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“Stick to Sports”: Fan Moral Reasoning Strategies and Subsequent Psychological Well-Being in Response to an Athlete’s Controversial Political Associations

A Dissertation Presented

By

STEPHEN WARREN

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2021

Communication

“Stick to Sports”: Fan Moral Reasoning Strategies and Subsequent Psychological Well-Being in Response to an Athlete’s Controversial Political Associations

A Dissertation Presented

By

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DEDICATION

To Bill Russell and anyone else who despite being godly on the court or field, was criticized for being human off it.

And to you, reader, for giving this dissertation a go. You're a brave soul.

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Right off the bat, Dr. Erica Scharrer. “Thank you” is not a term that could ever capture what you’ve done for me over the past five years. For the last half of a decade, you have been, at various times, advisor, mentor, colleague, coauthor, parent, aunt, older sister, and even teammate. Most importantly to me, over this time, you’ve been a friend. For that reason, if for no other reason, UMass was the right choice for my PhD. Already, my fondest memories here are not finding that an analysis yielded significant results or gaining a more thorough understanding of media effects, but instead, going to Syracuse and rooting for the Orange or putting on an Ooze shirt and rooting against the Coyotes. Beyond that, in an academic sense, the amount of time, effort, and wisdom that you have invested in me is more than I could ever repay. I am continually amazed at the detailed feedback and information you constantly provide. Even if this were not a pandemic, and even if you were not chair, you still devoted more to my academic career than I could have ever imagined. My hope is that I can provide any potential advisees of my own down the road with the same level of guidance and friendship. I know I will be saying it every time we see each other for the next 100 years, but again, thank you for everything.

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To Dr. Seth Goldman, thank you for teaching quantitative communication classes! Also, thank you for introducing me to exactly how much reading I needed to do to succeed and gain an understanding in any field I wanted to be an expert in. Your political

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once said to the equally incomparable Andrew Dice Clay, “you are an island of reality in an ocean of diarrhea.” Cheers!

ABSTRACT

“STICK TO SPORTS”: FAN MORAL REASONING STRATEGIES AND SUBSEQUENT PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN RESPONSE TO AN ATHLETE’S CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

SEPTEMBER 2021

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With athletes actively protesting on and off the court, as well as sports organizations embracing activism efforts like Black Lives Matter, the importance of understanding how sports fans respond to athletes engaging in or being associated with politics is increasing, as well. If part of the draw for watching sports and identifying with teams is the potential to increase psychological health, what happens when fans are presented with political viewpoints within sports that they disagree with? This dissertation uses two studies to explore how fans of the New England Patriots responded to reading an article about a rookie Patriots player being associated with a far-right militia group and having objectionable social media posts.

First, drawing on moral reasoning, team identification, and social identity theory literatures, when people learn about athlete’s political statements – often through media coverage and social media posts – if they find the political statements objectionable, they may deride the player. However, if people are fans of the player making the objectionable statement, and thus perceive the player as part of their ingroup, they may defend the

player. But to defend someone with beliefs they find objectionable, they may have to engage in moral reasoning strategies to rationalize or downplay the beliefs or the player's association with them. A cross-sectional survey looked at whether fans' team identification with the Patriots and political ideology influenced how fans responded to an article about a rookie Patriots player being associated with a far-right militia group and having objectionable social media posts. First, they were asked about their team identification. Then, they were asked to read the aforementioned article. Following that, they were asked how much they agree with statements suggesting three different moral reasoning strategies: moral decoupling (separating the player's abilities on-the-field from his political associations), moral coupling (jointly considering the player's abilities on-the-field and his political associations), or moral rationalization (downplaying or rationalizing the player's political associations). Lastly, they answered demographic questions, including political ideology. Results showed that as team identification increased, and as political ideology became more conservative, agreement with moral decoupling and moral rationalization increased, while there was no relationship between team identification and moral coupling. However, political ideology moderated the relationship between team identification and moral decoupling and rationalization; as ideology became more conservative, the relationship between team identification and moral decoupling and rationalization weakened. So, for die-hard Patriots fans, liberal and conservatives equally morally decoupled or rationalized, whereas for slight fans, conservatives were significantly more likely to decouple and rationalize than liberals.

The second study, using a new sample, additionally drew on the Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model (TI-SPHM, Wann, 2006b) and positive

media psychology literature which suggests that identifying as part of a team contributes to well-being. And, when faced with a threat to that group's identity, members' well-being may decrease. This will result in people engaging in coping strategies to restore that well-being. The second study here examined if being primed with one of the moral reasoning conditions would influence fans' subsequent social, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being after reading the same article from the first study. In a 4 (decoupling/coupling/rationalization/control) by 3 (low/medium/high identification) post-test experiment, the results showed that none of the primed moral reasoning strategy conditions had significantly different levels of social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being. However, team identification directly affected one concept of hedonic well-being (positive affect) and all three concepts of eudaimonic well-being (meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness). So, as team identification increased, those aspects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being increased. Meanwhile, team identification and social well-being were not related. Implications for players, fans, teams, sports marketing, and media psychology are discussed.

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1. “STICK TO SPORTS”: FAN RESPONSES TO ATHLETES’ POLITICAL STATEMENTS

In the summer of 2016, National Football League (NFL) quarterback Colin Kaepernick, then of the San Francisco 49ers, bent to one knee during the United States national anthem prior to a preseason game. He later said he did so to protest a recent string of incidents involving Black men being killed by police officers (Schmidt et al., 2019). The near-immediate response among many was that of nationalism: he was being anti-American and disrespectful to the United States and the U.S. army (Schmidt et al., 2019). Though the first, he was not the only athlete that began to kneel during the anthem, as several other football players began to join him around the league. Outside of the sport, U.S. Women’s National Team soccer player Megan Rapinoe began kneeling during the national anthem in September of that year as a gesture towards Kaepernick and to bring to light her own concerns of oppression of marginalized groups (Schmidt et al., 2019).

One year earlier, on November 8, 2015, after several racialized incidents involving the school, University of Missouri football players (supported by the rest of the team and coaching staff) stated they would boycott their games until the university president, Tim Wolfe, stepped down. He did so the next day. Obviously, there were a lot of opinions shared on both sides about this event, but one of the most common sentiments in Facebook comments posted to official University of Missouri Athletic Department Facebook page was the idea that advocacy and sports were incompatible (Frederick et al., 2017). This idea that athletes should “stick to sports” appears to be an inevitable sentiment that arises among some whenever athletes decide to make political statements.

Although the media often decidedly pick a side when covering notable American protests – protesters or government usually – the jury is still out for the Kaepernick Take-a-Knee protests (Higgs & Phillips, 2019). Players have been both condemned and commended in the news. If anyone was getting consistent criticism, it was the NFL itself for handling the situation poorly (Higgs & Phillips, 2019). More recently, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has publicly apologized for the handling of the situation, stating “I wish we had listened earlier” (Selbe, 2020, p. 1). Regardless of blame, it did not stop fans from both sides of the political spectrum from making their opinions known. Even politicians thought it necessary to weigh in. Democrats largely focused on the protestors having the right to protest, whereas Republicans, though acknowledging this, tended to consider kneeling during the anthem disrespectful and lacking patriotism (Rhett & Weiss, 2019). Regardless of the position that Republicans and Democrats took, the rhetoric regarding the protest switched from the reason behind the protest to the action of the protest itself (Cosby, 2019; Montez de Oca & Suh, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2019).

So, the argument that politics should not be mixed with sports may not be about the mixing per se, but rather about the specific political opinions themselves. Some argue that not allowing players to speak out is a form of politics, and others go so far as to say that cheering for one team over another, singing the national anthem, or the playing of *God Bless America* at baseball games following the 9/11 terrorist attacks show that free speech is, in fact, encouraged at sporting events (Perry, 2019). The question that remains is why are these arguably political statements deemed acceptable – even encouraged – while other political statements are derided? And, are people’s responses or acceptance of political statements different if the player with political opinions in question is on the

team that a person roots for? The purpose of this dissertation will be to examine how sport fans respond to political statements, whether their identification with the team influences this, and how those responses impact their own psychological health.

There are several reasons that studying sports and sport fans is an important venture. Most obviously is the immense impact sports have on daily life. Anyone that experienced the Covid-19 quarantine can attest to just how empty things felt for many without sport contests in the world. Moreover, sports are the most-viewed television programming in history; the only non-sports TV program that drew more viewers than the Nancy Kerrigan versus Tonya Harding ice skating match at the 1994 Winter Olympics was the *M*A*S*H* finale (Bryant & Raney, 2000). Not to mention, sports may be replacing organized religion in terms of social ties and people connections to their community (Bain-Selbo & Sapp, 2016).

Another important consideration is that sports are basically the last thing people want to watch live, in a synchronous stream. As a result, “sports programming may be one of the last bastions of the old model of interruptive advertising” (Benigni et al., 2014, p. 226), something evidenced by the billions of dollars spent yearly for broadcasting rights for each of the four major U.S. sports leagues (Cassillo, 2021). Newer media outlets like social media and on-demand streaming video have few temporal constraints like programmed schedules or fixed deadlines (Gantz & Lewis, 2014). But temporal constraints are less important for sports, because people tend to not care that there are constraints. Games are not predetermined, and part of fans’ motivations to watch is the suspense of not knowing the outcome. As a result, people still watch sports live more often than any other genre (Cassillo, 2021).

Further, athletes have a huge platform and have the potential to influence their fans, especially young fans, and the fans' beliefs, values and appraisals (Melnick & Jackson, 2002). In fact, because people give more leeway to people they admire, athletes may be "possibly the greatest contemporary messenger of opposing political views" (Galily, 2019, p. 4). As such, there are implications for communication and psychology research as to how sports fans may be influenced or persuaded by these public figures that they interact with sometimes on a day-to-day level.

Sports also provide a quintessential window through which to analyze many conventional topics in these disciplines. As Gift and Miner (2017) suggest, issues like social capital, political empowerment, and corruption all emerge centrally in sports – which makes sports an ideal backdrop in which to probe these phenomena. Sports are flush with actors, institutions, and groups that mimic those found in familiar political spheres. Consequently, analyzing how these entities interact and respond to incentives can shed useful insight on politics writ large (Gift & Miner, 2017). So, understanding how and why American sports fans respond to political statements could help shed light on how American politics in general are discussed, processed, and interpreted.

Another implication and importance of studying politics and sports fans is the effect on psychological health. As mentioned, sports have replaced religion for some people (Bain-Selbo & Sapp, 2016), and this sort of community connection and shared sense of values and identity often helps increase social life satisfaction and decrease feelings like loneliness vis-à-vis social identity theory (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Beyond the group identity benefits, people feel a sense of pride when their favorite teams win (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Fans can even benefit from

feeling a sense of closeness to individual athletes they experience only through media (Hartmann, 2016). Inoue and colleagues (2019) found that spectator well-being was the most important factor for stakeholders in college athletics, and therefore they call for more work on eudaimonic well-being, a type of psychological health more associated with feelings of meaning or self-realization (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Overall, examining how sports fans respond to political statements made by athletes, how their connection to the team affects that, and whether those responses affect their psychological health, is beneficial to many, academic and non-academic alike. With any luck, this dissertation will shed some light on what happens to different sorts of people when an athlete they root for does not “stick to sports.”

Chapter 2 will discuss the presence of politics in the sports domain. First, the argument will be made that sports and activism have gone hand-in-hand for quite some time. The difference now is the rise of social media that facilitates and amplifies how political statements are received. Chapter 3 will then examine the role of identification in sports to help explain why people have such strong attitudes about, behaviors associated with, and responses to sports. Specifically, team identification within the context of social identity theory will be discussed. The chapter will end by connecting the concept of team identification to moral reasoning strategies, or ways that people excuse social ties in order to cope with threats to those the groups associated with those social ties. Rounding out the literature review components of the dissertation will be Chapter 4, discussing how moral reasoning strategies and team identification affect sports fans’ psychological well-being. In doing so, this chapter explores the ways that individuals with divided loyalties between their connections with athletes and those athletes’ apparent political positions

might cope with or reason through that conflict. This chapter will also clarify and separate different conceptualizations of what well-being means, including defining and applying social, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being. Chapter 5 then describes the methodology used in two studies to explore these phenomena. First, a survey was used to explore how/if fans use moral reasoning strategies in response to an athlete they root for having controversial political associations and how team identification and political ideology influence those responses. Then, an experiment was conducted to see if those moral reasoning strategies affect subsequent social, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being. Chapter 6 describes the results of these two studies and if the hypotheses were supported. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the results of these studies, how they fit into the current literature, implications, and future directions in exploring fans being exposed to political ideas and statements within the sports they watch.

2. THE RISE OF SPORTS AND/IN POLITICS: DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

“Stick to sports.” This phrase is often the response heard most frequently whenever a professional athlete – particularly in the United States – makes any type of political statement (Frederick et al., 2018). This call for keeping politics off the field asks the professional athletes to not complicate the games that billions of sports fans seek out for entertainment on a daily basis. In a time when seemingly every aspect of people’s daily lives has turned political in some way, many seem to want to be able to spend a lazy Sunday watching NFL games and eating Buffalo wings.

Yet, even when athletes have not been outwardly political, sports have never really been *apolitical*. From betting to broadcast rights, governments develop public policy with regard to sports. The Olympics, for instance, have built-in politics, with sports drumming up strong nationalism as spectators watch athletes from their home countries compete against athletes from other countries (Gift & Miner, 2017). Indeed, the sheer economic impact of sports around the world makes it inherently political with team owners trying to garner interest to publicly fund new stadiums in part using residents’ taxes (Gift & Miner, 2017). Likewise, besides simply consisting of a group of players/coaches/fans/etc., local sports teams “might also symbolize or represent other communities (e.g., geographic, vocational, ethnic, etc.)” (Heere & James, 2007b, p. 324). Take the New Orleans Saints of the NFL. In 2009 – only a few years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans – the Saints had their most successful season ever. And, this success was seen by many in the city as a symbol that the city would recover after the disaster (E. B. Burns, 2014).

As for individual athletes, they are often expected to use their fame and resources to start charitable foundations, something that many team executives are in favor of for financial purposes (Babiak et al., 2012), regardless of their expertise or knowledge about those causes (Gift & Miner, 2017). This is arguably political, as well, as are seemingly bipartisan issues like bringing attention to males struggling with eating disorders (Mitchell et al., 2018) or NBA players dealing with depression and anxiety (Parrott et al., 2019). Though, both of those types of concerns usually have sympathetic reactions from all sides.

Alternatively, sports media is often incentivized to talk about political statements. Sports television is constantly trying to promote the notion of “bitter conflict” and raising of the stakes/drama, aspects that garner more clicks and better ratings (Bryant & Raney, 2000). If depicting opposing players as rivals is significantly more enjoyable and involving than depicting them as friends (Bryant et al., 1982), it makes sense to extend this conflict and drama to more peripheral aspects of players’ lives.

In fact, politics and sports have quite the symbiotic relationship, with the two topics having been discussed together since the ancient Greeks and Romans, and through the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Gift & Miner, 2017). Often, this relationship is more implicit and outside of the actual sporting events themselves. In the 20th century, the most frequent issues were regarding race, starting with athletes like Olympian Jesse Owens and Black athletes breaking the color barrier (Edwards, 2016) to players speaking out about issues at stake in the Civil Rights era (Watanabe et al., 2019) and hall-of-fame athletes including Jim Brown and Bill Russell voicing support for Mohammed Ali’s

protests, marking what some call a “pivotal moment in athlete activism” (Vasilogambros, 2016, p. 1).

There are, however, some moments of on-the-field sport-based activism. The classic example is when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists on the podium during the national anthem in the 1968 Olympics to protest racism and segregation in American sports (Rorke & Copeland, 2018). However, other athletes have made similar statements, like tennis player Arthur Ashe refusing to play a match in South Africa during Apartheid unless the crowd was allowed to be racially mixed (Perry, 2019).

Even simply the popularity of sports, and the public broadcasting that sports garners, can be enough to spark activism. For example, Korean protestors used the 1988 Seoul Olympics as an opportunity to not be punished, simply because of the attention being paid to the country during that time (Gift & Miner, 2017).

