sum, health-conscious sport fans indicated that they are more in conflict with their values during sporting events than less health-conscious sport fans. I also tested the amount of identity conflict between (1) high and low fan (not including health-consciousness), and (2) high and low health-consciousness (not including fandom). This analysis also revealed a significant difference between respondents of high and low health-consciousness, as well as a significant difference between respondents of high and low fandom. Individuals high in health-consciousness reported more identity conflict ( $M = 3.7$ ) when compared with individuals low in health-consciousness ( $M = 3.2$ ). This may be because their health-consciousness conflicts with aspects of sport fan culture, such as unhealthy eating behavior and its sedentary nature.

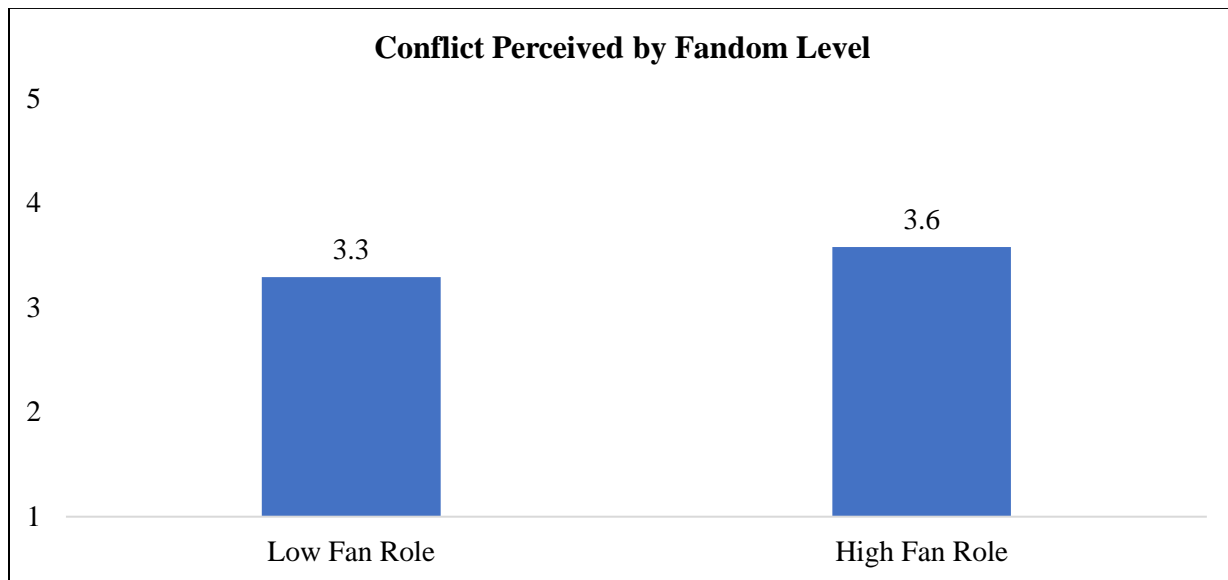


Figure 5.5. Conflict Perceived by Fandom Level (Low vs. High)

Further, individuals high in fandom reported more identity conflict ( $M = 3.6$ ) when compared with individuals low in fandom ( $M = 3.3$ ). This may be because they feel they act out



of accordance with their usual behavior when they are in fan-related settings (e.g., perhaps they behave emotionally or are more aggressive and loud than usual).

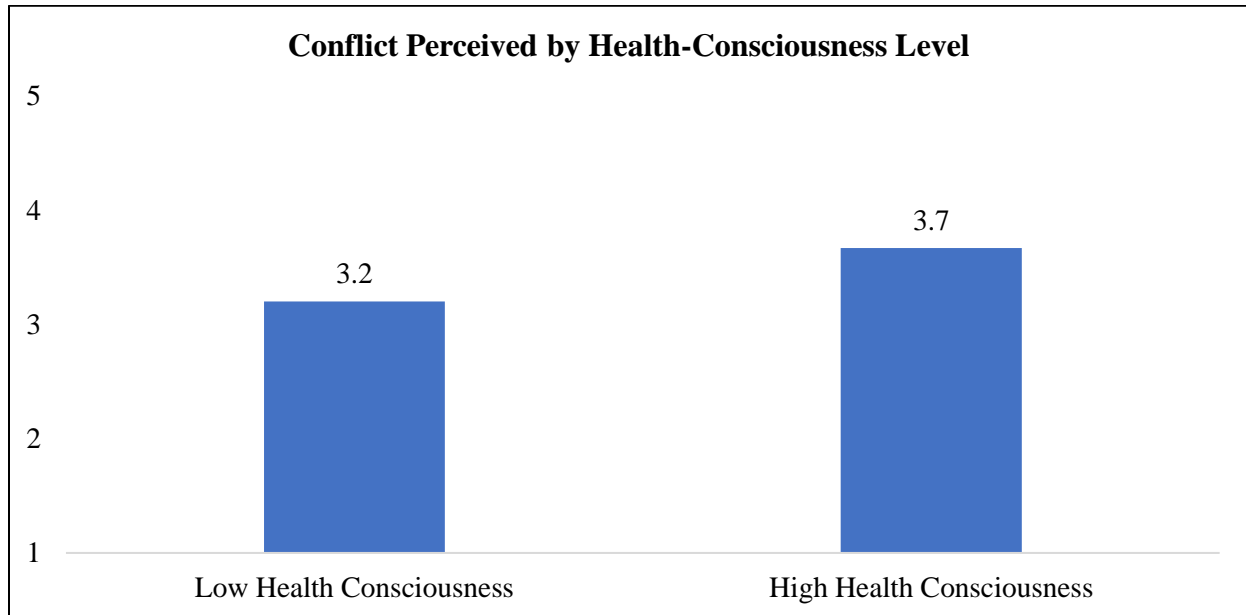


Figure 5.6. Conflict Perceived by Health-Consciousness Level (Low vs. High)

Next, I conducted a linear regression analysis.

Table 5.7

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness on Identity*

*Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.989	.296		6.709**	.000	.058	20.028	656
AVERAGE HealthCon	.443	.077	.263	5.743**	.000			
AVERAGE FanRole	-.080	.078	-.047	-1.030	.303			

Note. DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*\*  $p < .001$ ;

Health-consciousness did have a significant effect on identity conflict; however, the  $R^2$  of the model was only 0.058. Thus, the two variables in this analysis (fan role identity and health-consciousness) only explained 5.8% of variance in identity conflict. This indicates factors *other* than health-consciousness are likely contributing to experiences of identity conflict in sport fan environments.

These findings suggested that there might be an interaction effect between fan role identity and health-consciousness when predicting identity conflict. To test this, I standardized these two items by computing their product (naming it the interaction effect between fan role and health-consciousness) and including it in the regression model. This attempt, however, did not improve the model. The two variables and their interaction effect only explained 5.7% of variance in identity conflict.

Table 5.8

*Regression Analysis with Interaction Effect between Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness when Predicting Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.919	.307		6.252**	.000	.057	13.387	662
AVERAGE FanRole	-.058	.080	-.034	-.724	.469			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.435	.077	.257	5.635**	.000			
Interaction effect between Fan Role and Health-Consciousness	.009	.030	.012	.296	.767			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*\*  $p < .001$ ;

This reinforced the suggestion that factors other than health-consciousness are likely contributing to experiences of identity conflict in sport fan environments. It was for this potential outcome that RQ3 – a ‘messy’ research question, especially for a quantitative design – was included in this study. Therefore, as the final step of Study 3, I sought to understand what may be playing a role in fans’ experiences of identity conflict. If not health-consciousness, then what?

First, I added demographic variables to the model. Next, I included a number of theoretical variables that, based on the literature, I hypothesized may be relevant to the research question: achievement orientation, masculine ideologies, fat bias, locus of control, social dominance orientation, and role balance.

### *5.5.3 Research Question 3*

For RQ3, I hypothesized that demographic variables would have significant effects on individuals’ degree of perceived identity conflict. Data somewhat supported this hypothesis, yet the effects were mixed. Certain demographic variables had a statistically significant effect on identity conflict, but the effects were weak.

To conduct this analysis, I included additional variables in the model: gender, age, race, education, income, political orientation, and religion. This resulted in a slightly improved model, yet the  $R^2$  remained quite low (0.194).