In sum, sports have been politically involved for a long time. But despite this history, there does seem to be an increase in just how political sports have become. For example, incidents like Barack Obama commenting on NBA players wearing “I can’t breathe” shirts during pre-game warmups (in reference to the death of Eric Garner by New York City police) (Galily, 2019), as well as Fidel Castro’s death inciting commentary about his influence on Major League Baseball (Gift & Miner, 2017) are now daily news stories. Some opine that part of the reason for the rising levels of racial issues in sports leagues is that the main issue for many athletes – inequality – also takes shape in their sport. For example, in the National Football League, seventy percent of players yet only 22% of head coaches in 2018 were Black, (not to mention there were zero Black owners) (Stratmoen et al., 2019). Others suggest that the 1980s and 1990s had fewer

social ills than the decades prior (or since), along with athletes hesitating to speak out due to the perceived threat of financial fallout. The iconic, most likely apocryphal anecdote is Michael Jordan's quote in response to why he chose not to endorse a Black candidate in the racialized 1990 North Carolina senate race: "Republicans wear sneakers, too" (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). However, another potential reason for this increase in perceived prevalence of politics in sports is the proliferation of social media in the past ten years and the widespread influence it has had on sports.

How Social/New Media has Amplified the Sports/Politics Complex.

Dating back to the turn of the 20th century, media technologies have been influential and crucial in the publicizing of sport. The telegraph allowed newspapers to be more timely in their reporting of sporting event results. Likewise, newsreels in movie houses in the 1920s often showed sports clips, helping to increase the prominence of athletes (Bryant & Holt, 2006). And obviously, live broadcasts on radio and television have allowed sports to become the popular mainstay that they are today. Even as early as 1981, it was clear that "a TV sportscast is an anticipated activity that is read about, talked about, and waited for" (Gantz, 1981, p. 270), and part of this buzz will include any extracurricular topics hovering over any players/teams involved, including politics (Gantz, 1981). In fact, television now has more content hours *about* sports than the airing of sports themselves (Gantz & Lewis, 2014), creating a constant need for content.

Yet, despite the consistent role of media in how politics are conveyed in sports, the rise of social media has amplified this situation in three distinct ways: (1) greater social awareness through social media use/exposure; (2) increased fan/producer/athlete interaction and perceptions of closeness; and (3) sports media's increasing use of and

competition with social media platforms. Combined, these developments have spurred the recent influx of athletes expressing political opinions and fans responding to them.

Greater Social Awareness through Social Media Use/Exposure

Traditionally, mass media tends to reinforce existing structures, since much of their content is controlled by large, economically-driven companies (Galily, 2019). This is not necessarily problematic in and of itself. The point is that companies are looking to profit and the most efficient way is typically to rely on proven strategies. Social media, however, does not inherently build up the same existing structures. The difference is that audiences or consumers are often the content creators, and “the connectivity offered by social media platforms also enables people to find community around issues of interest” (Sanderson et al., 2016, p. 305). For sports, this means a larger influence on society, as greater numbers of fans find each other.

The notion that there is an increasing political, social, economic and cultural influence of spectator sports on society has been dubbed SocialMediaSport (Bowman & Cranmer, 2014). Essentially, there is a narrowing in the “time-space barrier between spectators and sports” (Bowman & Cranmer, 2014, p. 213), as all actors in the conversation have the ability to interact with each other, often instantaneously. As such, social media becomes the perfect place for all those involved in the SocialMediaSport complex – fans, athletes, and organizations – to talk with one another about anything they desire. This also means that there has been a “disintermediation” of the barriers for publication. For example, reporters now routinely tweet out play-by-play of sporting events they cover in real-time.

Prior to social media, athletes wishing to speak out needed to wait for the attention of the cameras for people to hear their thoughts or see their actions. Today, they can reach millions at any time through social media. So, when polarizing events occur, athletes will not shy away from expressing their feelings. For example, when George Zimmerman was found not guilty of attempted murder of Trayvon Martin, a Black seventeen-year-old, athletes' posts ranged from critiques of the American justice system and social institutions to shock and offering support for the family of the victim (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). It goes beyond just *sports* media, as well. National Basketball Association (NBA) player LeBron James' tweet in which he called President Trump a "bum" garnered major non-sports news coverage, leading to the point that a Fox News host responded directly with "shut up and dribble" (Galily, 2019).

One particular case showing how social media facilitates athletes in expressing their political opinions to a wide audience is that of NBA players. LeBron James, one of the best current NBA players, has been able to utilize Twitter as a platform for raising issues about institutionalized racial injustice that basketball fans might not typically be aware of (Galily, 2019). Further, James has gotten to a point where he is almost expected to weigh in on issues concerning racial injustice (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). Compare this to a similarly outspoken NBA player from the 1990s, Craig Hodges. Hodges won three 3-point shooting contests in the NBA, one of the highly publicized All-Star weekend contests. However, in 1992 he expressed disappointment in the Bush administration's lack of focus on racial issues and criticized Michael Jordan for not using

his platform to bring more awareness to social causes. He proceeded to not be signed by another team after that, and he sued the NBA for “blackballing” him (Galily, 2019).¹

Interestingly, there have been instances where athletes have spoken out publicly via traditional media platforms. The presentation of the ESPYs is one example. The annual awards of the Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly (on ESPN from 1993-2016), better known as the ESPYs, is a broadcast awards show for athletes for each year (Frederick et al., 2018). At the 2016 ESPYs – in July prior to Kaepernick’s first kneeling – several NBA players took the stage to talk about police violence against people of color. LeBron James summarized what many believe to be a responsibility of athletes to use their stature for good:

It’s time to look in the mirror and ask ourselves what are we doing to create change. It’s not about being a role model. It’s not about our responsibility to a tradition of activism. I know tonight we’re honoring Muhammad Ali. The GOAT. But to do his legacy any justice, let’s use this moment as a call to action for all professional athletes to educate ourselves. It’s for these issues. Speak up. Use our influence (Frederick et al., 2018, p. 18).

Although NBA players were speaking out about the same issues that Kaepernick was protesting, the NBA had no players kneel during the National Anthem in subsequent games. Part of this is due to there being specific wording about standing for the anthem in the official rulebook. However, the NBA players’ association and the league also came together to work on way to create “meaningful change” (Kelly, 2017, p. 42), which seemed to curtail any perceived need for kneeling or other expressions of protest before they began. And more recently, the league has seemingly fully embraced these political

¹ It is worth noting that Craig Hodges sued the NBA for the same reason that Colin Kaepernick did. Hodges lost his case, whereas Kaepernick settled. One noticeable difference in these situations: social media access. And a lot more people know the name Kaepernick now than Hodges (Galily, 2019).

statements, even going so far as to have “Black Lives Matter” painted on the court at times (Andrews, 2020).

Even the qualms about echo chambers online – with people selectively choosing and consuming content primarily with which they already agree (Colleoni et al., 2014) – could be placated by athletes’ use of social media. Sports fans are especially susceptible to influence from sports media content (Meân, 2014). With traditional media, though they may try to engage in cultural conversation, “these discussions are programmed, are often one-directional, and rarely incorporate audience feedback. Thus, their influence on sports fans tends to reinforce existing beliefs. Through channels such as Facebook and Twitter, however, the intersection of group cultural values is ongoing, and participation is not limited to media producers” (Sanderson et al., 2016, p. 316). Likewise, athletes appeal to all sides of the political spectrum, and sporting events are one of the few arenas where Republicans and Democrats can actually get along. In one study, 75 percent of respondents from 33 different countries agreed that “sports bring different groups and races... closer together” (Seippel, 2018, p. 334). So, athletes have the potential to bridge the political gap and help break down echo chambers (Galily, 2019), especially considering the newfound closeness that fans now perceive towards athletes.

Increased Fan/Producer/Athlete Interaction and Perceptions of Closeness

Another reason for the recent uptick in athletes expressing political views is the perceived closeness with each other that digital media provides. There is a common perception of a blurring of the boundaries between fan and content producer, “creating an illusion of participation and democratization” despite this participation still being quite limited (Meân, 2014, p. 333). And while “Fan-Based Internet Sports Communities

(FBISCs)” – spaces like blogs, forums or Reddit (Benigni et al., 2014) – have been incubating this increase in fan interaction for years, newer media platforms offer an environment where sports fans can express and talk about their support for teams and players more than has ever been possible with traditional media (Gantz & Lewis, 2014). Participation in online discussions about sport (or really, anything) is not limited by time or space – these discussions can be asynchronous (Sanderson, 2010). Social media allows people to talk about their opinions, thoughts, and team fandom to a wider group of people using several platforms (Filo et al., 2015). And, it is this “ability of new media to help acquire and distill information coupled with its facility to draw people closer together across time and distance [that] makes it a powerful medium for enabling [fan-athlete interactions]” (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014, p. 249).

For athletes, the shift in dynamic between themselves and others has greatly increased the potential for interaction. Athletes can now talk to reporters, fans, or their teams directly, including in confrontational ways (Benigni et al., 2014; Novick & Steen, 2014). Even as early as ten years ago, athletes understood the interpersonal aspects of Twitter. A 2010 content analysis of U.S. professional athletes’ tweets found that over one third of the tweets – the largest category – were considered “interactivity” or with the purpose of interpersonal communication with fans and other athletes (Hambrick et al., 2010). For fans, people can learn interesting and unique things about any of their favorite players: “typically, only the highest profile and most popular athletes participate in extensive interviews in which they can reveal in-depth information about their personal lives. Twitter makes the process more democratic” (Hambrick et al., 2010, p. 464). Indeed, there are countless moments of athletes responding to and arguing with fans

through social media, going back as early as 2009, with Shaquille O'Neil conducting scavenger hunts for his followers to find him at the mall (O'Neal, 2009).

There is some criticism that these interactions online are still very distant and detached: “no one actually meets; no one actually makes contact” (Novick & Steen, 2014, p. 125). Supporting this idea, findings from a cross-sectional survey suggested social networking sites were more useful for college football fans in developing weak ties to a large array of people to share ideas (bridging social capital), than they were for nurturing and deepening relationships (bonding) (Phua, 2012). Thusly, it is likely more appropriate to discuss these online interactions in mediated – not interpersonal – terms.

However, as these newer technologies allow athletes to foster deeper “relationships” with fans, there is potential for athletes and sports leagues to persuade fans into taking action in support of athletes (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014). After all, social media combines “the collective perspectives of athletes, fans and organizations into sports media content” (Benigni et al., 2014, p. 233). Now, sports leagues use social media to promote their product in myriad ways, like giving game information, selling tickets, carrying out sweepstakes, etc. (Hambrick et al., 2010). Most leagues even promote voting for all-star games via Twitter, where fans can use specific hashtags to cast votes (e.g. @NBAAllStar, 2017). Similarly, social media allows for stakeholders to understand the climate surrounding a given situation: “through social media platforms, fans have the ability to alert or notify sport organization stakeholders about their displeasure with the behavior of athletes, and these messages may persuade sponsors to take action and reduce or pull their team sponsorships” (Sanderson et al., 2016, p. 316). This means that Twitter users now have the power to be brand image influencers (Delia

et al., 2017), something that stakeholders probably thought was impossible only a decade ago. So, from a fan and athlete perspective, there has been a shift in how sports are consumed and discussed due to social media. Yet, those within traditional sports media outlets can also understand this increased power of fan opinion and social media.

Sports Media's Increasing Use of and Competition with Social Media Platforms

Some league commissioners have publicly stated that leagues, like the NFL, need to further develop the in-stadium experience, because the at-home sport experience is so excellent. (Benigni et al., 2014). But with newer media, actually viewing a game is simply the beginning of how fans consume sports. Information seeking and discussion are things sports fans yearn for: “they want to understand, prognosticate, and pontificate. They want to express glee, indignation, and sadness. For all of this, they turn to newer media” (Gantz & Lewis, 2014, p. 24).

Often, newer media technologies force more established technologies to alter their utility. For example, when radio first became a success for sporting events, newspaper editors and writers were forced to focus on the aspects of sports coverage that broadcasts were not well equipped for: analysis and depicting the personalities of athletes (Bryant & Holt, 2006). Currently, some appear to be on the fence about how impactful social media is on television as a distribution system for sports – the Super Bowl continues to break television ratings records, for example (Boehmer, 2016). But fewer are on the fence about how social media has influenced what aspects of sports are talked about (Billings & Hardin, 2014). And, those actively using Twitter use other media significantly more, including television, suggesting its use is complementary to the more traditional sports content consumption practices (Boehmer, 2016). In other words, social and new media

have developed complementary coverage of sports with regard to traditional media (Bryant & Holt, 2006), both for greater exposure for current fans and greater chance for exposure for non-fans. There is a greater presence of sports content online that fans interact with, but “this tends to be *in addition to* traditional media consumption rather than *instead of it*” (Billings & Hardin, 2014, p. 1). In fact, use of online media has been found to be the most impactful media type on the strength of association between college team identification and collective self-esteem (Phua, 2010). So, online media has become essential for sports coverage.

Some of the aspects that sports websites can offer (especially for highly identified fans) are: repeat viewings of highlights on-demand; full detail and analysis; and personalization of teams, sports, etc. for one’s homepage (Meân, 2014). Beyond this, mobile devices have made fan-based internet sports communities easier to be a part of, since the technologies are always on and within reach. Fans even prefer the use of team-specific apps instead of general, team-agnostic apps like ESPN. And, fans have moved past a more linear online fan-based participation, more often than not consuming sports via multiple platforms at once (Gantz & Lewis, 2014). This second screening can include checking Twitter for injury updates or refreshing a fantasy team’s point totals. In many ways, fans can have a more engaging sporting event experience at home, miles away from the game, through live tweeting, stats checking, timeline “lurking” (keeping up to date without posting/interacting). This is part of the appeal of digital/mobile media for sports fans. Benigni et al. (2014) even seem to believe “virtual tailgating” will be a thing in the near future, too.

Put these three ways that social media has influenced sports together, and it looks like a perfect incubator for politically active athletes. An example of how influential this can be is the case of the University of Missouri athlete protest. Researchers used geographic mapping and cluster analysis to determine exactly how impactful Twitter was for the football players at the school when they coordinated their strike. They found that the social media users' concerns spread considerably after the players went on strike (Yan et al., 2017). Any sort of opinion expressed by athletes, especially online, has the potential to result in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people engaging with the opinion. Prior to social media, the mainstream media would have had to first decide whether they wanted to even cover that type of story.

This seemingly utopian idea of social media use, however, can be double-edged. While digital media allows those interested in sports to further interact with sports and be more engaged in spectating experience, those not interested in sports have more media options away from sports. This notion is similar to the political knowledge gap, with those uninterested being increasingly less politically knowledgeable (Benigni et al., 2014). Adding to this, Meân (2014) suggests that because sport media can be sent anywhere and has huge, global followings, the marketing strategy is often similar to that of the classic television notion of "least objectionable programming" to attract as many people as possible. As such, there has been a decrease in "the range of discourses readily made available for consumption by audiences, further privileging traditional sporting discourses of White, heterosexual, hypermasculinity" (Meân, 2014, p. 332). And several studies have been conducted, many through the lens of critical race theory, to identify how this heteronormative ideology permeates throughout conversations against the player

protests during the national anthem (Frederick et al., 2017, 2018; Gill Jr., 2016; Stratmoen et al., 2019; etc.).

That said, sports organizations do appear wary of the closeness of fans and stakeholders. The NFL's public relations strategies are different now than they were prior to the proliferation of social media. For example, NFL player Ray Rice was initially suspended for two games for domestic abuse, but the league increased the suspension due to public outrage over the video of the attack when it leaked online (Lee et al., 2016). Likewise, the owners of the NBA team the Philadelphia 76ers backtracked on their decision to reduce employee salaries during the COVID-19 shutdown, after seeing the outrage of fans and their own players alike on social media (Toporek, 2020). In the words of a sports reporter covering the situation echoing the public image fears of the rest of the league: "no owner wants to log into Twitter and see his net worth trending after announcing this kind of news" (Wojnarowski, 2020).