Table 5.9

*Regression Analysis of Effects of Demographics on Fan Role Identity and Health-Consciousness  
When Predicting Identity Conflict*

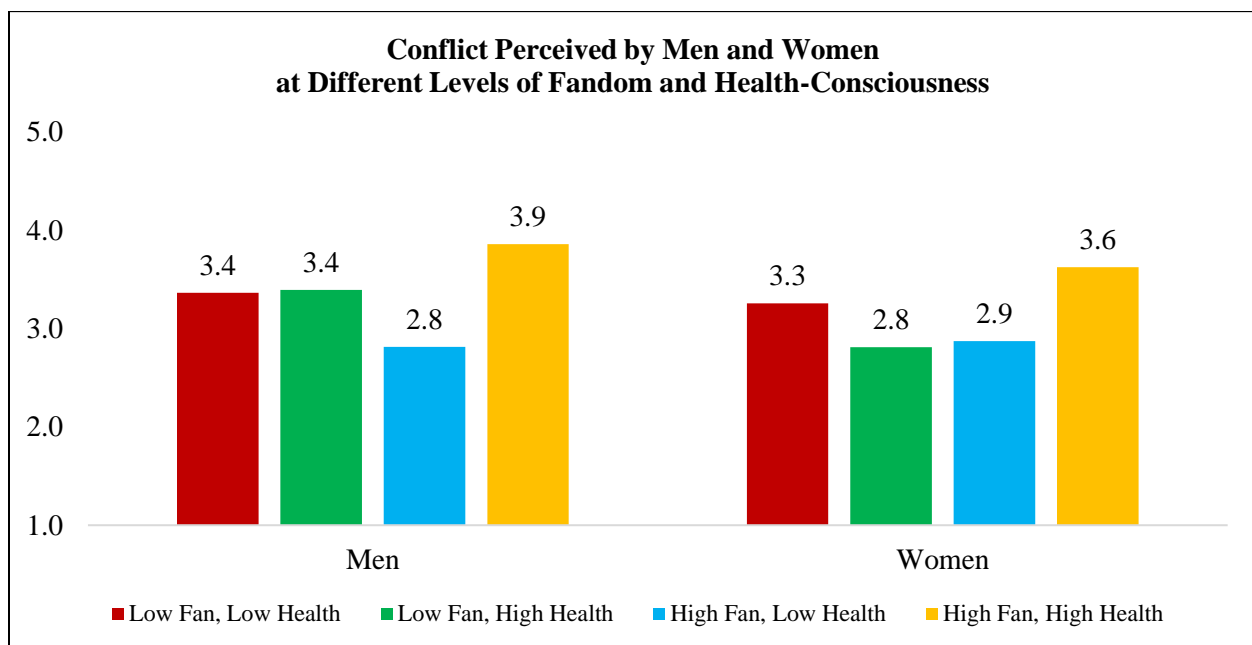
Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.392	.617		2.257	.025	.194	5.489	205
AVERAGE FanRole	-.089	.125	-.060	-.711	.478			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.651	.150	.370	4.350**	.000			
What is your gender?	-.243	.138	-.116	-1.765	.079			
What is your age in years?	-.018	.006	-.180	-2.788	.006			
Race (white/non-white)	-.085	.138	-.041	-.615	.540			
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	.147	.073	.143	2.024	.044			
What is your annual income?	-.021	.025	-.059	-.844	.399			
How would you describe your political orientation?	.029	.038	.056	.773	.440			
How religious are you?	.022	.038	.044	.584	.560			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*\*  $p < .001$ ;

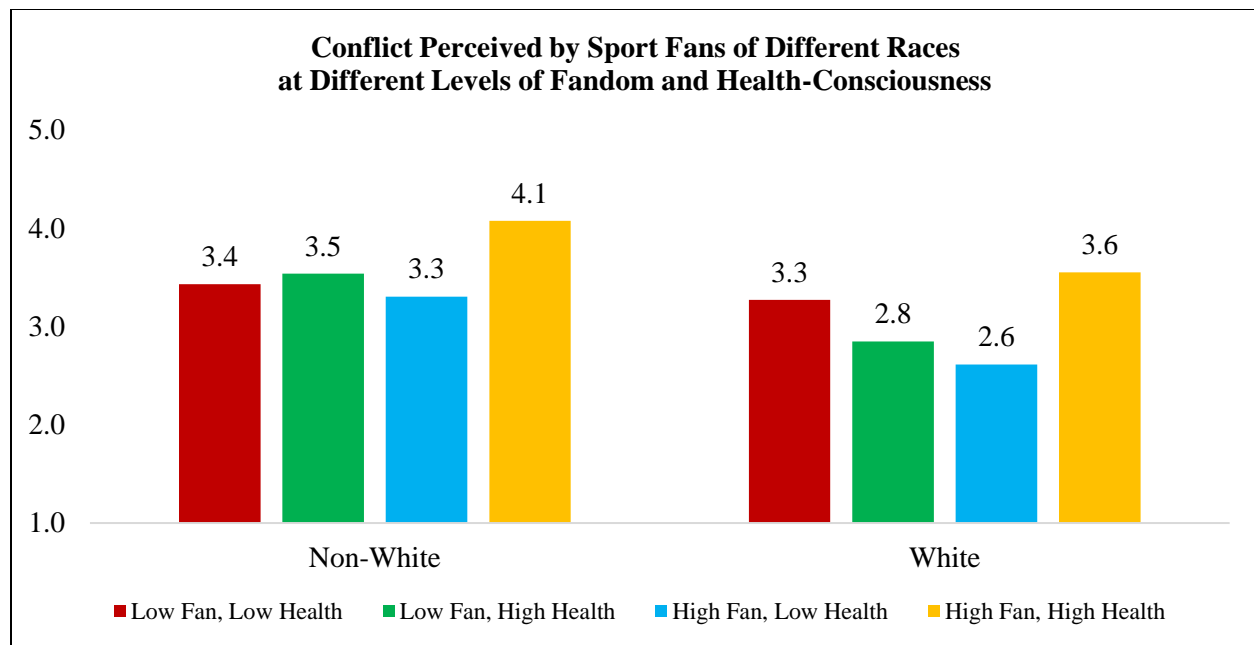
Of these variables, health-consciousness yielded the strongest effect; its standardized beta of  $b = .370$  was the highest in absolute terms, and its  $p$ -value was less than 0.05 and therefore statistically significant. Thus, controlling for all other variables, those with more health-consciousness experienced significantly more conflict at sporting events. Other statistically significant (yet weaker) effects were observed for age (older participants experience less identity

conflict at sporting events) and education (more educated individuals experience more identity conflict at sporting events).

Thus, it seems individuals who are younger, more educated, and more health-conscious are more likely to experience identity conflict at sporting events. On the other hand, individuals who are older, with less education, and with less health-consciousness likely experience less identity conflict in such settings.



*Figure 5.7.* Conflict Perceived by Men and Women at different Levels of Fandom and Health Consciousness



*Figure 5.8. Conflict Perceived by Sports Fans of Different Races at different Levels of Fandom and Health-Consciousness*

Both amongst men and women, and across races, the High Fan, High Health group indicated the highest level of identity conflict. Further, across genders and races, the High Fan, Low Health group indicated the least conflict. This is understandable, as the setting at sporting events seems to align with both their fandom level and unhealthy lifestyle. Further, non-white individuals indicated higher identity conflict in all groups when compared with white individuals.

I also examined the reported identity conflict of demographic groups (i.e., gender and race) regardless of their fandom level.

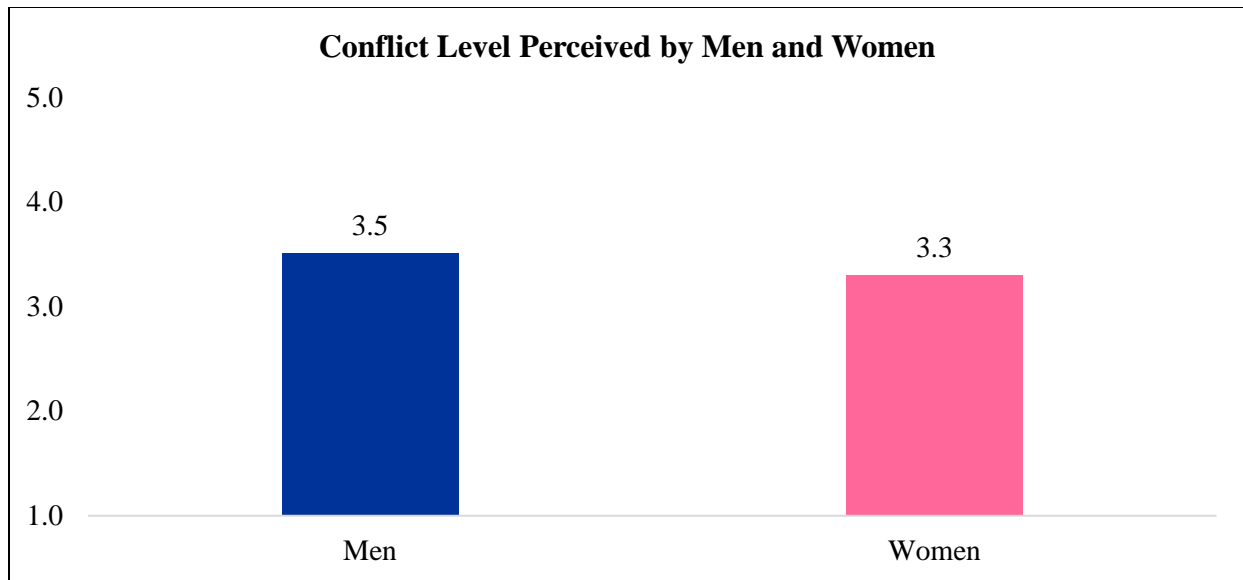


Figure 5.9. Conflict Level Perceived by Men and Women

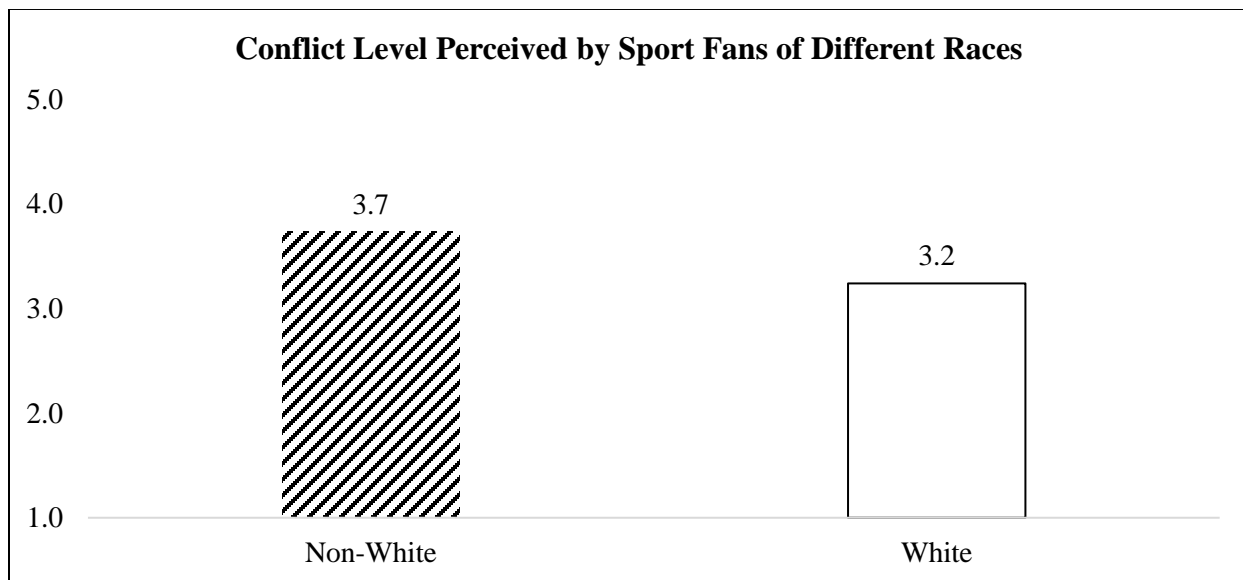
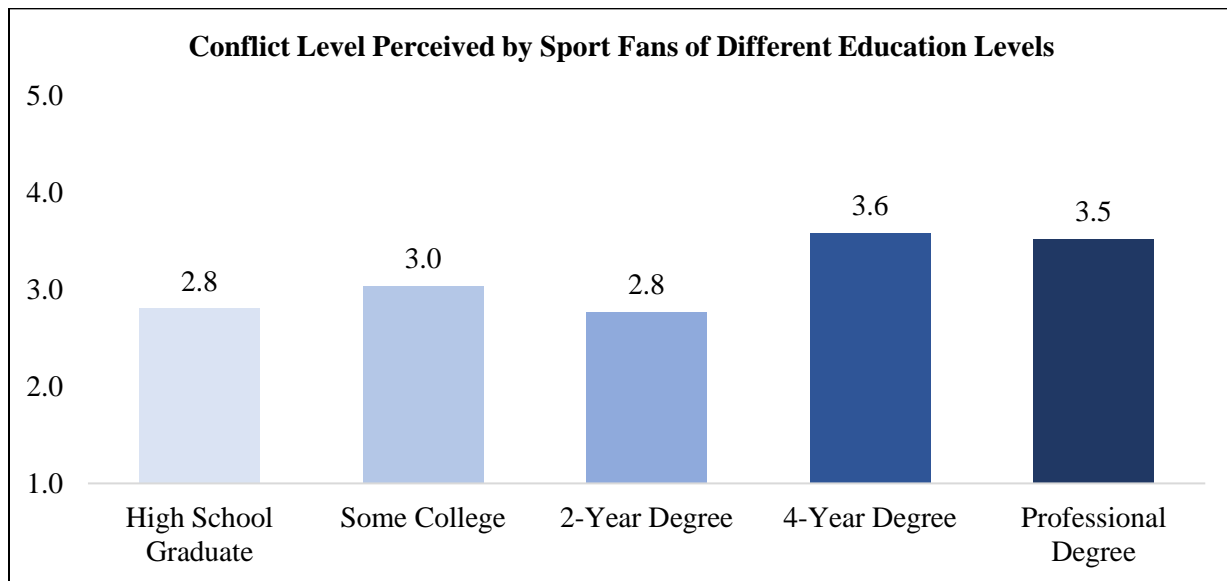


Figure 5.10. Conflict Level Perceived by Sport Fans of Different Races

This analysis revealed that men experience more identity conflict than women, and that non-white individuals experience more identity conflict than white individuals. Further, individuals with more education experience more identity conflict than less educated individuals;

the Pearson correlation was significant but small (.188). (Note: individuals with less than high school education and with doctorate-level education were excluded from the analysis due to their low sample sizes.)



*Figure 5.11.* Conflict Level Perceived by Sport Fans of Different Educational Levels

There was no relationship noted, however, between perceived identity conflict and income ( $r = -0.054$ ), political views ( $r = 0.095$ ), or religious views ( $r = -0.020$ ).