In sum, social media has facilitated increases in social awareness and fan/athlete interaction, as well as helped foster new and continued interest in sports in concert with traditional sports media. With the increase in social awareness and outspoken athletes, how and why do fans react so strongly to these outspoken voices and actions?

Fan Reactions to Politics in Sports

In attempting to answer to how and why sports fans respond to political statements made by athletes, the "how" is examined more often in the existing research than the "why." As will be seen below, this is most likely due to the descriptive nature of looking at how people respond. For example, analyzing comments via social media is much easier to do than analyzing the motivation – the "why" – behind such comments.

Instead, the value in the “how” is seeing the trends in responses to political statements, as well as what types of statements motivate responses. To fully understand what the reactions are from sports fans regarding athlete activism and political expression, it is helpful to look at some case studies.

Often, research regarding responses from fans examines such responses via social media. One common technique is to look at comments on news stories or team homepages’ Facebook. For example, Frederick and colleagues (2017) looked at the reaction to a protest by the University of Missouri football players by analyzing the comments on news links posted on the official Missouri Athletic Department Facebook page to see how the activism was framed and how the comments challenged or reinforced the “dominant ideology around racism in sport” (Frederick et al., 2017, p. 18). In the 473 comments, they found themes that included trivializing racism; encouraging advocacy; and criticism of the relationship between advocacy and sports (i.e., the “stick to sports” objection). Similarly, comments on the Facebook pages of Colin Kaepernick and Megan Rapinoe (two athletes that have knelt in protest during the national anthem) involved discussions of race, American values, and whether or not athletes should engage in politics (Schmidt et al., 2019).

In a change from other findings, an examination of the responses to St. Louis Rams’ players protesting the Ferguson shooting revealed that racial commentary was only the *third* most frequent topic, behind people renouncing their fandom and those suggesting players should be punished (Sanderson et al., 2016). However, it is worth noting that these comments came from the “Boycott the St. Louis Rams” Facebook page.

People on Facebook even respond to non-protest statements, like when several NBA players spoke at the ESPN's sports awards show the ESPYs on the topic of police brutality and racial divides. Again, the plurality of comments discussed race (Frederick et al., 2018).

Others have examined comments posted under news articles. After the St. Louis Rams' protest, the comments on various news articles about the protesting actually revealed a mostly even split of positive and negative reactions from commenters. The 1,200 comments ranged from support for the athletes and continued activism, to seeking punishment for the players and directly ignoring evidence in the matter (Gill Jr., 2016). Another study found that, in response to articles about former NBA player Charles Barkley criticizing Auburn University for hiring a White coach that many deemed inferior to a Black candidate, many of the 9,000 commenters minimized the role of racism in modern society and accused Black people of using racism as an excuse. At the same time, others acknowledged that the lack of diversity in college football coaching was problematic, exhibiting the possibility of non-mainstream concepts being promoted in the digital media space (Sanderson, 2010).

Something that many of these studies reveal is that these discussions often have two sides. For example, some argued that Kaepernick was protesting American values by kneeling, whereas others thought he was doing his civic duty to bring to light the injustice he was seeing in the country. Similarly, Megan Rapinoe's Facebook comments revealed dividedness among discussions of representing America, American freedom, and whether or not athletes should engage in politics (Schmidt et al., 2019). Further, a qualitative content analysis of the hashtags associated with the Take-a-Knee movement showed that

the hashtag “#BoycottNFL” was used by both those accusing the NFL of allegedly blacklisting Kaepernick, as well as those critical of the league for not disciplining players that knelt (Cosby, 2019). Also of note is the fact that the themes of these discussions sometimes devolve into reprimanding/endorsing the athletes and their actions and not the issues they were hoping to shed light upon (Schmidt et al., 2019), such as the debate surrounding Kaepernick’s actions turning into an argument over what constitutes patriotism (Montez de Oca & Suh, 2019), as well interpretation of the first amendment to the constitution: it was either his right to protest how he saw fit, or the NFL was free to penalize him as they saw fit (Gift & Miner, 2017).

To this point, *how* people respond to political statements is somewhat known and echoes other political realms – acrimoniously and divisively – which researchers have analyzed for some of the more outspoken moments of the past few years. As for *why* people respond in the ways they do, there is much less literature.

Several scholars have focused on power dynamics and sports, especially within the lens of critical race theory (Frederick et al., 2017, 2018; Gill Jr., 2016; Stratmoen et al., 2019; etc.), when trying to explain fan responses to political statements by players. The premise of this idea is that fans generally represent the dominant ideology or hegemony of society in sports. For example, when a Black player speaks out, this challenges the dominant ideology (in this example, Whiteness), which creates a kind of cognitive dissonance for fans who hold the opinion that injustice or systemic racism are not at issue. As a result of speaking out, the players make people uncomfortable, and the people then push back – calling out racism in sports makes the fan feel like they are being called out similarly. This can explain why fans may say things like “stick to sports” and

other common clichés (Frederick et al., 2017). They argue that this reinforces the idea that sports benefit Whiteness by trying to reduce the importance of Black athletes' challenges, thus fortifying systemic racial issues. A similar notion is that sports themselves tend to support notions of nationalism, as they often reinforce dominant cultural ideologies (Schmidt et al., 2019). So, anything that criticizes that or seems unpatriotic – kneeling during the national anthem, for example – can feel like an attack, leaving some to feel the need to defend themselves against the threat of change (Frederick et al., 2018).

Beyond dominant cultural ideology, one of the appeals of sports teams for individuals is the history associated with the organizations, which can foster “a sense of community that fans can tap into, strengthening the bonds and loyalty to a team and its traditions and the players themselves” (Osborne & Coombs, 2016, p. 112). And part of this rich history is also deeply entrenched in masculine ideologies (Stratmoen et al., 2019), which are reinforced through televised sports programming, the viewing of which has been found to strongly correlate with associations of traditional conceptions of masculine gender role norms (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018; Scharrer & Warren, ICA Paper 2020). So, when something is seen as anti-military or anti-traditionally masculine, people feel like their traditions are being encroached upon.

Empirically, not much is understood about fans' beliefs due to a dearth of research. One study that is an exception to the rule examined respondents' motivations behind speaking positively or negatively (word-of-mouth) about Nike after they released an ad featuring Kaepernick (J. K. Kim et al., 2020). Though the main analysis examined people's beliefs about the intentions of Nike in partnering with Kaepernick, they did find

that for those in the sample, being more liberal, female, more educated, and younger was associated with approving of the politicization of sports (J. K. Kim et al., 2020).

Interestingly, they only accounted for attitudes towards Nike, not Colin Kaepernick himself. Somewhat contradictory to the above demographics, another survey found that gender and education did *not* influence boycotting behavior (Westhoff & Saint Louis, 2019). And, in that study, susceptibility to both liberal and conservative calls for boycotts were significant predictors for self-reported boycotting of viewing games and buying tickets. Liberal ideology was only a significant predictor of the boycotting of merchandise, with conservatives less likely to boycott. Taken together, it seems that who the NFL apparel is from – Nike or the NFL – can influence people’s buying intentions. Yet, Nike currently has the contract for the NFL’s uniforms.

Another quantitative study examined how racial attitudes and adherence to masculine honor beliefs affected people’s support for NFL players taking knees during the National Anthem (Stratmoen et al., 2019). In a longitudinal survey, the more strongly a respondent adhered to traditional beliefs about masculinity and honor, the more disrespectful and less appropriate they believed the protests to be, as well as more threatening to the reputation of the U.S. Likewise, the converse was true for those who tended to place blame on prejudice. In a second study, both of these predictors were moderated by race and behavior of the athlete, so the link between masculine beliefs and subsequent perceptions depended on the player’s race and whether they were kneeling or standing (Stratmoen et al., 2019). Admittedly, they also did not control for fandom, which could weaken these relationships. Football is a physical sport. And, people that adhere to strong masculine honor ideologies may be more in line with retaliating

physically (police aggression). Someone with low masculine honor beliefs, then, may be less interested in a sport that relies on people hitting each other at full speed and being rewarded for hitting as hard as possible.

Despite some interesting results, what most of these studies do not consider is anything beyond description of people's responses online. The two empirical studies examining why people responded to the Take-a-Knee movement pointed to the role of the demographics of their respondents in determining how they responded to the movement (J. K. Kim et al., 2020; Stratmoen et al., 2019). Yet, neither study accounted for fandom or whether respondents rooted for the players in question. Digital media and the internet can allow for less direct conversation and more barriers of anonymity, allowing for "a more accurate societal barometer of fans' views on the relevance of race in sport" (Sanderson, 2010, p. 314). This could be creating a contrast of athletes trying to bring to light societal woes at the same time that fans feel more shielded to express themselves, sometimes in ways that others may find problematic incorrectly. After all, there has been a rise in the influence of alt-right communities on Twitter where those ideas are then exposed to the larger audiences (Zannettou et al., 2017). Fan reactions can even affect the financials of teams. Watanabe and colleagues (2019) looked at the market for four college football teams after protests in those areas. They found that protests could influence game attendance. Regions with higher percentages of people that voted Republican in the 2016 Presidential election saw greater drops in attendance after athlete protests (Watanabe et al., 2019). More research is needed that examines fan processes to understand how both financial and political stakeholders are impacted as a result of fans' reactions to political statements in the sports arena.

To help understand fan processes and responses to sports-based activism, one can turn to research examining other aspects of fan processes, motivations, behaviors, and emotions. For example, another reason for fans to feel threatened by political conversations within sports could be that they are generally watching because they expect positive emotional impact. In discussing the uses and gratifications of sports spectators (their reasons for watching), Raney (2006) mentions that two motives are entertainment and relaxation. There are also strong correlations between the TV sports viewing motivation “to let loose” and the emotional and behavioral reactions one would expect a highly involved spectator to produce during a game (Gantz, 1981). This would suggest, though, that most people regardless of political beliefs would be unfavorable towards athletes speaking out. Moreover, only ideas traditionally considered politically liberal (those associated with racial or gender equality) and the responses to those ideas have been studied.

Further, motivations are strongest for those most interested in sports. So, it is understandable that some people tuning in will be unwelcoming of political issues invading their relaxation and enjoyment time, especially when it was not planned. In fact, those more interested in sports are more likely to rely on TV for their gratifications sought than Twitter (Boehmer, 2016), where so much of these politically charged things begin. So, those more interested in sports might not be as privy to the typical social concerns and, at the same time, feel more encroached upon when those social concerns show up in their sports viewing content.

To this end, the reason people respond to athletes speaking out the way they do is still understudied, especially with regards to fan processes. Thus, an avenue that might be

helpful would be exploring other concepts studied in sports fandom in terms of how people react strongly and feel a connection with people or social groups, such as audience identification – specifically, team identification – the main topic of Chapter 3. Also, because relatively few have studied fan processes and outcomes specifically regarding politics, Chapters 3 and 4 will also discuss a similar type of sport-peripheral incident: how fans respond to athlete scandals. While objectionable political opinions or associations are sometimes only problematic for some people (particularly those at the opposite end of the political spectrum), scandals are a type of (sometimes) non-sports related event that is more associated with transgressions and immoral acts, and thus objectionable to most people.

3. THE ROLE OF IDENTIFICATION IN SPORTS AUDIENCES' BEHAVIORS

Why might fans have such a strong reaction to athletes, and sports more generally? Sports fans tend to report that, when viewing mediated sports, they are tapping into emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social needs. More succinctly, "... sports are visceral. They are felt" (Raney, 2006, p. 325). For many, this idea of connecting to a sport comes from playing the sport or appreciating the action, skill, or precision involved. For others, part of the cognitive and social benefits of spectating include the ways people feel connections to and identify with sports teams and athletes. Within media psychology and media effects research, this connection is broadly referred to as identification.

Identification

Sports spectators – and more generally, all media consumers – do not watch sports simply to watch sports; there is always some reason, be it purposeful or not. "It is not the mere exposure to entertainment that we enjoy, but the ability of entertainment content to distract us from ourselves and to reveal to us novel and exciting experiences of others" (Cohen, 2006, p. 183). So, whether the motivation to watch is more ritual, like out of boredom or to escape, or more purposeful, like keeping track of statistics for fantasy purposes to see if one's own imaginary team can outperform their competitor's team, some kind of gratification is typically a driving factor. Another motivation for media audiences, that also happens to develop from consuming content, is developing connections, both to individuals and groups.

Generally, audience identification refers to when viewers respond to media by feeling that they themselves are part of the mediated world; feeling like they are actually experiencing the events; or connecting to a mediated persona so strongly that they

understand that persona's motivations and goals (Cohen, 2001). There are several concepts that attempt to explain different facets of these mediated connections, like narrative transportation (Gerrig, 1993), involvement (Jungkee Kim & Rubin, 1997), and presence (Hartmann, 2008). What these conceptualizations all include is the audience feeling connected to the mediated environment in some way, and that the strength of that connection can potentially produce effects (e.g. Basil, 1996). For sports fans, identification manifests in different ways, and can develop outside of media consumption, such as acknowledging other fans on the street (Wann, Polk, et al., 2011). In this case, the identification is occurring at the team level, as fans feel a connection to other fans or even to members of the organization themselves. The most commonly used conceptualization of psychological connection for sports fans is Wann and Branscombe's (1993) sport team identification.

Sports Team Identification

Stemming from social identity theory, sport team identification refers to an individual's perceived connection to a team. In their seminal piece on team identification, Wann and Branscombe (1993) called out previous research for not fully considering the differing degrees of fanship that people can have. They decided to develop a measure to assess the level of a person's loyalty to and identification with a sports team. In a series of studies, they found positive correlations between "level of commitment" to a team, like perceived fandom and importance of team success, and outcomes like amount of money spent on the team, number of years of fandom, and attributing success to the team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Wann (2006a) later more clearly defined team identification as "the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team and

the team's performances are viewed as self-relevant" (Wann, 2006a, p. 332). This definition will be used herein.

Team identification develops when a person internalizes a sports team's identity, making it part of one's self-concept (Lock et al., 2012). In other words, when a person begins to define themselves as being part of a community that supports and champions a team, they have identification. The identity a fan perceives is quite important here. As with social identity theory and the dynamics between ingroup and outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), fans of a team will be favorable to other fans of the same team, while derogating fans of other teams (Wann & Grieve, 2005). Doing so helps them maintain a positive social identity. Likewise, fans tend to take on what they perceive as the norms associated with their group. For example, a Buffalo Bills fan could perceive that body slamming tables during tailgating is expected of Bills fans since news coverage of Bills fans often features this behavior. Similarly, college-aged sports viewers tend to behave differently based on their social situation, being more expressive during games when accompanied by friends – yelling in anger, cheering, criticizing officials, drinking beer – and less so when alone (Gantz, 1981). These fans may be performing these rituals to show their "authenticity," rituals that often involve the traditionally masculine ideals that sports tend to promote (Osborne & Coombs, 2016). These actions in the positive social identity process separate one's own group from rival groups or teams and tend to make highly identified fans lose their individuality and take up the group characteristics.

In terms of connecting with other fans, identification also works in the mediated world. Overall, media use and identification tend to be reciprocal: "mediated consumption of sports acts as a socializing agent for these fans, affirming their positive

in-group membership and elevating their collective self-esteem” (Phua, 2010, p. 199). For example, the more people engage with “Weird Celtics Twitter” (Highkin, 2018), the more they feel a part of Weird Celtics Twitter, which raises the collective self-esteem of the group. Another way of looking at this is that some people think that being associated with a winning team will result in themselves being viewed as a winning individual (Raney, 2006).

Antecedents of Team Identification

In his review of the extant literature (often citing himself), Wann (2006a) identified three types of antecedents as potential reasons that a person develops team identification. First, the psychological antecedents are related to the benefits that people think they are receiving due to being part of a group. These benefits include the need for belonging or wanting to spend time with others (Wann et al., 1996), the desire to feel like a part of the group or a sense of unity (Watkins, 2014), as well as using the group’s positive self-image to buffer against one’s own self-doubt and uncertainty (Grieve & Hogg, 1999).