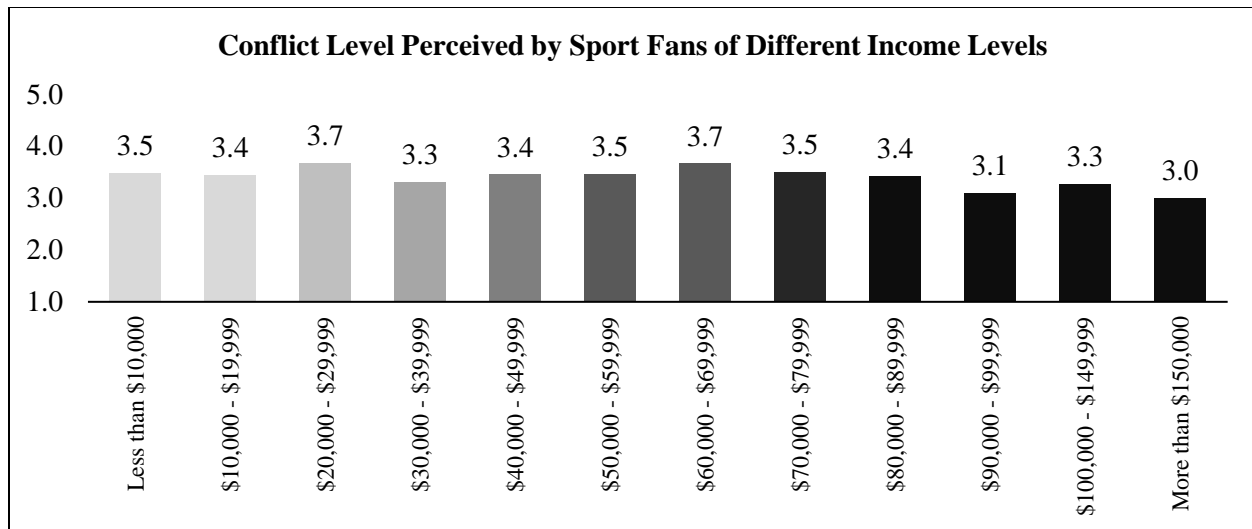


Figure 5.12. Conflict Level Perceived by Sport Fans of Different Income Levels

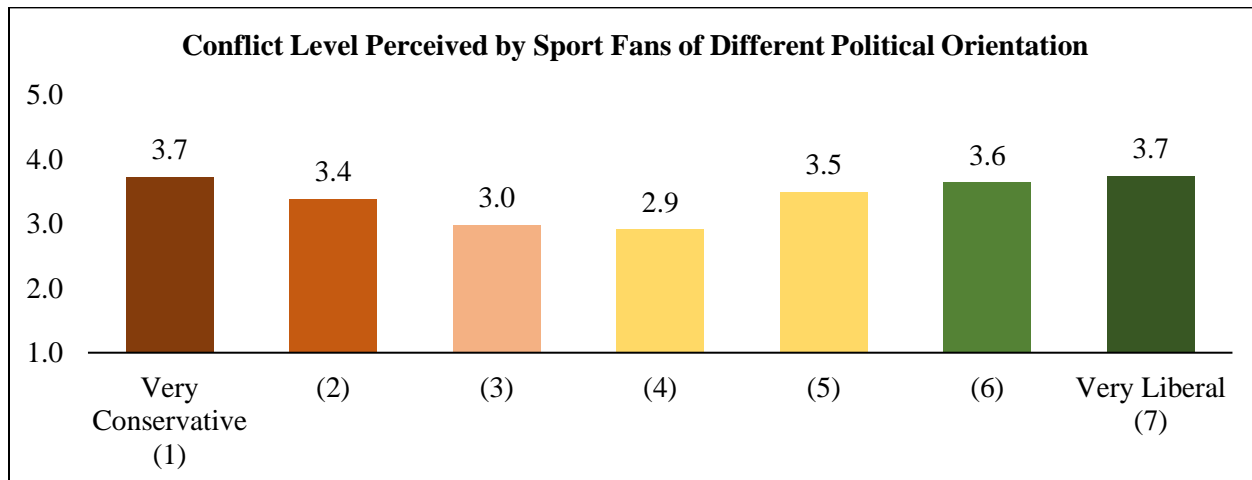


Figure 5.13. Conflict Level Perceived by Sport Fans of Different Political Orientation

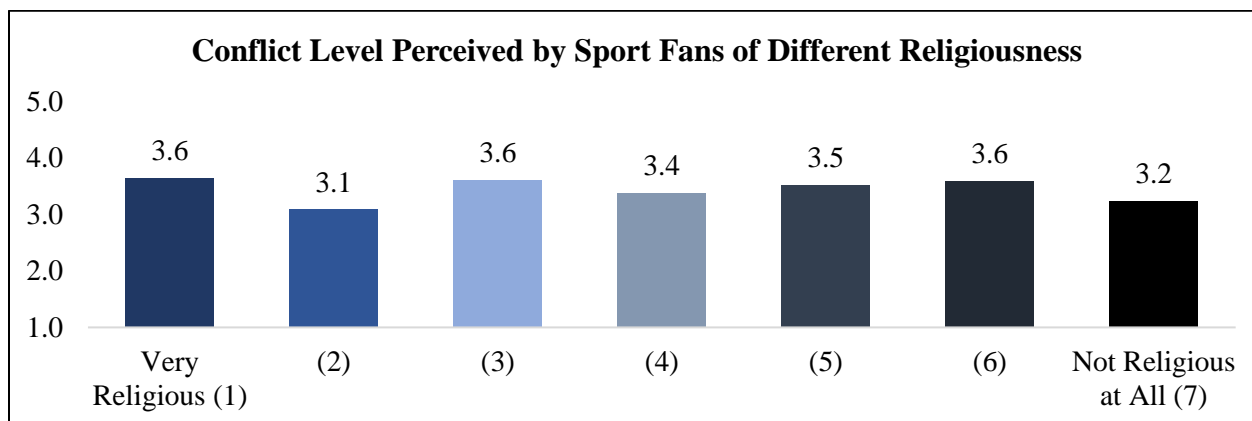


Figure 5.14. Conflict Perceived by Sport Fans of Different Religiousness

Thus, the results of this analysis somewhat supported the hypothesis that demographic variables would have significant effects on perceived identity conflict. However, some variables included in the model – such as income, political views, and religious views – did not impact experiences of identity conflict.

Out of curiosity – though these variables were not directly tied to any of my hypotheses – I also tested whether achievement orientation, masculine ideologies, fat bias, and locus of control would reveal any additional effects on perceived identity conflict. Thus, I included these variables in the regression model (in addition to fan role identity and health-consciousness).

Table 5.10

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Achievement Orientation, Masculine Ideologies, Fat Bias, and Locus of Control on Perceived Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	2.395	.259		9.234*	.000	.607	154.415	601
AVERAGE FanRole	-.027	.059	-.016	-.458	.647			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.196	.060	.116	3.247*	.001			
AVERAGE Masculine	.421	.042	.391	10.074*	.000			
AVERAGE Locus	-.667	.055	-.406	-12.116*	.000			
AVERAGE FatBias	.141	.041	.115	3.434*	.001			
AVERAGE Achieve	.163	.071	.090	2.309*	.021			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

This analysis demonstrated that each of these additional variables significantly improved the regression model ( $p < 0.05$  for each). By comparing the standardized betas, it was evident

that locus of control had the strongest (negative) effect ( $-0.406$ ). In other words, the higher one's locus of control score (the stronger the belief that one is in control of his/her own physical health), the lower the level of conflict he/she perceives in sport fan environments (controlling for fan role identity and health-consciousness). Thus, individuals who feel more in control of their physical health destiny may feel less vulnerable to negative health influences at sporting events.

To a similar extent, masculine ideologies also have a strong (positive) effect on perceived conflict ( $b = 0.391$ ). The more an individual believes in traditional masculine values, the more conflict that person feels during sports fan events. Perhaps such individuals exhibit more aggressive behaviors than usual during such events, viewing this as identity conflict because in their typical daily activities (e.g., at work, in a grocery store, with friends) they do not act in this manner. Individuals low in ascription to masculine ideologies may stay calm and simply behave as they normally do.

Additionally, fat bias had a significant but weak positive effect ( $b = 0.115$ ) on conflict. Those who are worried about gaining weight – and who have more negative outlooks on body fat – may feel that sporting events put them in 'danger.'

Finally, need for achievement also had a significant but weak positive effect ( $b = 0.090$ ) on conflict. Those who are motivated to accomplish career success seem to feel slightly more conflict at sporting events. Perhaps such individuals feel guilty for 'indulging' in entertainment, which may not seem to directly advance their career goals.

I also looked at these relationships amongst only High Fan, High Health respondents. Similar patterns were observed, except need for achievement did not have a significant effect.

Table 5.11

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Achievement Orientation, Masculine Ideologies, Fat Bias, and Locus of Control on Perceived Identity Conflict (Amongst Only High Fan, High Health Respondents)*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	4.444	1.009		4.405*	.000	.607	154.415	601
AVERAGE FanRole	.267	.236	.063	1.133	.258			
AVERAGE HealthCon	-.376	.226	-.084	-1.665	.097			
AVERAGE Masculine	.462	.078	.415	5.956*	.000			
AVERAGE Locus	-.668	.104	-.360	-6.443*	.000			
AVERAGE FatBias	.147	.069	.117	2.126*	.034			
AVERAGE Achieve	-.048	.174	-.014	-.277	.782			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

As data collection progressed into its final stage and I analyzed the initial data, I added two additional theoretical variables: role balance (building upon the findings of Study 1) and social dominance orientation. Only about 30% of respondents in the full sample responded to these measures. Working with this filtered sample, I first conducted the same previous regression analysis (with identity conflict as the dependent variable; the basic metrics, fan role and health-consciousness, as independent variables; and the four additional metrics, masculine ideologies, locus of control, fat bias, and need for achievement, also added as predictor variables).

Table 5.12

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Basic Metrics (Fan Role and Health-Consciousness) and Additional Metrics (Achievement Orientation, Masculine Ideologies, Fat Bias, and Locus of Control) on Perceived Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.731	.432		4.008*	.000	.616	55.959	209
AVERAGE FanRole	-.101	.086	-.067	-1.175	.241			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.206	.110	.117	1.880	.062			
AVERAGE Masculine	.560	.071	.481	7.852*	.000			
AVERAGE Locus	-.562	.090	-.322	-6.250*	.000			
AVERAGE FatBias	.140	.074	.104	1.877	.062			
AVERAGE Achieve	.165	.115	.090	1.432	.154			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

Much like in the total sample results, masculine ideologies and locus of control had a significant effect on conflict at a 95% confidence level. The (weak) effect of fat bias was now observed with less than a 95% confidence level. However, this is likely due to decreased power, given that there were fewer participants. The aim of this analysis was to have a basis of comparison with the next regression (with the same participants).

By adding the two new dimensions to the regression model, the model fit improved ( $R^2 = 0.63$ ). I did not see an additional significant effect for role balance, yet I did see a significant, moderately positive effect ( $b = .138$ ) for social dominance orientation.

Table 5.13

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Basic Metrics (Fan Role and Health-Consciousness) and Two New Dimensions (Role Balance and Social Dominance Orientation) on Perceived Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	1.256	.545		2.307*	.022	.630	43.702	205
AVERAGE FanRole	-.058	.088	-.039	-.659	.510			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.219	.109	.125	2.009*	.046			
AVERAGE FatBias	.136	.075	.102	1.799	.073			
AVERAGE Masculine	.476	.080	.410	5.956*	.000			
AVERAGE Achieve	.206	.116	.113	1.784	.076			
AVERAGE Locus	-.510	.096	-.292	-5.327*	.000			
AVERAGE SDO	.193	.075	.138	2.587*	.010			
AVERAGE RoleBalance first 8 items - 3,5,8 reversed	-.093	.129	-.036	-.716	.475			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

Though role balance did not have a direct effect, I had also included two additional scales from the same study (Marks & MacDermid, 1996): role overload and role ease. In total, these three scales included 21 items. I included role overload and role ease as measures to test in the event case role balance did not have an effect. Thus, I ran the same analysis with role overload and role ease added to the role balance scale.

Table 5.14

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Basic Metrics (Fan Role and Health-Consciousness) and Four New Dimensions (Role Balance, Social Dominance Orientation, Role Overload, and Role Ease) on Perceived Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	.851	.524		1.625	.106	.671	41.368	203
AVERAGE FanRole	-.133	.085	-.089	-1.573	.117			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.130	.108	.074	1.209	.228			
AVERAGE FatBias	.001	.077	.001	.012	.990			
AVERAGE Masculine	.415	.077	.357	5.405*	.000			
AVERAGE Achieve	.106	.112	.058	.940	.349			
AVERAGE Locus	-.371	.100	-.212	-3.717*	.000			
AVERAGE SDO	.121	.073	.086	1.650	.101			
AVERAGE RoleBalance first 8 items - 3,5,8 reversed	-.008	.127	-.003	-.062	.950			
RoleOverload	.318	.070	.310	4.559*	.000			
RoleEase	.138	.072	.095	1.907	.058			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

By including all three role-related items (role balance, role overload, and role ease), as well as social dominance orientation, it was evident that *only* role overload had a strong and significant additional effect on conflict. Thus, the more someone feels overloaded with his/her different roles in life (e.g., sport fan, health-conscious individual, parent, employee, spouse, etc.), the more conflict that individual seems to feel during sporting events. However, role balance and

role ease had no significant impact at a 95% confidence level (though role ease had a p-value of 0.058, so it was marginally significant). Similarly, social dominance orientation had no additional impact when all of these variables were taken into account.

Table 5.15

*Descriptive Statistics of Basic Metrics (Fan Role and Health-Consciousness), Role-Related Items, and Perceived Identity Conflict*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
AVERAGE ConflictLast4_.81 (reverse scale)	3.47	0.96
AVERAGE FanRole	4.00	0.64
AVERAGE HealthCon	3.98	0.55
AVERAGE Masculine	3.62	0.82
AVERAGE Locus	3.33	0.55
AVERAGE FatBias	3.66	0.72
AVERAGE Achieve	3.95	0.52
AVERAGE RoleBalance	3.69	0.56
AVERAGE SDO	2.79	0.68



Table 5.16

*Regression Analysis of Impact of Basic Metrics (Fan Role and Health-Consciousness) and Role-Related Items on Perceived Identity Conflict*

Predictors or IV	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
(Constant)	.697	.465		1.500	.135	.680	55.085	207
AVERAGE FanRole	-.155	.081	-.104	-1.911	.057			
AVERAGE HealthCon	.143	.102	.081	1.398	.164			
AVERAGE Masculine	.362	.076	.311	4.780*	.000			
AVERAGE Locus	-.400	.086	-.229	-4.640*	.000			
AVERAGE FatBias	-.024	.074	-.018	-.323	.747			
AVERAGE Achieve	-.036	.113	-.020	-.319	.750			
AVERAGE RoleBalance	.732	.126	.429	5.816*	.000			
AVERAGE SDO	.133	.070	.095	1.912	.057			
RoleOverload	.318	.070	.310	4.559*	.000			
RoleEase	.138	.072	.095	1.907	.058			

*Note.* DV = AVERAGE ConflictLast4\_.81 (reverse scale); \*  $p < .05$ ;

To further explore the role overload finding, I tested whether this relationship could be attributed to career ambition. However, the correlation between role overload and need for achievement was low (.291). This indicates the overload which predicts identity conflict in fan settings is likely spurred by something *other* than work stress.

Table 5.17

*Correlation Between Fan Role, Health Consciousness, Need for Achievement, Role Overload, Perceived Identity Conflict*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. AVERAGE Achieve	1				
2. AVERAGE HealthCon	.637**	1			
3. AVERAGE FanRole	.647**	.561**	1		
4. AVERAGE ConflictLast4_.81 (reverse scale)	.177**	.237**	.107**	1	
5. RoleOverload	.291**	.424**	.268**	.716**	1

*Note.*  $N = 665$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

## 5.6 Discussion

With this study, I was motivated to understand the relationship between health-consciousness and fandom by examining a broad dataset, allowing for contextual variances. Thus, I collected data through Mechanical Turk, surveying 659 individuals from the United States and India. I discovered several surprising and interesting findings, findings which extended Studies 1 and 2 and added clarity to the research questions driving this dissertation. In the below sections, I discuss implications of these findings.

### 5.6.1 Theoretical Implications

#### 5.6.1.1 The relationship between fandom and physical health

As Chalip (2006) noted, “We know very little about the factors that currently inhibit or that could ultimately foster a stronger contribution to health by sport” (pp. 5-6). The findings of the present study add to a growing literature on whether fandom impacts individuals’ health (see

Inoue et al., 2015). Zillman et al. (1979) long ago noted that “sportsfanship is safe in a physical sense,” and also suggested that fandom “is a rather harmless, risk-free affair” (p. 254). Research on the mental effects of fandom (e.g., Wann, 2006) indicates fandom may be beneficial to one’s overall well-being. However, the literature has been mixed (see Inoue et al., 2019).

Following Study 1, I concluded that there was no black-and-white answer to the question, “Does fandom in some way (positively or negatively) impact physical health?” Instead, based on interviews with 17 health-conscious sport fans, I suggested that ‘it depends,’ with both individual (i.e., psychological) and environmental (i.e., sociological) factors at play. In Study 2, I extended this suggestion, noting the importance of three vital variables: centrality, salience, and setting.

However, Study 3 indicates that there *is* a general relationship between fandom and health-consciousness – and, contrary to my hypothesis, it is a *positive* relationship. In other words, fandom seems to lead to beneficial physical health outcomes. This is consistent with the findings of Inoue et al. (2018). These scholars also found a positive relationship, but suggested factors specific to Japan may have been playing a role. Thus, they called on researchers to replicate such an examination in other cultures. I did not seek participants from a specific geographic context, yet most were from the U.S. (n = 597), with some from India (n = 62). Despite the change in setting, fandom again was correlated with positive effects.

Scholars have found that fandom often inspires fans to exercise (Hammond, 2016). The same is evident in the present study; those who identified as sport fans unanimously reported engaging in more health behaviors than those who did not identify as sport fans. This motivational boost to engage in activity may, then, ‘overpower’ the effect of the unhealthy foods often associated with sport fandom (see Ireland & Watkins, 2014), consistent with Inoue et al. (2018). Further, given that the sport fans in this project noted they eat a healthier diet than those

who are not fans, consuming sport may also inspire healthier consumption after the fact, even if unhealthy foods/drinks are consumed *during* the sporting event.