The second type of antecedent of team identification consists of environmental factors. These are primarily social aspects, like family, friends, and other fans, but also include environmental factors like team stadiums and arenas. Obviously, where a person grows up and the teams their family roots for play a large factor in a person’s team identification. Fans that have been socialized into cheering for a team in this manner have been found to report higher levels of feeling an obligation to their friends and family, as well as regional “tribalism” or ethnocentrism, than fans who chose their team without the same influence (Koch & Wann, 2013). In fact, a person’s need to belong has been found

to be correlated *only* with rooting for local sports teams and not distant teams (Theodorakis et al., 2012), and rooting for local teams often leads to greater levels of social self-esteem and well-being (Wann, 2006b). Yet, the recent proliferation of sport fan interactivity on social media may lessen the locality-based influence. Even the salience of opposing groups can influence one's own identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For example, the more a Red Sox fan sees coverage of the Yankees, the more he or she may dig in their fandom heels. Player interaction can also increase team identification. Wann and James (2019) suggest interactions with players can develop interest in a team, potentially via the parasocial contact model where one's one-way mediated relationship with a player can increase their perceptions of that player's ingroups, similarly to the benefits of interpersonal interaction (Schiappa et al., 2005).

Lastly, there are team-related antecedents of team identification (Wann, 2006a). These include valuing a team's public image and sense of traditions (Aiken & Koch, 2009) (e.g., "The Patriot Way"), the team's success on the field (End et al., 2002), and the perceived relatability of the players (Fisher, 1998; Wann et al., 1996). Overall, team identification seems to develop once there is motivation to fulfill certain psychological gratifications, whether they are personal or social.

Outcomes of Team Identification

More interestingly, and more applicable within the context of this dissertation, there are multiple outcomes as a result of team identification. Wann (2006a) suggests three general outcomes of team identification: affective responses, behavioral responses, and psychological well-being. Generally, the affective responses are positive emotions from success and negative emotion from team failure, a concept similar to affective

responses in disposition theory in which audiences derive pleasure from seeing characters they like succeed and characters they dislike fail (Raney, 2003). For example, male basketball fans self-reported significantly higher positive emotions and lower negative emotions after their team won a game, regardless of level of fanship, and vice versa when their team lost (Bizman & Yinon, 2002). Likewise, closer, more difficult wins have been found to produce greater positive affect than easy wins, and this effect is magnified by team identification (Wann et al., 1994). Additionally, resulting positive emotions may last longer. In studying soccer fans during the 2010 World Cup, Jones and colleagues (2012) found that soccer fans of the *winning* team retained *positive* mood states longer than fans of the *losing* team retained *negative* mood states. This manifested itself in greater vigor, as well as lower depression and anger.

The behavioral responses are the most studied of the consequences of team identification. This is because two of the main types of behaviors studied are fan consumption (which essentially has its own area of study, sports marketing) and spectator aggression (one of the main outcomes of concern within the media effects paradigm) (Wann, 2006a). Beyond this, researchers have established several behaviors that fans will typically exhibit, often associated with being a group member. Basking in reflected glory (“BIRGing”), which includes things like bragging about the team and wearing more team merchandise, can occur while a team is winning and after they win (Delia et al., 2017). Likewise, information seeking, both online and interpersonal, about the team occurs when one’s identification is higher, which can facilitate socialization with other fans (Lock et al., 2012). Other studies have shown that winning can also influence social interaction and even spending. When Spain won the 2010 World Cup, their fans spent

significantly more money and socialized significantly more than before the tournament, compared to English fans (whose team lost in the round of 16). And, this occurred regardless of strength of identification (Jones et al., 2012).

Lastly, the psychological outcomes of team identification are responses that tap into individuals' psychological health or well-being. Findings show that identifying with valued social groups can help increase psychological well-being and mental health through feeling less lonely, reducing depression, etc. (Crocker & Major, 1989; Smith, 1989; Wann, 1994). For sports fans, team identification is positively associated with self-esteem and negatively with depression (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). Identification by itself does not necessarily mean increased well-being. Success certainly helps. For example, German spectators of German World Cup matches had significantly higher self-reported subjective well-being after two wins (relative to non-spectators), but not after a draw (Stieger et al., 2015). Moreover, identification tends to lead to connectedness with others, which leads to well-being. Research has found that simply being in a group is not enough to increase well-being – one must identify with that group. Further, team fandom leads to more connectedness than simply sport fandom (Wann & James, 2019). Think of the bonds that people form based on the teams they root for. And lastly, location matters – Keyes' (1998) Social Well-Being scale has been found to be associated with identification of local teams, but not distant teams (Wann & Weaver, 2009). This makes sense: the further one is away from a team, the fewer fans there are, the less of the well-being benefits one may receive from the socialization aspect of identity. Though, displaced fans can have heightened temporary social psychological health when the

salience of their team increases (such as watching the highlight video in the experiment) (Wann, Polk, et al., 2011).

Overall, Wann and James (2019) note that “the positive relationship between team identification and psychological well-being is robust and the generalizability of this effect is quite impressive” (p. 182), and they provide a sample of the studies finding this connection along with fifteen various conceptualizations of well-being. Though the majority of these are correlation studies, there is some causal evidence, via a crossed-lagged design, that team identification positively predicts collective self-esteem and negatively predicts loneliness (Wann, 2006c). The evidence appears so robust that Wann developed a model that connects team identification with both trait and state well-being: the Team Identification – Social Psychological Health Model (TI-SPHM, Wann, 2006b), discussed in Chapter 4.

So, this is how team identification is developed and manifests itself, but the influence described above is primarily happening in a vacuum. In reality, there are more forces at work. Even just in viewing games, one of the two teams that people identify with is going to lose. Something like losing would logically potentially lessen all the positive things described above. Luckily, there is a slew of research that focuses on how people maintain their positive outlook towards their social groups, even when factors or events threaten their groups’ status or uniqueness. The following section describes some of those identity threats and how people cope with said threats.

Identity Threats and Coping with Them

An inevitable aspect of team identification – and rooting for a team, in general – is, obviously, losing. Half of the fans in any sporting event will always end up

disappointed. This is perceived as a threat to group identity for sports fans, including the perception that one's own team is more successful or morally superior compared to others (Branscombe et al., 1999), and the responses can include arousal, anxiety, depression, etc. Yet, despite the chance for these detrimental outcomes, there is evidence to suggest that sport fandom has prosocial and psychological benefits (Wann, 2006b; Wann & James, 2019). Indeed, sports fans – young and old – reported that they were more likely to view more exciting games with unpredictable outcomes than games in which their team was heavily favored (van Driel & Gantz, 2019). So, there is some sort of incongruity in that team identification leads to psychological health, yet many high-identifying fans have anxiety and negative affective states from sports. The missing mechanism that helps alleviate this contradiction and allows people to have positive gains from team identification is the concept of coping with identity threats.

According to Wann's (2006b) Team Identification-Social Psychological Well-Being Model, sports fans use multiple strategies to help cope with the undesirable feelings from identity threats, including their team losing. Coping is used to deal with state-level, immediate stress or distress, as well as long-term, trait outcomes (Snyder, 1999). As such, coping strategies mitigate identity threats by alleviating a person from the negative feelings related to their group's identity being threatened.

Specifically for sports fans, several coping strategies have been examined. One strategy turns BIRGing on its head. Cutting off reflected failure (CORF) refers to decreasing one's association with a team when they lose (Snyder et al., 1986). Though, this is not as viable for high-identified fans, because they cannot "turn off" their fandom as easily. Instead, die-hard fans sometimes engage in self-stereotyping, as suggested by

Spears et al. (1999). When a team does poorly, low-identified fans will distance themselves from that team's fan stereotype, whereas the high-identified will reinforce that self-stereotype (Spears et al., 1999). This is where the idea of the "bandwagon fan" comes in: high-identified fans will make fun of those that abandon the team when the team performs poorly, claiming that only they themselves are the "real" fans for still going to the games, wearing the gear, etc. In this instance, social identity theory would posit that because fans cannot use their team's superior performance to distinguish their group's uniqueness (i.e., the team loses), the group distancing strategy used by the high-identifying fans is being used towards the low-identifying fans. So, high-identifying fans change their group identity from all fans of a team to just a group of die-hard fans as a way to continue to express the unique aspect of their group.

There are other types of coping strategies as well. For instance, cutting off future failure (COFF, being wary of the team's success, to mitigate failure later) (Wann et al., 1995), taking it out on others (other team's fans, players, or referees) (Wann, 1993), retroactive pessimism (i.e., "they never had a chance anyway") (Shepperd et al., 1996), or self-serving bias (internalize victory and externalize defeat) (Miller & Ross, 1975) are all documented strategies. Some other coping strategies are also moderated by fan identification. For example, high-identified fans can be more likely to have biased recollections and expectations of team performance, like overstating prior achievements (Wann & Dolan, 1994) or thinking the team will be better in the future (Markman & Hirt, 2002).

Although researchers have examined ways that team identification is affected by team/player performance on the field, how identification is affected by immoral behavior

off the field is under-studied (Fink et al., 2009), as are athletes' political statements. While losing is inherently built into rooting for a team, off-field incidents involving athletes can be different in that they may involve crimes, polarizing ideas, and other questionable acts. And while there seems to be a decent amount of research into the reactions of the most vocal people on social media, that does not tap into how fans are coping internally or if the coping techniques are effective. Generally, high-identified fans will be the ones to use coping strategies, since they are the ones whose identity is most threatened (Wann, 2006b). What, then, would happen if a fan learns that a player on their favorite team has political opinions or associations with which that fan disagrees? The logic above would suggest that the fan would engage in a coping strategy that helps them maintain their own group's superiority. In this case, that group would be perceived as their political party or people that share similar beliefs. However, that would also mean the fan is actively trying to distance themselves from a member of another group to which that fan belongs: their favorite team. So, which group identity prevails? Would someone with low team identification be more likely to maintain their own ideology or morality, as opposed to high-identification fans ignoring player's morality or questionable political beliefs? Although not much has been studied on how political statements play into coping with identity threats, there has been some work on a different off-field threat to team identity and fan reactions to said threat: athlete scandals.

Scandals, Reactions, and the Role of Team Identification

Research shows that fans may cope with scandals and other immoral behaviors involving athletes by using some level of mental gymnastics. When players do something that threatens the value of a fan's group identity (Branscombe et al., 1999), be it cheating,

committing a crime, etc., the fan might use some strategies to cope with that threat. And while there is the possibility for a black-sheep effect – where an unscrupulous athlete is ostracized by a fanbase (e.g. Branscombe et al., 1993; Johns et al., 2005) – others have found the opposite: greater positive bias toward the athlete when on their favorite team, and negative bias when on a rival team (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2002). High identifying fans evaluate their team's players in an especially positive way (Wann et al., 2006). So, when it comes to evaluations of players engaging in immoral behaviors, those with high levels of team identification may employ strategies like ingroup bias or favoritism – digging their feet in (Branscombe et al., 1999). Additionally, fans are significantly more likely to be lenient towards players' transgressions on their own team compared to players on a rival team (Chien et al., 2016), again harkening back to social identity – wanting to make one's group look better and make other groups look worse.

Specific reactions to athlete and public figure scandals can vary significantly, and a few of those variations have been studied. One type of reaction refers to sports consumers talking to each other about the event face-to-face, or “word of mouth.” In the case of scandals, Sato et al. (2018) found that on-field scandals (versus off-field) were associated with higher levels of anger and perceived responsibility, which correlated with negative word of mouth. Likewise, the condition in which the athlete knowingly used performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) (versus unknowingly) was positively associated with anger, perceived responsibility, and negative word of mouth (Sato et al., 2018).

Fans can also attempt to defend the athlete or act by derogating the source of the threat or questioning the reliability of the information, such as blaming the media for exaggerating the significance of the unscrupulous act (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). By

suggesting that someone is out to get that player or that the media made something up, fans can cope with the threat to their team identity by reducing the amount of guilt by association felt by fans (Doosje et al., 1998). For example, fans sometimes attribute blame elsewhere. In the case of Ben Johnson, the Canadian track-and-field gold medalist who tested positive for steroids and was stripped of his medal, those that followed the athlete more closely were more likely to claim he was sabotaged or blame his coaches and trainers for giving him steroids unknowingly (Ungar & Sev'er, 1989).

Organizational responses to scandals can also affect team identification. Drawing from balance theory (Heider, 1958), Fink and colleagues (2009) posited that various external responses can help rebalance people's negative feelings toward a group member, such as the coaching staff having a strong response (e.g. suspending a player), signaling to fans that "the punishment fits the crime." They looked at how a star college quarterback's fictitious off-field incidents, and the school's response to those incidents, affected team identification. Those with high team identification saw significant decreases in their identification when exposed to the weak response from the school (i.e., coaches and athletic director responding slowly and not suspending the player) (Fink et al., 2009). The authors propose that a weak response means the team is supporting the player – i.e., the person that caused the fan's negative feelings. As a result, that fan is less able to rebalance their emotions. But a strong response provides something positive for the person to hold on to – something that lessens the "threat" against the team.

Relating this to political statements, fans sometimes call for reprimand when faced with protests they find unfavorable, devolving the conversation into the appropriate punishment for the players (Sanderson et al., 2016). This would help explain why both

conservatives and liberals were found to be boycotting the NFL in the aftermath of the Take-a-Knee movement (Westhoff & Saint Louis, 2019): liberals/supporters of taking-a-knee denouncing the NFL for reprimanding the players in any way and conservatives/denouncers of taking-a-knee denouncing the NFL for not being harsh enough.

So, fans can do mental gymnastics to reconcile their feeling about players committing dishonest or immoral acts. But what exactly are these mental gymnastics that allow people to think about things in incongruent ways? One line of research that investigates these notions explores the concept of moral reasoning.

Team Identification and Moral Reasoning

An interesting research path that could be useful in looking at reactions to athlete scandals (and thus, by extension, athletes' political statements) is how fans use moral reasoning strategies to cope with threats to their identity, first applied to consumer research by Bhattacharjee and colleagues (2013). The idea is that people try to cope with the cognitive dissonance of likeable public figures committing immoral actions by using moral disengagement strategies that help lead to continued support. Upon hearing about immoral or unethical behavior, moral judgements occur automatically, and moral reasoning follows to provide justification for said judgements (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). In other words, if a person's friend were to be (correctly) accused of a crime, the immediate response might be to defend that friend. Then, moral reasoning would activate as a way to justify defending that friend's actions. And, people will typically come to conclusions that are self-serving (Lee & Kwak, 2015). This process also occurs for the

self, where moral rationalization is used when the cost of upholding one's own moral code is greater than the benefits (Tsang, 2002).

Within moral reasoning research, there have primarily been two conceptualized strategies that can help people overcome potential incongruency between their initial reaction and then justification of immoral acts: moral rationalization and moral decoupling. First, moral rationalization refers to “the process of reconstruing immoral actions as less immoral in order to maintain support for an immoral actor” (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013, p. 1168). This is a similar strategy to the mechanisms of moral disengagement, in which people attempt to make immoral acts personally acceptable by doing things like lessening the wrongdoer's role or blaming the victim (Bandura et al., 1996). For example, people are more willing to justify the practices of sweatshop labor when their desire for a product is strong (Paharia et al., 2013). In the sports world, if an athlete has done considerable pro-social work prior to their scandal, this has the potential to reduce people's negative reactions to their transgressions, like doping (Lee & Babiak, 2019). However, one potential downside to this type of moral reasoning is that it forces people to excuse unscrupulous acts. Therefore, Bhattacharjee and colleagues (2013) extended the concept of moral reasoning to include another distinct strategy, moral decoupling.