However, as scholars have long noted, correlation does not equal causation (Verhulst, Eaves, & Hatemi, 2012). Perhaps individuals who are drawn to sport fandom also simply gravitate toward more active lifestyles and healthier food consumption – perhaps their fandom does not play a role. In fact, perhaps they would be *healthier* without fandom. This study does not fully answer this question.

#### *5.6.1.2 Identity conflict for health-conscious fans*

In Study 1, I found that some fans (Segmenters) perceived conflict between their fan identity and health-conscious identity, but others (Synergistics) felt the two were integrated. In the present study, I was able to capture the experiences of highly identified health-conscious sport fans on a broader scale. Individuals in the High Fan, High Health group indicated they experience much more identity conflict (3.8) in the consumer sport setting than participants in any other group. Further, individuals high in fandom but low in health-consciousness indicated they experience the least identity conflict (2.8).

Thus, data supported H2. It does seem health-conscious fans feel they are in conflict with their values when they are engaging in fandom; in other words, there are likely more ‘Segmenters’ than ‘Synergistics’ among health-conscious sport fans. This makes sense given the apparent contradictions between healthy behavior and the food atmosphere at many such events, which were often noted by participants in Study 1. However, there is an important caveat: I found that the two variables in this analysis (fan identity and health-conscious identity) only explained 5.7% of variance in identity conflict. This means something *else* is likely playing a role in experiences of identity conflict noted within this group.

This was a puzzling finding without a simple explanation. However, one potential answer does come to mind, as hinted at above. Perhaps respondents, when addressing the measures, did not think of the unhealthy food at sporting events, but instead of their *general behavior*, such as their aggression or passion level, in such settings. This type of behavior may feel out of accordance with their usual demeanor. This also aligns with the findings that masculine ideologies have a significant effect on perceived identity conflict and men perceive more identity conflict than women.

#### *5.6.1.3 Role overload for health-conscious fans*

As data collection progressed, the relationship between fandom and health-consciousness came into clearer focus. Thus, in the final round of collection, I added measures from Marks and MacDermid (1996). In sum, 21 measures captured three constructs: role balance, role overload, and role ease. Based on the findings of Study 1, I hypothesized that role balance would reduce feelings of identity conflict.

That did not prove to be true; data made evident, however, that role overload *did* have a strong and significant additional effect on conflict. Role balance and role ease had no significant impact at a 95% confidence level (though role ease had a p-value of 0.058, so it was marginally significant). In other words, role balance had the smallest effect of the three constructs.

Though this sample was limited (only about 30% of respondents answered these measures), the finding is noteworthy. It seems the more someone feels overloaded with his/her social roles (e.g., sport fan, health-conscious individual, parent, employee, spouse, etc.), the more conflict that individual feels during sporting events.

Individuals who identify as health-conscious and sport fans appear to naturally possess more role identities than those who identify as neither, or only as one or the other. Thus, it makes

sense that health-conscious sport fans experience the most identity conflict in consumer sport settings. It seems either an overaccumulation of roles (possessing *too many* central identities) or stress in one particular domain (caring *too much* about a central identity) may be contributing to identity conflict for health-conscious sport fans. Of note: this does not appear to be related to career ambition, given the low correlation between need for achievement and role overload. These findings also hold implications for the sport industry.

### *5.6.2 Managerial Implications*

#### *5.6.2.1 Reducing identity conflict for health-conscious fans*

When one's identities are viewed in conflict, individuals feel inauthentic (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). They do not feel they are being their 'full selves.' Thus, the sport industry should seek to reduce identity conflict for health-conscious fans. There are several tactics that come to mind. First, as noted in Studies 1 and 2, the industry could modify its environment to better promote healthy behavior. Though this study indicates the apparent incongruity between fandom and health-consciousness noted by Segmenters in Study 1 (and often by myself in Study 2) may be overstated – given that fans live healthier lifestyles – some simple tweaks could allow the two to better coalesce.

Given scholars' argument that sport must seek positive social outcomes (see Zeigler, 2007), the industry should be striving to *help* health-conscious fans. Teams may, for example, consider promotional campaigns that encourage such individuals to 'let their hair down' at sporting events, encouraging them to decompress. Health-conscious sport fans seem to feel they cannot be their authentic selves; consumer sport settings seem to produce internal turmoil and the question, *Am I behaving appropriately?* If such individuals are liberated and empowered through

teams' messaging, their degree of perceived identity conflict may decrease, allowing them to enjoy the moment with their fellow fans – and feel less overloaded.

Further, findings indicate teams should promote mental health to such individuals, who seem to gravitate toward putting too much on their plate (or at least *feeling* there is too much on their plate). Stress, like obesity, is an epidemic (see Wainwright & Calnin, 2002). Given its natural positioning to facilitate relationships, sport fandom can spur positive mental health outcomes (see Wann, 2006), enhancing stakeholder well-being. In fact, it can serve as an escape (Wann et al., 2004) from the pressures of everyday life.

Amid the societal shift toward 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2001), traditional forums for community such as religion are dwindling (Bourque, Gayle, & Wright, 2005). Thus, individuals – whether watching the action from stadium seats, barstools, or the couch – are increasingly fulfilling their evolutionary desire for social connection through fandom (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Danielson, 1997; McPherson, 1976). This prospect should be emphasized to health-conscious fans, who likely feel overburdened.

Organizational efforts, however, should extend beyond promotion; teams should also strive to offer direct *value* to such consumers. They should strive to reduce feelings of role overload. They may, for example, consider bundling tickets with meditation software, or merchandise with passes to a yoga class. The sport industry should aim to reduce such individuals' stress. Fandom should not be viewed as *another* thing to do, but rather as something enjoyable, something that does not impede but rather enhances quality of life.

### **5.7 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

With Study 3, I sought to extend the more intimate findings of Studies 1 and 2 by examining a broader dataset. I did so by leveraging MTurk, a commonly utilized quantitative

data-gathering platform. However, questions have been raised about its reliability (see Buhrmester, Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018). Thus, this sample should not be considered bulletproof.

Further, I sought participants from a wide variety of backgrounds. However, all participants were from the United States or India. The sample is somewhat restricted.

Additionally, this project was designed to emphasize breadth over depth. Thus, participants' lived experiences are only captured at a surface level. I was able to see that health-conscious sport fans experience the most identity conflict in consumer sport contexts – and to measure additional variables that may have played a role in this relationship – but I was not able to probe them about *why*, or in which conditions. However, this dissertation was designed such that the shortcomings of one study (e.g., the lack of nuance in Study 3) are mitigated by the design of another (e.g., the intimacy of Studies 1 and 2).

Though scholars have argued the relationship between fandom and physical health is contextual (Chalip et al., 1996), with multiple contributing factors, researchers should be encouraged to further examine the physical health effects of fandom. There is opportunity to do so, for example, through a 'natural science' lens. I chose to examine identity, a social-psychological construct, as well as self-described behavior. However, scholars may also examine fans' health and longevity by tracking their biomarkers over years. Do sport fans live longer and healthier lives than non-sport fans, or is the inverse true? Are there any general, universal effects that may be observed?

An experimental design would be particularly interesting: having fans take a year off of sport engagement, for example, and tracking their health effects versus fans who continue to engage with this piece of self (i.e., continue to watch games, consume content, etc.). Though the



increasing research on sport fans' physical health offers a good start, there remain opportunities to bolster this line of inquiry.

In the future, scholars should seek to understand whether the suggestion that acting out of accordance with one's usual behavior – such as by displaying unusual aggression or passion – engenders identity conflict in the consumer sport context. Scholars should also further explore the construct of role overload. Scholars could survey sport fans to gauge their degree of role overload, then conduct interviews – or, even better, become embedded with them at sporting events – to understand their experiences.

### **5.8 Study 3 Conclusion**

I hypothesized that sport fandom would be negatively related to health-consciousness, health-conscious sport fans would experience the most identity conflict of any group in the consumer sport setting, and demographic variables would play a key role in this relationship. Findings were mixed.