This second moral reasoning strategy of decoupling refers to separating the judgments of immoral actions from judgements of job (or, in the case of athletes, on-field) performance (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). Most likely because it does not involve altering one's attitude towards an immoral act, decoupling has been found to feel less wrong and, therefore, be easier to justify. In addition, it allows a person to not contradict

their own moral code. A perfect example of this comes from the same Bhattacharjee et al. (2013) piece in a discussion of the Bill Clinton impeachment. In arguing why they believe decoupling is a separate process from rationalization, they inadvertently make the case for exactly why a common response to athlete activism is “stick to sports”:

Democrats who were motivated to support Clinton’s presidency tended to acknowledge that his actions were immoral but argued that his private life should not affect our view of his ability to govern... Conversely, Republicans who were motivated to oppose Clinton tended to argue that these judgments are intertwined and that moral character is an essential component of presidential performance (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013, p. 1169).

Rather than debate the morality of the situation, the central discourse was about whether or not Clinton’s morality should be tied to his job as president. Interestingly, it appears that decoupling even falls along party lines, with liberals significantly more likely to decouple than conservatives on all fronts (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015). As mentioned, a discourse along similar lines seems to dominate all other discourse when athletes speak out. Indeed, the authors propose that this research applies succinctly to sports, in which athlete performance is easily observed and measured (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). For instance, those deriding outspoken athletes to “stick to sports” may not be sick of politics, but instead are simply opposed to that athlete’s views. Alternative to this perspective, some praise athletes when they speak up (as long as they agree with the athlete’s viewpoint). In this case, these people may be engaging in another type of moral reasoning strategy that is the distinct opposite of rationalization or decoupling.

A third moral reasoning strategy that has been adopted more recently is called moral coupling. Contrary to the first two strategies, moral coupling is the “psychological process that integrates the evaluations of the transgressor’s morality and the transgressor’s performance” (Lee & Kwak, 2015, p. 101). In this process, evaluations of

an athlete's performance are informed in part by their transgressions, with people having trouble separating the two. It seems those engaging in moral coupling may also focus on other coping strategies to feel better. For instance, for college basketball fans reading a damaging report about their team, their moral outrage and moral cleansing can be more intense if the source of the report is considered an outgroup (Lewis & Hirt, 2019).

Further, the specific type of incident plays a part. When separated into on-field (PED use) and off-field (tax evasion) immoral acts, those in the on-field condition were more likely to morally couple, and those in the tax evasion condition were more likely to decouple (Lee & Kwak, 2015). Yet, perhaps the severity of the transgression might be a factor, which has been suggested in media enjoyment scholarship (Raney & Bryant, 2002).

Lee and colleagues (2015) decided to investigate how moral reasoning played into people's evaluations of athletes that commit immoral acts and their associated brands. Basically, would consumers continue to buy products endorsed by athletes after they were involved in a scandal? Participants read an article about a fictitious athlete's athletic performance and success, and then were randomly assigned to read another fictitious article about that athlete being involved in either an on-field or off-field scandal. Lastly, they then picked the moral reasoning strategy they preferred as a reaction. Moral coupling had a negative effect on attitudes towards the athlete and associated brand, whereas decoupling had a positive effect. Rationalization only had a positive impact on brand. In terms of performance-relatedness, when an athlete's transgressions affected the sport, people were more likely to engage in a moral reasoning strategy that combined performance and morality or rationalization to overlook the behavior. Whereas, decoupling was more likely when the act was not related to the sport (Lee et al., 2015).

For a follow-up final experiment, Lee and Kwak (2015) included the interaction of sports involvement to see how it moderated participant moral reasoning choice and consumer support for a brand associated with an athlete involved in a scandal. For both purchase intention and attitudes towards brands associated with the transgressor, participants' level of involvement was a moderator for both decoupling and rationalization (and not coupling). Interestingly, those using moral rationalization – rationalizing the behavior – actually *increased* their purchase intention and brand attitude, as if they were standing more strongly in support of the athlete (Lee & Kwak, 2015). This shows that identification may greatly inform people's moral reasoning.

Hypotheses of Team Identification, Political Statements, and Moral Reasoning

Along these lines, what would guide the moral reasoning strategies for when athletes speak out on a political issue or even simply have controversial or objectionable political associations? Despite the prevalence of politics in sports, as well as the several studies discussed that identify how fans respond to political statements by athletes, no research currently explores if fans engage in moral reasoning strategies when learning that a player on the team they root for has political beliefs or associations they may find objectionable. Based on the literature just discussed, if the politics are objectionable enough, one would expect similar results to those athlete transgressions. Namely:

H1a: Team identification will be *positively* associated with moral decoupling.

H1b: Team identification will be *positively* associated with moral rationalization.

And, because a person's political associations are a more off-field concern, which is more associated with fans decoupling (Lee & Kwak, 2015):

H1c: Team identification will be *negatively* associated with moral coupling.

To complicate things, people have multiple groups with which they identify. If a fan of a team has political viewpoints that significantly differ from those of an athlete on their favorite team, said fan might feel a threat to their own political group's identity due to supporting that player. As a result, perhaps they would attempt to morally decouple to relieve that cognitive dissonance. Compare this to someone that supports both the athlete's team and that athlete's political viewpoints, where perhaps the fan would morally *couple* and perceive their favorite team as housing the types of athletes with acceptable political views, thus increasing their self-identity or social well-being.

So, the logic here is that sports fans that have significantly different political viewpoints from an athlete that speaks out will potentially respond by telling the athlete to stick to sports. However, sports can potentially increase consideration of attitude change on contentious policies. Based on the theory of dissonant identity priming (TDIP, Harrison & Michelson, 2017), sports fans' attitudes can be changed when the person speaking out is perceived as part of their in-group. In three different studies, they found that when a player on their team supports LGBT rights, this can increase the fan's support for LGBT rights. For example, sports fans' support for marriage equality was significantly higher (than the control) when they saw a statement of support from a former player of their football team whereas the differences between control and treatment for non-fans was not significant (Harrison & Michelson, 2017).

However, what Harrison and Michelson (2017) did not tap into was *how* supportive people were in these studies. So, would there be less of an effect in the above experiment for people vehemently opposed to marriage equality? Would they instead stand their ground and try to distance themselves from that former player? This

gap is where the current study fits. Therefore, while Harrison and Michelson (2017) examined how fan identity (the perceived in-group) affected attitude change (arguably, attitude change towards a specific out-group), the present study seeks to address how fan identity affects how fans respond to an in-group member having controversial political viewpoints that they might perceive as being aligned with an out-group. One idea that may help explicate this tension is cross-pressures.

In her book *Hearing the Other Side*, Diana C. Mutz (2006) looks at people with “cross-cutting exposure,” or social networks with individuals with opposing political viewpoints. While the present study is not discussing interpersonal social networks, per se, the discussion from Chapter 2 of this dissertation on how the perceived gap between sports fans and athletes is shrinking, along with the notion that parasocial relationships can feel like interpersonal relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956; P.-L. Pan & Zeng, 2018), this idea of cross-cutting exposure may also apply to sports fans and the teams/players they follow. For example, theory of dissonant identity priming suggests that people’s attitudes can change via athletes they have never met (Harrison & Michelson, 2017). Taken together, this suggests that athletes theoretically could be included in a person’s social network.

If considering a sports fan’s social network to include sports teams, players, and organizations, then, the above notion of identifying as a fan but rooting for a player with opposing political viewpoints could be seen as a cross-cutting exposure. And, the more cross-cutting exposures people report having, the lower those people typically are in political knowledge and likeliness of voting, and higher in ambivalence (Mutz, 2006). Further, sports fans – either a majority or plurality White for all leagues in the United

States (Morning Consult Brand Intelligence, 2020) – are a prime demographic for fewer cross-cutting discussions compared to other demographics. People do not typically surround themselves with people specifically based on politics (Mutz, 2006). Thus, what happens when people higher in political knowledge or less ambivalent towards issues, often found to be the most politically identified with like-minded people (Mutz, 2006), end up exposed to oppositional viewpoints when they are not accustomed to that? Their initial response may be to argue that sports and those viewpoints should stay separate, like what they are used to in their daily lives. Alternatively, someone that supports the athlete's viewpoint will welcome the same political viewpoint they are used to in their daily lives. Lastly, those more ambivalent individuals, with lower political identity, will be less likely to have an opinion either way.

Connecting these ideas to moral reasoning literature, Lee and colleagues (2016) found that the more negative emotions (contempt, anger, etc.) a person has, the more likely they are to couple – not be able to separate a transgression from the player's performance. So, one could argue that the same would happen for a fan whose political viewpoints are directly opposite of a player's. And perhaps the opposite is true: the stronger the positive response to a player's statement, the less the fan would want to separate the politics and the athlete. Therefore, strength of political ideology in either direction would reduce the likelihood of decoupling or rationalization and increases coupling.

However, this will also be influenced by team identification. Take, for example, a player had strongly conservative political viewpoints. For those opposed to the viewpoints, the stronger their team identification, the more threatened they would feel,

resulting in an increased likelihood to cope with that threat using moral rationalization or decoupling. For fans in support, they could perceive the benevolent statement as something that could improve their team's status, thus increasing the likelihood of linking their team identification and political identification. Based on these arguments, it is predicted that when presented with information indicating that a player on a favorite team has made objectionable political statements and has objectionable political associations:

H2a: Political ideology will moderate the association between team identification and moral decoupling, such that as political ideology becomes more conservative, the relationship between team identification and likelihood of moral decoupling weakens.

H2b: Political ideology will moderate the association between team identification and moral rationalization, such that as political ideology becomes more conservative, the relationship between team identification and likelihood of moral rationalization weakens.

H2c: Political ideology will moderate the association between team identification and moral coupling, such that as political ideology becomes more conservative, the relationship between team identification and likelihood of moral coupling strengthens.

One factor not yet considered, however, is if degree of fan identification affects what moral reasoning strategy is used for coping as a response to oppositional political viewpoints, how does this coping strategy actually affect fans? In discussing performative sport fandom, Osborne and Coombs (2016) suggest that identity theory (not social identity theory) can explain fandom. In their study of female fans of the NFL, they mention the negotiation those fans must "perform":

Indeed women fans are caught in a catch-22 when it comes to performances. If they express extreme emotions, they run the risk of being labelled hysterical. If they do not, they run the risk of being seen as casual or bandwagon fans whose interest in football does not run deep enough (Osborne & Coombs, 2016, p. 32).

This exact sentiment could be applied to fans with specific political ideologies. For fans of a team comprising some players with whom they disagree ideologically, if they still cheer for them, they may run the risk of being labelled as ideological hypocrites. If they refuse to cheer, they could run the risk of being seen as “casual or bandwagon fans whose interest in football does not run deep enough” (Osborne & Coombs, 2016, p. 32). As a result, does the coping with one identity threat lead to a different identity threat, leading to dissonance or imbalance? Sports and team identification are usually associated with positive outcomes, like psychological well-being and the sense of belonging. But, what happens if coping to replenish one’s well-being becomes a reason for cognitive dissonance?

In other words, how does a fan’s choice of moral reasoning relate to their psychological health, which according to the TI-SPHM (Wann, 2006b), is what the use of a moral reasoning strategy – i.e. a coping mechanism – is supposed to maintain in the face of an identity threat? How moral reasoning and team identification influence fans’ psychological well-being is the subject of Chapter 4.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH, SPORTS, AND IDENTITY THREATS

The idea that humans can feel a sense of well-being from both pleasurable experiences as well as less pleasurable, more challenging experiences goes back to Aristotle, with the combination of both being ideal. Hedonic well-being refers to experiences like pleasure, satisfaction, painlessness, and ease. Whereas, eudaimonic well-being refers to meaning, self-realization, ethics, and authenticity (Huta, 2016). These concepts are complementary, and a person needs both to thrive, i.e., have a “full life” (C. Peterson et al., 2005). For example, people that cook may feel fulfilled from creating their own meal (eudaimonic), as well as from the taste of the food (hedonic).

When it comes to entertainment research, there is often a baseline interest of study: hedonic enjoyment of a media message. Indeed, enjoyment is often seen as the reason people watch sports, as well (Raney & Kinnally, 2009), along with suspense (E. M. Peterson & Raney, 2008). This hedonic enjoyment is interesting, but more recently there has been a surge of research focusing on enjoyment that seems deeper than that, tapping into phenomena beyond affect, like using media for seeking answers to life’s questions, for example (Oliver & Raney, 2011). This part of psychological health is called eudaimonic well-being, sometimes referred to as self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2001) or “appreciation” (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) within entertainment research (Wirth et al., 2012).

Logically, media use and sport spectatorship have more frequently been examined with regard to hedonic well-being (Bartsch et al., 2018). Generally, there are two explanations for that hedonic enjoyment experienced as part of media exposure in general or sports exposure, in particular (Raney, 2004). First, related to disposition theory

(Raney, 2003), people root for positive outcomes for those they view positively and negative outcomes for those they view negatively (Bryant & Raney, 2000; Zillmann et al., 1989). Anyone who has ever rooted for a team to win knows the feelings that arise when that team wins, harkening back to the behavior of “basking in reflected glory” from team identification research. The second explanation for enjoyment of entertainment or sports media is that sports are suspenseful. There can be arousal associated with close and exciting sporting events, especially when the outcome is uncertain and commentators are playing into the drama (Bryant et al., 1982). For example, spectators that think a match between two athletes in a rivalry report greater levels of excitement and enjoyment compared to a match between friends (Zillmann et al., 1989). Conceptually, hedonic well-being manifests as other experiences as well, like positive affect (probably the best indicator), satisfaction, carefreeness and low negative affect (Huta, 2016).

Despite this notion that media is purely entertainment or pleasure, there is a conundrum. If media use is motivated by enjoyment and mood management, why do some people subject themselves to movies or books with ambiguous morality or that end in tragedy? Scholars in the late 1990s and early 2000s posited that “media users may seek distress and burdening experiences through the selection of particular media products, because in the long run, they not only feel relief but gain pleasure and manage their moods” (Vorderer, 2003, p. 137). This type of longer term gratification that does not appear to be initially hedonic is instead related to another, deeper motivation.

Based on this notion of seeking entertainment for non-hedonic reasons, there has been a paradigmatic shift within media psychology into looking at entertainment media as contributing to a second type of personal psychological health: eudaimonic well-being

(Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). For example, films that elicit sad reactions are still enjoyable (Oliver, 1993), and that sadness is associated with eudaimonic enjoyment (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Additionally, people seek out entertainment for both entertainment itself as well as greater insight and meaningfulness (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Wirth and colleagues (2012) tested this by having participants watch *Hotel Rwanda* with the normal ending or a happy ending, then answer questions about eudaimonic entertainment (a scale they developed) and hedonic entertainment (Differential Emotion Scale). They then repeated this with *Life is Beautiful*. Their results suggested that hedonic enjoyment can be manipulated, being higher when a film has a happy ending, while eudaimonic enjoyment remained unchanged. And, eudaimonic enjoyment was correlated with sadness (Wirth et al., 2012). It seems that media content with complex morality issues can elicit more eudaimonic entertainment experiences (Bartsch & Oliver, 2016), such as of meaning, elevation (spiritual, moral, awe-inspiring, etc.), feeling integrated (feeling right and centered), personal expressiveness, accomplishment, and engagement (Huta, 2016).

Beyond the distinction of hedonic and eudaimonic, personal psychological well-being is often distinguished at two levels: trait and state. As with literature dealing with media and aggression (Farrar & Krcmar, 2006), entertainment researchers should understand that there is a difference between momentary affective or mood states and longer-term personality traits, and studies should distinguish between the two to assess “either the trait level to characterize a whole person or the state level to characterize a momentary activity or a relatively short period of time” (Huta, 2013, p. 140). Despite this, there is concern over the conflation between state- and trait-level well-being. Huta

and Waterman (2014) performed a meta-analysis examining the various ways that eudaimonic well-being has been operationalized, which revealed both varied conceptualizations in the literature as well as a dearth of state-level measurement. They conclude that specification of the level of measurement is imperative when examining personal well-being (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Typically, most of the constructs that have been used to tap into both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being can be measured at both levels, with simply a change in wording to differentiate the level (Huta, 2013).

Regardless, the above constructs of state- and trait-level well-being are associated with a person's personal psychological well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010). However, beyond personal well-being, there is a third type of psychological health that is often studied that is associated with a person's social identity: social well-being, or "the appraisal of one's circumstance and functioning in society" (Keyes, 1998, p. 122).