Fandom (gauged through both role identification and team identification) is correlated with positive physical health outcomes. Health-conscious sport fans do experience identity conflict at sporting events, yet this experience hinges largely on factors other than health-consciousness, such as masculine ideologies, locus of control, and role overload. Further, some demographic variables, such as race and gender, play important roles in experiences of identity conflict, but others, such as religion and political affiliation, do not. With Study 3, I make my biggest contributions by clarifying the relationship between fandom and health in a new context and by highlighting the nuances of the identity conflict health-conscious individuals experience in sport settings.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

Picture the Woodstock and Coachella music festivals. Woodstock took place in 1969, and Coachella occurs annually today. The attendees, though dressed similarly for these festivals, possess bodies that look different. Individuals' weight has increased exponentially since the early 1900s (Iannelli, 2019); because of the negative health outcomes associated with obesity, this issue has gained particular relevance in recent decades (World Health Organization, 2000). Though body weight management is often considered a matter of willpower, there is more to the equation, as contexts, relationships, psychological conditioning, food engineering, the media, and more play roles (Askegaard et al., 2014).

As individuals' waistlines have ballooned, so too has the popularity of sport. When Woodstock was occurring, the average National Football League (NFL) player earned an annual salary of \$25,000 (\$156,400 when adjusting for inflation), whereas the average NFL player today earns approximately \$3 million (Renzulli & Connley, 2019). An average of nearly 70,000 fans attended the league's games in 2018 (Statista, 2018b), up by 20,000 from the numbers of 1969 (Bell, 2013). A wide array of evidence has demonstrated that both obesity and sport consumption have increased in recent decades, both becoming prominent functions of society.

This simultaneous surge begged the question of whether the two phenomena may be in some way related. Given the physicality inherent to its design, sport has long been thought to spur positive public health outcomes, but clear evidence for that idea had not been established (Zeigler, 2007). Amid the furtherance of issues plaguing humanity during the spike in the popularity of spectator sport, sport management scholars have been prompted to consider what the discipline is doing to help alleviate suffering (Malloy & Zakus, 1995). Scholars have called

for sport theoreticians to make serving public health a focal point of their work (Chalip, 2006), with a particular emphasis on combating obesity (Zeigler, 2007).

Thus, I strived to make such a contribution. I employed three studies: two qualitative and focused on depth, and one quantitative and focused on generalizability. In Study 1, I completed semi-structured interviews with individuals who consider both role identities central to their self-concept. Two groups emerged: Segmenters, who value both pieces of self yet view them as separate ‘hats’ that must be worn at different times; and Synergistics, who view the identities as integrated and capable of being worn simultaneously. The difference between these groups could be explained by both individual (i.e., psychological) and social (i.e., sociological) factors.

In Study 2, I examined experiences of relevant identity work through autoethnography. I found that I often struggled to reconcile my fandom and health-consciousness, particularly in the spectator sport environment, yet this negotiation was highly dependent on psychological centrality, the presence of social connections, and situational context. I attempted to make all of my psychologically central identities work together (i.e., to integrate the multiple identities atop my salience hierarchy), but often found it untenable. Eventually, it seemed something had to give, and I resorted to ‘identity math’ to dictate my behavior. I found, however, that I never fully ‘removed’ any of these hats, given their centrality in my self-concept.

In Study 3, I surveyed health-conscious sport fans to understand their experiences on a broad scale, surveying individuals from the United States and India. Contrary to my expectations, findings indicated health-consciousness and fandom are *positively* correlated. Further, health-conscious sport fans perceive identity conflict in the consumer sport context – yet this experience is nuanced, with multiple factors (including aggression/masculinity, locus of control, demographics, and role overload) at play.

These projects should lead to follow-up work exploring the role of physical health among sport spectators. For example, given that food researchers have consistently noted the salient influence of physical setting in influencing food behaviors (e.g., Shettleworth, 1975), scholars may conduct an ethnography that illuminates the role of food in various sport settings (e.g., live games, watch parties, etc.). Further, though the present inquiry is centered on the general health of sport consumers, fitness/activity is an essential aspect of overall health that could garner its own specific exploration (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). Thus, future studies may more directly explore the relationship between sport spectatorship and exercise behavior, both in the short- and long-term.

Additionally, scholars have increasingly noted the salient role of networks in dictating sport spectator behavior (Katz, Ward, & Heere, 2017), and social relationships and contexts play foundational roles in identity theory (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Mead, 1934). A wide range of social science literature has demonstrated how relational ties and network variables impact obesity, life satisfaction, and other health outcomes (Christakis & Fowler, 2007, 2008; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Indeed, socialization was a pervasive theme, saturating this dissertation. Thus, an opportune next step would be to investigate the questions underlying this inquiry through the lens of network theory. The present work could also open opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, offering new insights by combining unique perspectives, specializations, and bodies of knowledge (Doherty, 2013).

As Zeigler (2007) noted, sport scholars must challenge the conventional wisdom that more engagement with sport is always better, as clear evidence for that line of thought has not been established. Given that fandom and obesity continue to increase in prominence, and that sport management scholars had not yet explored the relationship between fan identification and

health identification, this dissertation makes a timely and innovative contribution to the sport literature. The results yield insights for both theoreticians (i.e., sport consumer behavior scholars) and practitioners (i.e., professional sport organizations' marketing departments).

I have strived to make contributions to practical and theoretical needs in sport and society, satisfying both Chalip's (2006) general and focused criteria for a sport-focused research agenda. It is my hope that this project will help organizations promote, and fans achieve, holistic well-being. As I have seen in my life and research, fandom and physical health can both be ingredients of an enjoyable, meaningful life. As studies in this vein continue, I am hopeful that the two will become naturally synergized, allowing the population to reap the benefits of both.

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**APPENDICES**

Refer to the following list.

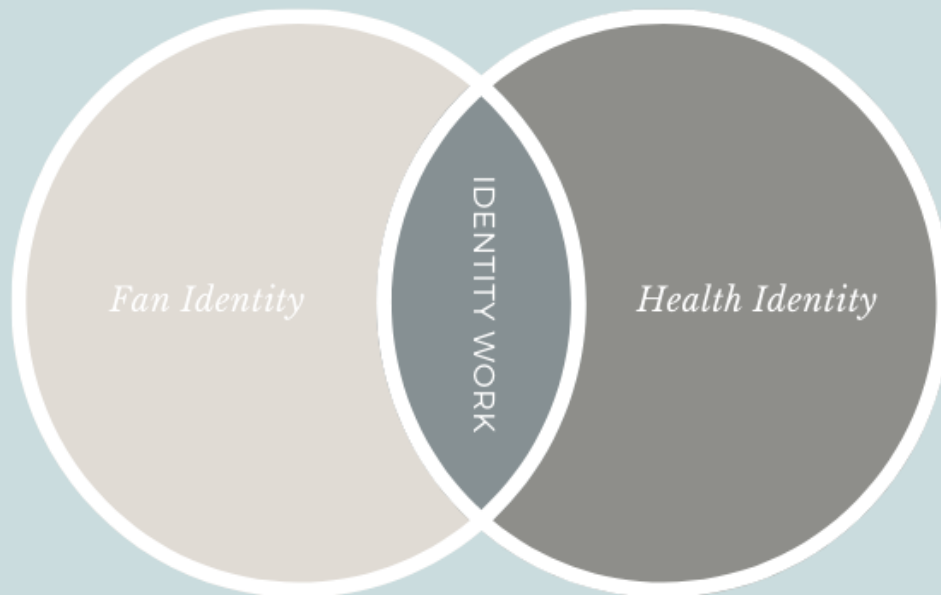
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## Appendix A

### Theoretical Framework of Dissertation

# Theoretical Framework of Dissertation

*Role identity is "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role (e.g., sport fan) or situation (e.g., supporting a team), defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation" (Burke & Stets, 1999, p. 349).*



## **Appendix B**

### **Pre-Interview Survey Instrument**

(1 to 5 Scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I do everything I can to stay healthy.  
- Derived from Dutta-Bergman (2004).
2. Living life in best possible health is very important to me.  
- Derived from Dutta-Bergman (2004).
3. I reflect about my health a lot.  
- Derived from Gould (1988).
4. I'm aware of the state of my health as I go through the day.  
- Derived from Gould (1988).
5. I consider myself to be a 'real' sports fan.  
- Adapted from Trail et al. (2003).
6. I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a sports fan.  
- Adapted from Trail et al. (2003).
7. I actively follow sports.  
- Adapted from Trail et al. (2003).
8. Being a sports fan is very important to me.  
- Adapted from Trail et al. (2003).

## **Appendix C**

### **Health-Conscious Sport Fan Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

#### *Part 1: Health Identity*

1. How did you become interested in your personal health?
2. Why is your personal health is important to you?
3. What measures in your life (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep) do you implement to take care of your health?
4. Would you say your interest in personal health has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in recent years?