Humans have an innate need to feel like they belong and to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Many researchers have studied how feeling part of a group can benefit individuals, as well as how to measure this sentiment towards their social standing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Linville, 1987; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Turner, 1975; etc.). Generally, identifying with valued social groups can help people further develop their social network, as well as lessen states that detract from mental health, such as depression, loneliness, and anxiety. A meta-analysis examining the literature on social relationships and mortality even found that "social relationships exert an independent influence on risk for mortality comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality" (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010, p. 12).

In terms of how viewing sports relates to any type of psychological health, the literature primarily suggests that people watch sporting events for gratifications like entertainment, self-esteem, and excitement, each related to hedonic enjoyment (Wann, Grieve, et al., 2008). Yet despite the enormous number of hours that people devote to watching sports on TV or the internet, very few researchers have looked at how sports spectatorship can influence deeper types of psychological health, like sense of meaningfulness or appreciation. This is unfortunate, “because traditional social ties such as religion and the extended family may be on the decline... an understanding of the potential benefits of team identification is even more vital now than ever before” (Wann, 2006b, p. 288). Social well-being, however, has been studied rather extensively in the team identification domain. The following section will explore how these varying types of well-being have or have not been studied regarding sports spectators, including the implementation of the Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model (Wann, 2006b).

Sports and Social Well-Being

Unquestionably, the most frequently studied type of psychological health for sports fans is social well-being. This makes sense, since identifying with a team is such a social experience. It is along these lines that Wann (2006b) developed his Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model to connect sports team identification with both trait and state social well-being to examine how being a fan of a team could improve or contribute to well-being.

How Team Identification Influences Social Well-Being

In general, fans have two techniques to boost their psychological well-being from their sport fandom (Wann & James, 2019). The first involves spectating. People try to enhance their social identity through association with high-status groups. Seeing one's team win can provide satisfaction, enjoyment, pride, etc. Therefore, sports fans cling to winning teams and will especially identify with a successful team (i.e., the bandwagon effect). However, people can also have negative psychological effects when associating with teams that perform poorly that threaten group identity. This is where processes like cutting off reflected failure come in to help alleviate these threats (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Further, those with low self-esteem may try even harder to differentiate their group from others (Phua, 2010).

The second technique for boosting well-being is through a person actually feeling like a part of the team. In fact, "team identification is defined as a fan's psychological connection to a team, that is, the *extent to which the fan views the team as an extension of his or herself*" (Wann, 2006b, p. 273). This helps clarify why the model above looks at how people can actually gain well-being from feeling like they belong to a group. As Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain:

Satisfying this drive involves two criteria: First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare (p. 497).

Thus, people can feel like they belong when they interact with their social circle and feel like that interaction is genuine. Both criteria above clearly project to sports fans, since even strangers will talk to each other simply because they are both wearing the same team's logo. And, this process is said to be similar to the process that occurs for people

feeling a part of their religion, an aspect of life that is increasingly, arguably, being replaced by sports (Bain-Selbo & Sapp, 2016; Branscombe & Wann, 1991). In fact, people can feel an increase in community pride simply from their home city hosting important sporting events like the Super Bowl™ (W. Kim & Walker, 2012). So, sport fandom itself is not necessarily the contributor of well-being, but more the perceived connections that can result from fandom can be considered to drive well-being.

Social media can also play a factor in how fans interact with and feel connections to others. College respondents highly identified with their college's football team reported having greater bridging and bonding social capital (meaning loose connections to many and strong, emotional connections to some) when interacting on social networking sites (Phua, 2012). In fact, general media use can even moderate the relationship between team identification and well-being. For undergraduates on a college football team's mailing list, the more they identified with the football team, the higher their reported self-esteem (Phua, 2010). Moderating this was media use: the greater one's media use, the more powerful the association between identification and self-esteem. Likewise, media use was positively associated with team identification (Phua, 2010). So media use (Phua, 2010), as well as use of social media (Phua, 2012), in particular, may amplify the connection between one's team identification and their self-esteem. One can even experience this by watching sports alone, because of a sense of shared identity or "imaginary-intimate relations" (Jeeyoon Kim et al., 2017, p. 312).

Team identification has been found to lead to both temporary and enduring social connections (Wann, 2006b). Research has shown that whether team identification relates to temporary or enduring social connections depends on the fans being local or displaced,

with local fans experiencing the social benefits from identification more frequently. For instance, in a sample of college students, identification with the local basketball team was associated with three of the five factors from the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 2008) that assesses psychological well-being, whereas identification with a team 200 miles away did not (Wann, Dunham, et al., 2004). Because enduring social connections will likely result from being a fan of a local team and frequently being around clearly identifiable fans, this constant interaction makes it easier for one to feel and identify as part of that ingroup.

Temporary identification refers more to when a fan is displaced, or cheers for a team that is not the local team. Some ways to increase state social well-being are more immediate activities, like attending gatherings to watch the team. Temporary connections can come from momentary interaction with other fans, like a local bar full of a team's fans or a brief interaction on the street with someone wearing team colors, etc. One study found that participants reported lower levels of loneliness when watching a highlight video of their favorite distant team along with other fans compared to those watching alone or watching a control video with others (Wann, Polk, et al., 2011). In these cases, salience is important, as the more salient group identities at any given time will be most likely to inform a person's self-identity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) – one needs to know that another person is a fan, too, or else they will not connect. But even these temporary interactions can potentially have a positive impact on well-being. For college students, the greater their reported interactions with mere acquaintances, the greater their sense of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014). One should assume this holds for sports fans interacting, as well.

Wann and James (2019) note that the TI-SPHM causal paths may be such that team identification leads to social connections which, in turn, leads to social well-being, but evidence is mixed. For example, for respondents from a Division 1 basketball school, team identification was significantly and positively associated with perceived sense of belonging, which mediated the relationship between team identification and perceived meaning in life (Wann et al., 2017). Thus, the more students identified with the team, the more they felt they belonged to a group, which, in turn, meant they had more sense of meaning in life. However, two other studies (Wann et al., 2015; Wann, Waddill, et al., 2011) found that social connections had no impact on the relationship between team identification and the Satisfaction with Social Life Scale (SSLS; Diener et al., 1985). Alternatively, in a study following the earthquake in Japan in 2011, Inoue et al. (2015) found that in the wake of the disaster, the more a person felt connected to their local team, the higher their social well-being, but this was mediated by perceived emotional support (visits to shelters or schools, community service) from other fans (Inoue et al., 2015).

Lastly as it could relate to athletes' political expression, when American female undergraduates were exposed to the boxing movie *Rocky IV*, and the video was manipulated to make it seem like the Russian antagonist to Rocky won their match, the results suggested that this made the participants think their own social groups were inferior, which led to reductions in their perceptions of collective self-esteem associated with their social groups (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Therefore, if a player on a team has political viewpoints that a fan perceives as inferior, they could at the same time feel that those inferior statements are coming from their team, i.e., another of their social

groups, thus reducing their collective self-esteem. In this instance, the social psychological health that can improve from team identification may be lessened.

Thus, one's identification with a team may influence one's social well-being, which has been rather extensively studied. Yet as discussed previously, that only accounts for one-third of how researchers generally conceptualize psychological health alongside hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The consensus in the literature is that social well-being is more likely the result of team identification than is personal well-being. First, the benefits of feeling like part of a group are often social (e.g. Wann et al., 2015). Indeed, in their review of the literature, 80% of the well-being concepts listed by Wann and James (2019) were social in nature. One could see this as evidence that personal well-being does not fit into the team identification model. A different notion, though, could be that personal well-being is simply understudied in this area. As such, a review of how team identification relates to the two types of personal well-being is discussed next.

Sports and Personal Well-Being

On a more personal level, enjoyment is often sought and received by sports spectators (Bryant & Raney, 2000). In fact, this notion is so obvious that the concept of enjoyment in sports communication research has actually received less attention than many other concepts (K. Kim & Yun, 2013). Yet, the question is important in the abstract: "Why are denizens of modern society willing to spend so much time sitting in front of screens large and small, watching grown (often overgrown) men and women throw, pass, kick, shoot, or dribble an object on grass, hardwood, or ice?" (Bryant &

Raney, 2000, p. 120). The type of psychological health associated with enjoyment and sports is hedonic well-being.

How Team Identification Influences Hedonic Well-Being

One of the specific theories associated with sport spectator enjoyment is the disposition theory of sports spectatorship (Bryant & Raney, 2000; Zillmann et al., 1989). Simply put, this theory suggests that enjoyment is had from seeing one's team win or from seeing a competitor lose. Alternatively, enjoyment decreases from seeing one's team lose or from a competitor winning. This is an offshoot of disposition theory of media, which suggests the same outcomes of enjoyment with regard to fictional characters (Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann & Bryant, 1994). Based on this concept, enjoyment can stem from spectating both individual athletes as well as teams.

When thinking about sports fans' reactions, the most common depiction is probably affect in some form. Indeed, this has been studied often, with positive affect found to be the best indicator of hedonic well-being (Huta, 2016). College students that viewed videos of their team win had significantly more positive moods, higher positive affect (happiness, contentment, optimism, etc.), and lower negative affect (anger, frustration, sadness, etc.) than those that watched their team lose (Hirt et al., 1992). In another study, compared to both the control and those in the winning condition, participants that witnessed two school basketball team losses reported lower positive affect and self-esteem (Hirt et al., 1992).

Identification can play a role, as a person with low team identification might not care as much about the outcome of a match. Even simply reading about an outcome can affect high- and low-identifying individuals differently. One study found that after

reading an article about a team's victory (especially when the author of the story identified as a fan, as well), people highly identified with the team reported higher positive mood states than did low identified (Wann & Branscombe, 1992). In fact, low identifying participants did not vary based on any condition, including if their team won or lost. In another study, respondents were asked about their team identification to the home team prior to the start of a college basketball game and subsequently reported their enjoyment after their team had won (Madrigal, 1995). Madrigal (1995) also found a significant and positive relationship between team identification and enjoyment and between team identification and BIRGing.

As for Huta's (2016) other constructs of hedonic well-being, calmness has not directly been studied with regard to team identification. Yet, Japanese soccer fans reported significant decreases in placidity (a pleasant emotion of calmness and the closest related concept in the literature to that of carefreeness) from the start of the game to the end of the game, regardless of fandom. In another study, placidity was consistently higher at the beginning, middle, and end for fans of the winning team (Kerr et al., 2005). The former of these findings suggests that the excitement and suspense of a game increases as it progresses towards the denouement.

Satisfaction – the final hedonic well-being construct examined by Huta (2016)– has been studied often regarding game outcome. For example, satisfaction after a hard-fought, close win has been found to be significantly higher than after a loss or even an easy win (Sloan, 1989). However, team identification appears less in the literature and appears to have mixed results. For South African football fans, there was a positive and significant association between fan engagement (e.g. "I often interact with other fans to

talk about issues related to my team”) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS: Diener et al., 1985). Further, the team identification of football fans that use social networking sites correlated with satisfaction with life, and satisfaction with life was positively related to bridging and bonding social capital (meaning loose connections to many and strong, emotional connections to some) (Phua, 2010). However, in a study that asked NFL fans why the game result turned out the way it did, team identification did not mediate the relationship between people’s reasoning for why their team won/lost and satisfaction with how their team performed (Madrigal & Chen, 2016). In other words, satisfaction “...does not rely on an association with the team. Instead, an attribution of the causes contributing to an outcome has a direct effect on satisfaction” (Madrigal & Chen, 2016, p. 731). However, Madrigal and Chen (2016) found that high identifiers BIRGED significantly more than low identifiers.

Therefore, feeling connected to teams and players can influence a person’s emotions or mood. This connection is well-established. The less clear connection is between identification and deeper-level psychological health, i.e., eudaimonic well-being.

How Team Identification Influences Eudaimonic Well-Being

While the pleasure attainment and stress avoidance of sports viewing can be motivated by entertainment, self-esteem, eustress (positive arousal or stress), and excitement – processes directly affecting hedonic enjoyment (Wann, Grieve, et al., 2008) – the eudaimonic experiences when one’s team succeeds can include achievement, pride, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Cognizant of this, Jeeyoon Kim et al. (2017) found that while hedonic experiences during sports viewing (e.g. enjoyment, fun, etc.) were directly associated with “global

well-being” (e.g. “I am pleased/satisfied with my life.”), eudaimonic experiences (e.g. achievement, pride, etc.) indirectly led to global well-being only for people *high* in sports identification. This suggests that a team’s success could contribute more to hedonic enjoyment, just from feeling happy about the team winning. More eudaimonic happiness could be related to the team’s actual playing style or feelings of fan connectedness. In other words, those higher in fandom (e.g. often identifying as more knowledgeable about the team or sport) might appear to have more appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) for the strategy or skill involved in the game and appreciate the ability, skill, effort, etc. regardless of the outcome of the game. This is essentially what Hall (2015) examined. In their study, 175 undergrads were asked about MLB baseball games for the St. Louis Cardinals as they made a run through the playoffs, as well as their fandom, enjoyment, appreciation, suspense, affinity, and baseball involvement. The results showed that people still enjoyed a loss of their favorite team, as long as the game itself was suspenseful. And the more the favorite team won by, the greater “touched emotions” (e.g., compassion, moved, etc.) respondents reported. Further, in addition to the strong correlations to parasocial interaction and affinity with players, Hall’s measure of baseball involvement was most strongly correlated with appreciation from viewing the game (Hall, 2015).

While social well-being is often the focus of team identification research, state-level eudaimonic well-being studies are nearly nonexistent. According to Wann and James (2019), it seems only one article at the time of this writing has attempted to measure it, using the profile of mood states (POMS) by asking people how they felt “right now” (Wann et al., 1999). However, this may tap more into hedonic well-being, as

the findings showed that those with higher team identification reported higher good moods and lower bad moods.

Some other findings suggest that team identification can influence eudaimonic well-being beyond affect or appreciation. For example, Wann and colleagues (2017) looked at how fandom and team identification influenced fans' sense of meaning in life. Their goal was to test how fandom and identification affected more personal well-being variables. In their survey of college students, they found that team identification was only associated with meaning in life indirectly through sense of belonging. This suggests that team identification and fandom give people the opportunity to connect with others, which, in turn, can be beneficial for psychological or emotional health (Wann et al., 2017). This notion appears likely, considering how often the collective psychological health of entire cities noticeably improves after their teams win championships following natural disasters, from the New Orleans Saints and Houston Astros following hurricanes (E. B. Burns, 2014; Erlichman & Harrison, 2019) to the Japanese Women's National Soccer team following the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 (Inoue et al., 2015).

A different, more vicarious avenue to take to understanding how team identification may relate to eudaimonic well-being is through social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989). From this perspective, people may model those they like or even those that they perceive as more similar to themselves, even through media (Klimmt et al., 2006). So, if someone feels identification with a group, and that group is performing prosocial behaviors, it stands to reason that the viewer could mimic those prosocial behaviors. This has been studied with regard to TV, where the number of enrollees in a Mexican illiteracy program skyrocketed after the airing of a fictional TV series about a

literacy program featuring a popular actress (Bandura, 2004). In a case like this, one could argue that the potential benefits to psychological health that occur due to modeling are indirectly related to the connections people feel towards mediated personae. Obviously, detrimental influences are also possible, such as people with greater parasocial interaction with personae in *16 and Pregnant* reporting higher acceptance of myths about teen pregnancy and lower beliefs in the personal risk of becoming pregnant (Aubrey et al., 2014).

However, sports can positively influence people outside of the actual competitions in this manner. Jang et al. (2019) looked at how various types of messages affected people's intentions to support former NBA player Dwayne Wade's charity by showing participants one of three videos: (1) meaningful – Wade visits a disabled child; (2) off-field hedonic – Wade pranks fans; or (3) on-field hedonic – Wade highlights. They also assessed participants' level of parasocial identification with Wade, a concept in which the audience member can develop a relationship with mediated personae that is perceived as interpersonal despite being one-way and with an unaware mediated personae (Horton & Wohl, 1956). They found that participants that had low parasocial identification with Wade who watched the meaningful video had the highest support level. Interestingly, high identifying individuals did not differ across the three conditions (Jang et al., 2019). This suggests that for those with strong parasocial relationships with Dwyane Wade, their intent to donate to his charity remained at the same level regardless of the individual parasocial interaction they experienced through exposure to a particular media message featuring Wade. And, prosocial outcomes are generally associated with eudaimonic entertainment (Bartsch & Oliver, 2016).

In sum, both teams and individual athletes can influence viewers' psychological health in social and personal ways. Yet, teams and athletes are not only positively influencing people. There are inevitably identity threats that can hurt a person's social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being. But because developing connections are imperative to achieving well-being from these entities, individuals attempt to cope with those threats, for instance by employing moral reasoning strategies. What happens if decoupling or rationalizing – two strategies that essentially excuse a person's immoral behavior – create such a cognitive rift that a person's psychological health suffers? In other words, what happens when performing an act that is meant to improve well-being also, itself, reduces well-being? The following section will address this question.

How Moral Reasoning Strategies Influence Well-Being

Team identification is built upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which claims that people have multiple social groups to which they perceive themselves as belonging. People strive to behave and think in ways that reinforce these group identities, and group members look to differentiate themselves from other groups to increase their own group value (Rees et al., 2015). To this end, high-status sports fans will focus on their team being champions or having the best players in the league or other similar aspects that signify some level of superiority over other teams. Alternatively, “low-status groups will be more likely to embrace a strategy of social creativity in which they define themselves on status-irrelevant dimensions (e.g., ‘we may not be the best, but we best represent the true spirit of the game’)” (Rees et al., 2015, p. 1085). This “strategy of social creativity” is essentially cutting off reflected failure – some level of mental gymnastics that help fans cope with threats to their team identification.

Related to off-field incidents, for example an athlete scandal, the mental gymnastics that fans will go through could entail moral reasoning strategies to separate the individual's off-field actions from the team's on-field performance or lessening the scandal (Lee et al., 2015; Lee & Kwak, 2015). But with scandals, there is less complexity in morality. In other words, nearly everyone is on the same page about domestic violence or performance enhancing drugs. Therefore, the coping strategy only involves finding ways to maintain team identity (Rees et al., 2015). However:

...the self is conceptualized as a context-sensitive process in which self-definition varies as a function of the prevailing social setting – e.g., in the case of women's rugby, so that a player sees herself as an athlete on the field of play, but as a woman off it (Rees et al., 2015, p. 1086).

Thus, what happens when an incident occurs that threatens both a person's team identity and a different social group to which an individual just as strongly belongs? More specifically, what happens when a die-hard fan that also happens to be a die-hard political partisan learns of a player on their favorite team having a political viewpoint that completely disagrees with that fans' strong ideological leanings?

Not only do people have more group identities than just their sports fan identity, "it is likely... that other aspects of social life in which membership also has emotional and value significance to an individual will be incorporated into his or her social identity" (Heere & James, 2007b, p. 320). This notion of social identity complexity can help explain how people's various group identities interact. Further, the self-categorization model of social identity suggests that "those who share both ingroup identities with the self are evaluated more positively than those who share only one common ingroup membership, who in turn are more positively evaluated than those who are outgroup members on both dimensions" (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p. 91). Thus, liberal Patriots fans

will be less favorable toward Tom Brady (who has declared his friendship with Donald Trump) than someone like Michael Bennett (a liberal social media advocate that played for the Patriots).

Along these lines, Heere and James (2007b) discuss the idea of “external group identities” referring to identities outside of those of a fan’s team, and that a person’s loyalty to a team could be strengthened by their membership to other identities that are perceived as being related to or represented by the team. Building on this, Heere and colleagues (2011) looked at associated group identities and how they affected team identification. They measured state college students’ level of identification with their team, school, city, and state to see if the three latter identities would influence the former. This was a test of the reliability and validity of team identity scales from the 2007 study (Heere & James, 2007b) when measured for different, correlating identities. From their path analyses, they found increases in the level of city and state identities moderately explained increasing in team identification, and this relationship was mediated by university identity. In other words, a person’s degree of identity with a state or city influenced their identity with the school, which influenced identity with the school’s team. Heere and colleagues (2011) argue that this supports the claims of Heere and James (2007b) that “how we identify with different groups has an effect on our team identity process” (Heere et al., 2011, p. 619), if the different groups are perceived as represented by the team identification (e.g., the Saints represent all of New Orleans). They conclude that this type of analysis would be useful in looking at how other group identities – like ethnicity or social class – affect people’s team fandom.

Hypotheses of Moral Reasoning Strategy, Identification, and Sports Fan Well-Being

Performative sport fandom scholars suggest that fans are constantly trying to negotiate their fandom with other identities (Osborne & Coombs, 2013). For example, women fans watching their favorite team play on the TV in their home are negotiating between their fandom and being a good role model/mother to their children. This struggle “can become internally contested or problematic” (Osborne & Coombs, 2016, p. 172). It is easy to see how a similar contestation could result from the battle between fandom and political ideology in the wake of a fan learning of an athlete on their favorite team having controversial political viewpoints with which that fan disagrees. “Audience members experience texts from multiple positions both within and outside the text. Viewers can simultaneously hold several subject positions, though at any given moment one position is most likely dominant” (Cohen, 2006, p. 185). But through all of this literature, the question that remains is how that negotiation between identities affects a person’s well-being.

Disposition may be important for how moral reasoning plays out. Hall (2015) applied disposition theory to say that affinity with a player would increase suspense, a finding also relating to NASCAR fans (Hartmann et al., 2008). Thus, the more people like a character or athlete, the more suspense they feel while watching. In other words, if a person roots for a team, they root for players on that team and hope for the players on that team to succeed. Short-term changes in this hope would come from scandals of the team or player (or not), or from political statements fans disagree with. The initial emotional response is to not like the statement. This would be a threat to one’s identity as

a fan – “how could a fan of [blank] root for a player like that?” To cope with this threat to team identity, a person would then engage in a moral reasoning strategy.

Normally, being able to morally decouple a player on one’s favorite team may allow a person to maintain both their fan identity and their political identity. However, what would happen if the fan had recently been exposed to the merits of moral coupling? In such a scenario, perhaps a media priming effect would occur, meaning that the media messages that a person most recently consumed would be at the front of their mind and more readily accessible and salient (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Thus, if primed with differential messages about a specific moral reasoning strategy – as different groups of participants were in the Lee and colleagues (2015) study – such as morally coupling, a fan may not be able to separate the player and a controversial statement.

When controversies with group members have risen in past research, people tend to side with the group overall versus the individual, i.e. the “black sheep” effect (Johns et al., 2005; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988). In this case, both their political and team identities would then override their feelings about a particular player – derogating a political outgroup member and separating oneself from a team ingroup member (black sheep). Alternatively, having recently been primed with the strategy to excuse the player’s statement could help maintain that connection to said player.

Further, Bryant and Raney (2000) offered five critical factors for spectator enjoyment of sporting events. Among these, emotional involvement/relationships with the players or team is the first one they describe. It stands to reason that a decrease in emotional involvement, or at the very least a decrease in how much a fan likes a player, would decrease enjoyment. If a person has a lower affinity for a player, they would be

less inclined to root for said player (thinking of affective disposition and hoping for positive outcomes for those they like). This means a fan could be rooting for the success of their team, but not wanting success for one of the players on that team. Based on disposition theory, a person's enjoyment of content is in part determined by hoping for positive outcomes for those they like and negative outcomes for those they dislike. Thus, in the above situation, a person is forced to hope for a positive outcome for someone they dislike, potentially lessening their enjoyment. Similarly, there is an established positive relationship between team identification and enjoyment, in terms of viewing sporting events (e.g. Madrigal, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). It seems logical that this connection would extend and be subject to influence from external, off-field events, like scandals or unwelcomed political statements.

However, if a person can morally decouple, and separate the moral concern from the athlete's performance, attitudes towards the player may not be affected (at least not to the extent they would be for coupling). In fact, decoupling has been found to have a positive impact on attitudes towards a problematic player (Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, decoupling the problematic political association from player performance could potentially increase one's connection to the player, thus increasing their hope for that player to win. Based on the extant literature described in the previous paragraph, the result could be that that fan's hedonic well-being manifested as enjoyment would increase.

Likewise, moral rationalization – or lessening the gravity or seriousness of the immoral act – has been found to result in similar attitudes towards the offender as those found with decoupling (Lee et al., 2015; Lee & Kwak, 2015, 2017). In this case, the

importance of the political statement is lessened, which reduces the identity threat. As a result, a person is less worried about supporting a player that threatens their political identity, which would result in being able to continue supporting the player without threat to enjoyment.

This internal conflict could have an impact on a person's more eudaimonic well-being. When a person feels their group identity is threatened, that group identity comes to the forefront, and other identities are sent into the background, making them less important in that moment. Further, threats, as well as moral disengagement, can induce stress and require more cognitive resources. And, "individuals under stress will tend to perceive their groups as largely overlapping and largely similar" (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p. 99). Thus, if a die-hard fan then thinks they root for a team that supports people in direct opposition to their political views, that could compromise that person's well-being. For example, autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2008) – i.e., being able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulating social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulating behavior from within; evaluating the self by personal standards – would suffer because a person would then have to reconcile that they could be judged for rooting for a player they dislike, which could compromise their position in their group (team identification). Alternatively, by trying to separate from a player on one's favorite team – through disparagement or another strategy – they are disparaging someone in their own social group, which could lower the status of their own self-identity via their group identity. A person that opposes the political views but is still rooting for someone on that team with those views might feel compromised or disappointed with their self.

In addition, referring to the Wann model (Wann, 2006c), the moral reasoning coping mechanism used to lessen the threat to one's identity might consequently increase the threat to one's other identities, in particular their political identity. Likewise, an analysis of comments on the "Boycott the St. Louis Rams" Facebook page responding to players on the team engaging in a controversial political statement revealed that one quarter of the comments were about how the statement reduced fandom or connection to the team, suggesting political identity trumped team identity for the users of the Facebook page (Sanderson et al., 2016). A reduction in team identification could correlate with a decrease in social well-being. Therefore, experiences like sense of belonging or loneliness or other social well-being indicators could suffer as a result. In fact, a person tries to separate their group from various outgroups. The problem in this situation is that the outgroup they are trying to separate from may be intertwined with their own identity, since that player could be perceived as being associated with a fan's team identity. Further, social well-being has been found to be significantly and positively related to both life satisfaction (eudaimonic well-being) and positive/negative affect (hedonic well-being) items (S.-L. Pan et al., 2018). Beyond the extant literature on team identification, coping, etc., therefore, there can be a correlation between social well-being and the other two well-beings.

Lastly, when a group's status is called into question, highly identified group members sometimes get more defensive compared to low identifying individuals, who instead show a decrease in self-esteem (Branscombe et al., 1999). Likewise, the more salient an identity, the more it informs a person's self-identity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

As such, for those typically opposed to the political viewpoints of an athlete on a team they root for:

H3a: Those primed with a moral decoupling strategy will have more *positive* hedonic well-being.

H3b: Those primed with a moral decoupling strategy will have more *positive* eudaimonic well-being.

H3c: Those primed with a moral decoupling strategy will have more *positive* social well-being.

H4: Team identification will moderate the association between the moral decoupling strategy and psychological health, such that as team identification becomes stronger, the relationship between moral decoupling and each type of well-being strengthens.

H5a: Those primed with a moral rationalization strategy will have more *positive* hedonic well-being.

H5b: Those primed with a moral rationalization strategy will have more *positive* eudaimonic well-being.

H5c: Those primed with a moral rationalization strategy will have more *positive* social well-being.

H6: Team identification will moderate the association between the moral rationalization strategy and psychological health, such that as team identification becomes stronger, the relationship between moral rationalization and each type of well-being strengthens.

H7a: Those primed with a moral coupling strategy will have more *negative* hedonic well-being.

H7b: Those primed with a moral coupling strategy will have more *negative* eudaimonic well-being.

H7c: Those primed with a moral coupling strategy will have more *negative* social well-being.

H8: Team identification will moderate the association between the moral coupling strategy and psychological health, such that as team identification becomes stronger, the relationship between moral coupling and each type of well-being strengthens.

The chapter that follows (Chapter 5) details the methods by which the hypotheses will be examined. In particular, study 1 will investigate what moral reasoning strategy people respond with when exposed to the political viewpoints of a player on the team they root for, as well as how team identification and political ideology influence this response. Study 2 will then investigate if being primed with specific moral reasoning strategies elicits changes in fans' subsequent psychological health and how team identification moderates that process.

5. METHODOLOGY

Within the context of media effects, the bulk of the research often examines how, what, if, and to what extent media content affects audiences. Yet in reality, while people can be influenced in various ways by the media they consume, media use is also informed by people's predispositions, suggesting a degree of reciprocity. In addition, the current hypotheses can be separated into two distinct sets of inquiries: (1) moral reasoning as an outcome, and (2) moral reasoning as a predictor. Thus, it makes logical sense methodologically to separate the examination of the hypotheses into two distinct studies.

Study one utilized a cross-sectional survey design to determine how political and team identification influence respondent moral reasoning choices when presented with controversial political beliefs of a National Football League player. Study two then used the various moral reasoning strategies as experimental conditions to determine how such moral reasoning strategies influence participant psychological health following exposure to an NFL player's controversial political beliefs.

Although two studies were conducted, the media content utilized in both was the same news story. The subject of the story was Justin Rohrwasser, a rookie drafted by the New England Patriots in the 2020 draft. The day he was drafted, many people began criticizing Rohrwasser for being associated with right-wing conservative groups, as well as with Donald Trump. The exact story will be presented below.

Study 1

Hypotheses 1a through 2b predicted that a person's team identification would be related to their preferred moral reasoning strategy with regards to that athlete's controversial political viewpoints. Study 1 examined this through a cross-sectional survey

design. A cross-sectional survey was used because all those participating in the study received the same media exposure (i.e., news story) and the same set of questions. As such, an experiment was not needed to prime participants differently in different experimental conditions. In a way, in Study 1, participants' individual dispositions are what were hypothesized to lead them to potentially respond differently. In other words, a survey method is appropriate, because this study employed a within subjects approach.

Respondent Sample

To ensure that team identification with a team and player were achieved, the sample was purposive, chosen from those describing themselves as a fan of Rohrwasser's team (the Patriots). This sampling strategy is frequently employed for team identification studies (e.g. Lee et al., 2016; Wann, 2006c; Wann et al., 2006). This also reduced the chances that respondents would be fans of rival teams. Team identification generally measures how identified or not identified an individual is with a specific team, not how much they like or dislike said team (James et al., 2019; Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Respondents were recruited using Qualtrics, the online surveying service, a company that invites their panelists to complete online surveys in exchange for compensation. Qualtrics offers similar survey services to Facebook and Amazon's MechanicalTurk, however "...where scholars are particularly concerned with representativeness or sample diversity on demographic and political variables, a Qualtrics panel offers clear advantages, even without employing the quotas that are included in the base price" (Boas et al., 2018, p. 247). For Study 1, quotas were used to ensure that the sample split equally by gender, as well as represented U.S. statistics for the distribution of race and Latino/a ethnicity. Additionally, the player in question was accused of

political associations with White supremacist groups, thus it was beneficial to have people of color be well represented in the sample so that responses to the issue within this group are able to be explored. Respondents were asked for both their gender and race and Latino/a ethnicity following agreement with the consent statement as part of the screening process, an approach that will be discussed in greater detail below. Further, because this study involved a recently drafted player for the NFL team the New England Patriots, the sampling heavily favors the New England region of the United States. But, respondents from other regions did complete the questionnaire if they rooted for the Patriots.

Materials and Procedure

Sport Team Identification.