#### *Part 2: Fan Identity*

5. How did you become interested in sports?
6. Of which team(s) do you consider yourself a fan?
7. In what fan activities (e.g., watching the team, following news articles online, attending games or watch parties, discussing the team with friends) do you regularly engage?
8. Why is your fandom important to you?
9. Would you say your fandom has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in recent years?

#### *Part 3: Salience Hierarchy Negotiation*

10. Which role is more important to the way you think about yourself: sport fan or healthy individual? You are not being asked to say which activity is ‘more’ important, only which activity is more important to how you think of yourself.

- Adapted from Stryker & Serpe (1994).

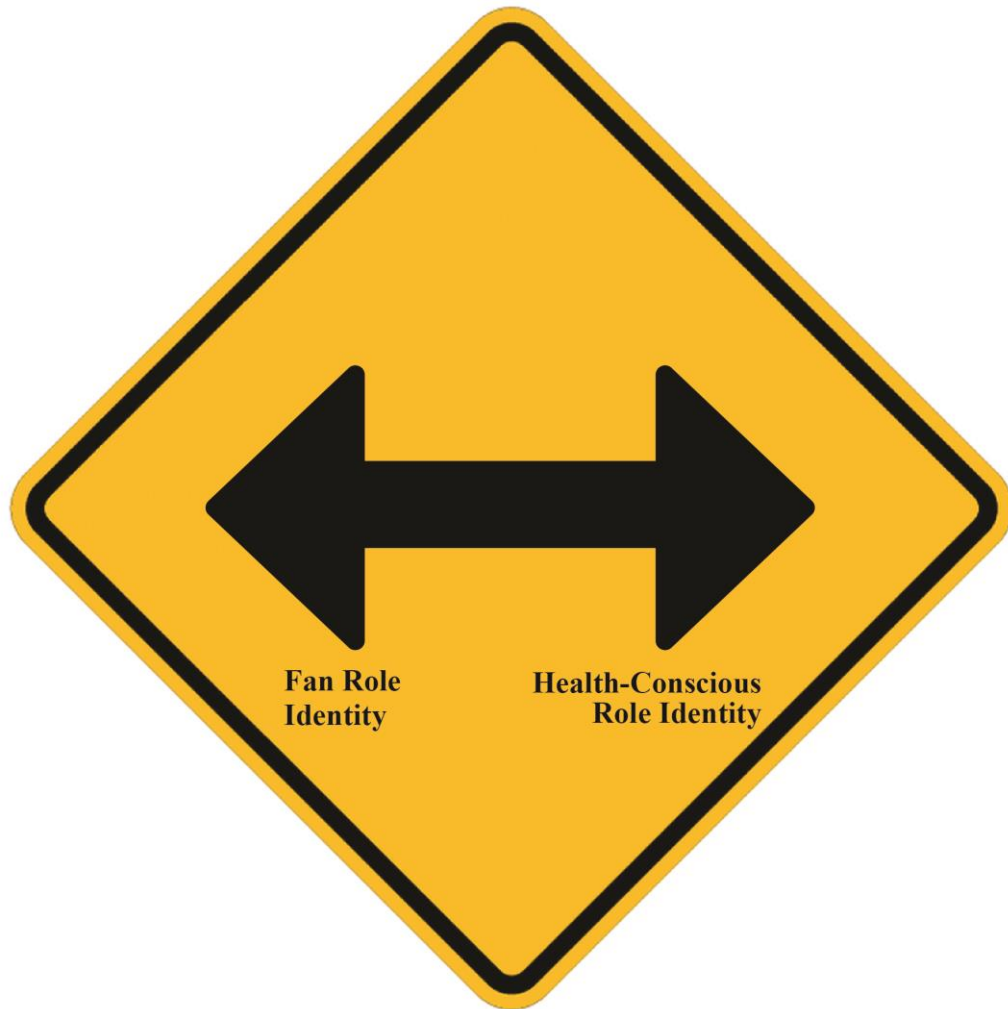
11. Do you ever feel your interests in fandom and health conflict?

- If yes: How? Can you think of a specific time in which this happened?

- Do you ever feel that you must ‘choose’ between these interests?
12. Do you ever feel your health and fan identities complement each other?
- If yes: How? Can you think of a specific time in which this happened?
13. How, if at all, does your health identity affect your behavior in a sport fan context (e.g., while attending a game)?
14. How do the other identities in your life (e.g., spouse, employee) affect your fan and health identities?
15. How do the social relationships in your life and your interactions with others affect your fan and health identities?
16. How well do you believe the sports industry serves health-conscious consumers?
- In what ways, if any, do you believe the sports industry could better serve such individuals?
17. Do you have any practical suggestions for changes that you would like to see the sports industry enact?
18. Do you have any other thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?

## Appendix D

### Model 1: Segmenter Road Sign





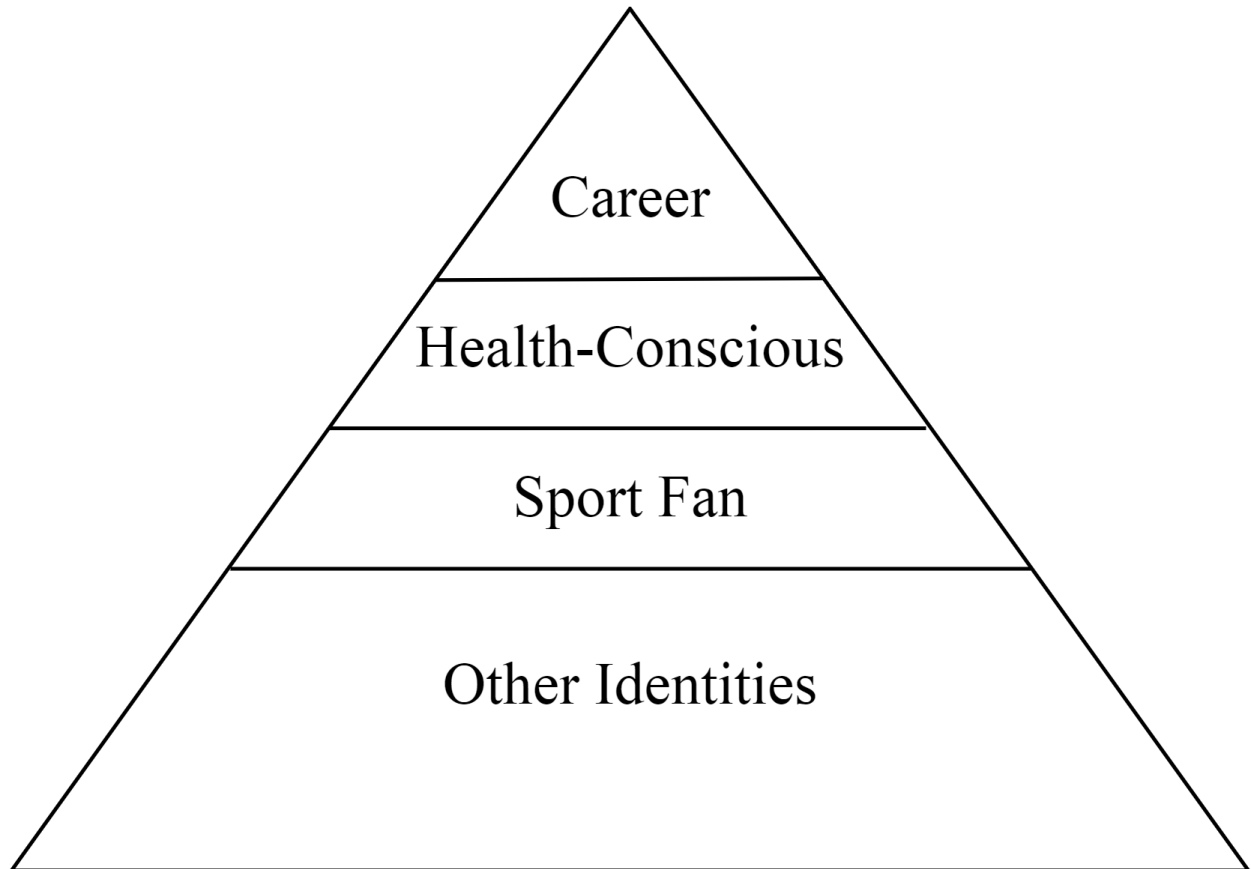
## Appendix E

### Model 2: Synergistic Road Sign



## Appendix F

### Model 3: Situational Self 1



**Appendix G**

**Model 4: Situational Self 2**