After reading the consent statement and deciding whether to agree, respondents began the questionnaire by answering questions about their sport team identification with the New England Patriots. For team identification, there are several conceptualizations for examining this connection to a sports team, including both one-dimensional and multidimensional instruments that focus on either fan or team identity. Lock and Heere (2017) provide a detailed analysis of the various ways the concept has been used. For example, TEAM*ID (Heere & James, 2007a) is a multidimensional approach to team identification that measures several factors that play into why a person identifies as a fan, whereas the team identification index (Trail & James, 2001) is unidimensional and assesses a person's motivations for sport consumption. Overall, choosing the appropriate instrument for the particular conceptualization of team identification in a study is vital

(Lock & Heere, 2017). Further, careful attention must be paid to the dimensionality of the scale:

...if the research goal is to better understand why a person identifies with a team (i.e., what drives team identification), then a multi-dimensional scale is likely the proper choice. On the other hand, if the goal is to capture whether there is a psychological connection (and the strength of that connection), a unidimensional scale is more than sufficient (Wann & James, 2019, p. 56).

Because the current study examined and relied upon the strength of team identity of fans, and not why fans may have their team identity, a unidimensional approach was more appropriate. Of the unidimensional team identification measures, the sport spectator identification scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) – is by far the most popular measure of team identification. The original article from 1993 that developed this scale has been cited over 1000 times and the measure itself has been used as a main variable in more than fifty studies (Wann & James, 2019).

Recently, there has been criticism regarding interpretation of team identification scales, including the SSIS scale. Specifically, James et al. (2019) found that often scholars measuring team identification have conflated people that report being low in team identification with those having no identification with a team. In such cases, fair-weather fans (low identification) would be potentially grouped with fans of other teams (no identification with the team in question). Their own study showed that fans of other teams could still answer (correctly) above the lowest score for the item regarding rooting against rivals of the team (e.g., a fan of the New York Giants also roots for some of the rivals of the Dallas Cowboys [i.e., the enemy of one's enemy is their friend]) (James et al., 2019). Consequently, James and colleagues (2019) developed and tested a revised version of the sport spectator identification scale (SSIS-R) in a pair of studies. After

identifying the SSIS validity issues in the first study, they revised the scale mostly by adjusting the low anchor wording (often changing from “not at all a fan” to “slightly a fan”). Their revised scales achieved similar reliability and validity scores and were better representative of fan behavioral intentions. Thus, the James and colleagues (2019) Sport Spectator Identification-Revised (SSIS-R) scale was used for this dissertation.

The Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R) includes one dichotomous screener question and seven Likert items. The screener asks the respondents “Do you identify yourself as a fan of the [team], even if just a little bit? Yes or No.” Any individuals that select “no” – i.e., non-fans – are directed to “skip” the scale questions. For respondents that answer “yes,” they are then asked “Please think about [team] as you answer questions A – G. Please circle the appropriate number on the scale next to each question.” Although the original SSIS-R scale uses eight-point items, the scale was revised here to seven-point items. This is because using seven options allows for a midpoint in self-reporting, and because all other scales in this dissertation use seven-point items. Table 5.1 shows the seven Likert items each with seven points.

Table 5.1

Questions on the James, Delia, & Wann (2019) Sport Spectator Identification Scale - Revised (SSIS-R)

Do you identify yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots, even if just a little bit?

Please circle the appropriate letter. A. Yes B. No*

Please think about the New England Patriots as you answer questions A – G. Please circle the appropriate number on the scale next to each question.

Item	Low Anchor (1)	High Anchor (7)
1. How important to you is it that the New England Patriots win?	A Little Important	Very Important
2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots?	Slightly a Fan	Very Much a Fan
3. How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the New England Patriots?	Slightly a Fan	Very Much a Fan

4. During the season, how closely do you follow the New England Patriots via any of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, on television news or a newspaper, or the Internet?	A Little	Very Frequently
5. How important is being a fan of the New England Patriots to you?	A Little Important	Very Important
6. How much do you dislike the New England Patriots greatest rivals?	Dislike a Little	Dislike Very Much
7. How often do you display the New England Patriots name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	Occasionally	Always

Note: An individual answering “no” directed to “skip” the scale questions.

Survey Materials

Following the initial demographic and team identification questions, the respondents were given a short news story of about 500 words from NESN.com (New England Sports Network) (Randall, 2020). The story focuses on the New England Patriots rookie field goal kicker Justin Rohrwasser and accusations that he is associated with far-right groups and has supported controversial statements, including statements from Donald Trump that denigrate the take-a-knee movement.

This story was chosen because it involves beliefs that are presented as quite extreme and controversial, leaning heavily far right on the U.S. political spectrum (i.e., the conservative end of the spectrum). In addition, despite being the twentieth most Democrat-leaning fanbase in the NFL, a national survey found that the share of New England Patriots fans that identify as Democrat is greater than the number of fans that identify as Republican (by 3.2 percentage points) (Paine et al., 2017). Therefore, having a player associated with more conservative political beliefs as the subject of the studies has the potential to elicit stronger reactions than a player associated with more liberal beliefs. In addition, using a rookie potentially allowed for more natural responses, as more fans

were likely less familiar with the player than with a more well-known player. The story is presented below in Figure 5.1, exactly how it was presented to respondents.

Figure 5.1

Article Used as Media Stimulus for both Study 1 and Study 2

Jemele Hill Weighs In On Justin Rohrwasser's Iffy Social Media Activity

by Dakota Randall on Sun, Apr 26, 2020 at 10:33AM

Jemele Hill already has reached a verdict on Justin Rohrwasser.

The New England Patriots on Saturday selected the Marshall kicker in Round 5 of the 2020 NFL Draft. It didn't take long for fans and media to flag some of Rohrwasser's tattoos and social media activity as problematic.

The New York native's social media accounts are littered with posts and "likes" that suggest Rohrwasser supports far-right groups and ideology. He also has a tattoo of the logo for Three Percenters, a far-right militia movement and paramilitary group that primarily advocates for gun ownership rights and limiting the Federal Government's involvement in local affairs. During a conference call with reporters, Rohrwasser said he was an under-informed teenager when he got the tattoo, which he plans to cover. He did not offer an explanation for his social media activity in the years since, nor was he asked to.

For what it's worth, Rohrwasser does not appear to have the tattoo in photos of him during his days at the University of Rhode Island, which he attended from 2015 to 2016. He sat out 2017 before resuming his collegiate career in 2018 as a redshirt junior with Marshall.

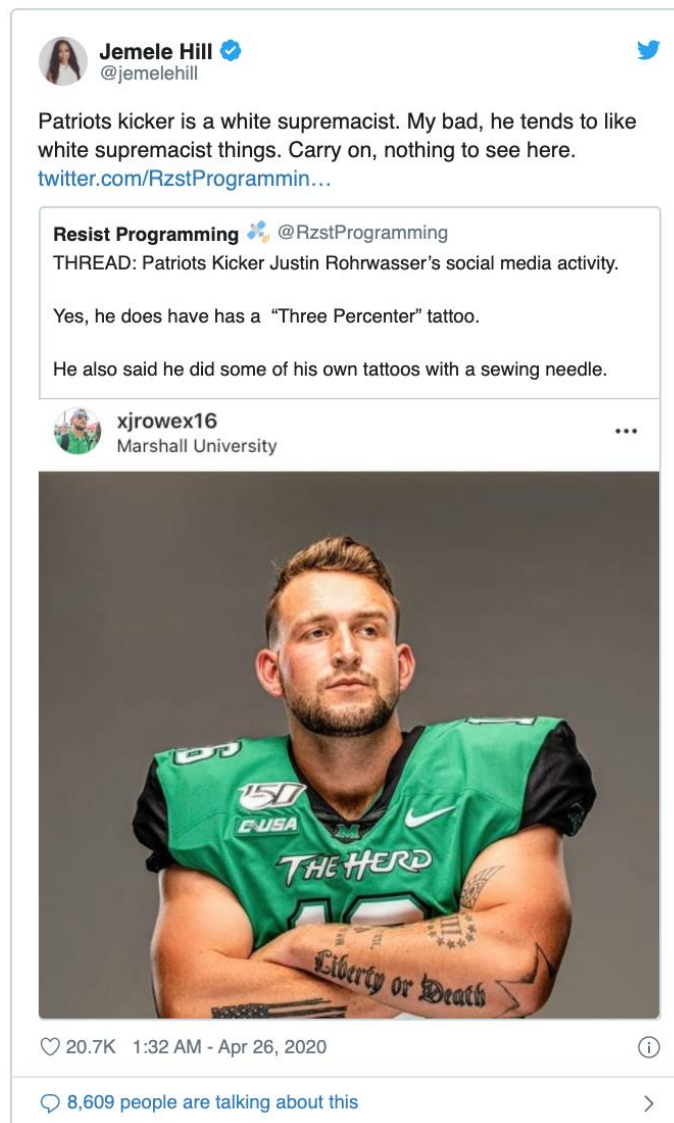
As for the Three Percenters, it is worth noting the group has attempted to separate itself from racist ideology. After its members attended the Aug. 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Va., the organization's "National Council" issued a "stand down order," stating, "We will not align ourselves with any type of racist group." Many Three Percenters supporters communicate the opposite sentiment in social media comment sections, among other places.

The Twitter thread highlighting Rohrwasser's controversial social media activity features posts/likes that imply the new Patriots kicker is a passionate conservative who occasionally aligns himself with far-right groups, such as the Three Percenters. In multiple posts, Rohrwasser has shown support for United States President Donald Trump as well as contempt for those who, during the playing of the national anthem, have knelt in protest of racial and social injustice in America. He has downplayed the severity of COVID-19 and elevated the works of popular Psychologist Jordan Peterson and philosopher Ayn Rand, two individuals some consider to be controversial.

None of the posts in the aforementioned thread show Rohrwasser directly communicating racist or white supremacist ideology. Whether he indirectly does so via his social media activity is subject for debate.

Nevertheless, Hill, who recently criticized Patriots owner Robert Kraft for supporting Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, labeled Rohrwasser as a "white supremacist" in a tweet early Sunday morning.

Take a look:



Make of that what you will.

Since being drafted by the Patriots, Rohrwasser has changed his Twitter account from public to private and scrubbed his Instagram account of multiple posts. Additionally, some people claiming to have attended URI with Rohrwasser have come forth and accused him of exhibiting racist behavior.

Hill hardly is the only person who has criticized Rohrwasser and the Patriots for drafting him. Of course, those who believe they have enough evidence to judge Rohrwasser have every right to do so, as do those who insist on giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Still, it might be beneficial for all parties to give Rohrwasser an opportunity to explain his past — at least more than what he was given Saturday. Whether the notoriously strict Patriots will afford the rookie such an opportunity is anyone's guess.

*Note: After receiving backlash online, Rohrwasser had the “Three Percenters” tattoo removed in July of 2020.

Moral Reasoning.

After reading the article, the respondents were instructed to rate their agreement with various moral reasoning statements with regard to the Rohrwasser article. Instead of asking respondents to choose a specific type of strategy, they were given a set of statements and asked the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each. This use of a multi-item scale is the same technique used by Lee and colleagues (2016) in their study exploring people's reactions to images of NFL player Ray Rice's assault on his fiancée from 2014. And the same items used therein were used herein. The scale included 7-point Likert items from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”). The statements from all three moral reasoning strategies appeared in random order to avoid order effects.

Moral Decoupling.

Items measuring moral decoupling – or a person's ability to separate an athlete's off-field actions from their on-field performance – were taken from Bhattacharjee et al.'s (2013) scale. The three decoupling statements are listed in Table 5.2.

Moral Rationalization.

Lee and colleagues (2016) also used moral rationalization measures from the seminal study on the subject (Bandura et al., 1996). There are five original statements on

this scale. However, the following two statements were dropped due to irrelevance in this scenario:

1. “It’s unfair to blame just Ray Rice because it must be his fiancée’s fault.” (displacement of responsibility).
2. “Ray Rice’s behavior was alright if his fiancée belittled him” (attribution of blame).

The remaining three statements that were used in this study are listed in Table 5.2.

Moral Coupling.

The third and final type of moral reasoning strategy was moral coupling, originally developed and validated in three studies by Lee and Kwak (2015) specifically for use with athletes’ on- and off-field actions. These items were then used by Lee and colleagues (2016). The two coupling statements are also listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Statements Assessing Moral Reasoning Strategies (from Lee et al., 2016)

Item
Moral Decoupling
1. Justin Rohrwasser’s political beliefs do not change my assessment of his football ability.
2. Judgments of Justin Rohrwasser as a football player should remain separate from judgments of his political beliefs.
3. Controversial political beliefs should not affect our view of Justin Rohrwasser as a football player.
Moral Rationalization
4. Justin Rohrwasser’s controversial political beliefs are not as bad as some other horrible things that people do.
5. It is important to take into account that Justin Rohrwasser’s political beliefs do not really do much harm.
6. Justin Rohrwasser should not be at fault for making a controversial political statement because the pressures of modern politics are so high.
Moral Coupling
7. People need to let their view of Justin Rohrwasser’s political beliefs affect their assessment of him as a football player.

8. It is important to take into account Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs when assessing him as a football player.

Note: Respondents asked to report their degree of agreement with each statement from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree")

Validity Check.

Following the strategy of Stratmoen and colleagues (2019), there was one question used as a manipulation check that asked respondents to assess the political ideology of Justin Rohrwasser. This made sure they were correctly identifying Rohrwasser, as presented in the article, as a right-wing conservative.

Demographic/Personological Information.

Lastly, respondents were asked questions about their demographic information that were to be used as control variables in hypothesis testing. First, biological sex was used ("What was your sex at birth, as shown on your birth certificate?"), as well as gender identity ("How do you describe yourself?: male, female, transgender woman, transgender man, non-binary, or 'I do not identify as male, female, non-binary or transgender'"). Gender was asked prior to the team identification questions to meet the quotas described earlier. Sexual orientation was also measured, with options for identifying as straight/heterosexual, gay or lesbian, Unknown/Uncertain, other. Race/ethnicity was measured with the options "White non-Latino/a," "Latino/Latina," "Black/African American," "Asian/Asian American," and "bi-/multi-racial" and was asked after the gender screening question. Lastly, respondents were asked to report their age.

Following those control variables, two questions about political identity were asked. First, political ideology was measured by asking respondents "When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?" Response options ranged from 1

(“Very Liberal”) to 7 (“Very Conservative”). This single item has been used often to measure political ideology in studies about people’s perceptions of media personae (Becker, 2019; LaMarre et al., 2009) and sports teams (Harker, 2019). Second, respondents reported their political party affiliation (“Democrat,” “Republican,” “Independent,” or “Third Party/Other”).

Analysis, Sample Size and Straightlining.

To assess the relationships between the variables, ordinary least ordinary squares multiple regression analyses were run for each of the three moral reasoning strategy dependent variables, with age, gender, race/ethnicity, and political affiliation as controls, and team identification, political ideology, and the interaction of team identification and political ideology as predictors. To run these OLS multiple regressions, the statistical software Stata was used (StataCorp, 2016).

To determine the sufficient sample size, a power analysis for a multiple regression with ten predictor variables (age, gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, team identification, political ideology, and the interaction of team identification and political ideology) was conducted in G*Power using an alpha of 0.05, a power of 0.80, and a relatively moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) (Faul et al., 2007), resulting in a desired sample size of 118.

To account for “straightlining” – i.e. when respondents answer the same response for all items in a scale to finish as quickly as possible (Y. Kim et al., 2019)– differentiation scores were calculated for each respondent using the mean root of pairs method (L. Chang & Krosnick, 2009; Mulligan et al., 2001) for the moral reasoning items. This method reveals how much respondents varied in their answers for each scale.

For these scales, there should be some variance. The scale for moral reasoning contains inherently dissimilar opinions (e.g., compare the statements “Judgments of Justin Rohrwasser as a football player *should remain separate* from judgments of his political beliefs” (decoupling) versus “It is important to *take into account* Justin Rohrwasser’s political beliefs when assessing him as a football player” (coupling). In addition, the scale was presented in grid-form, with all items on the same page, which can reduce the chances of respondents noticing reverse-coded items (Tourangeau et al., 2004). Thus, the above method helps account for that, as well. In the end, the original sample of $n = 220$ was reduced to $n = 205$ due to 15 respondents failing this test by having no variance in any scaled answers (a root mean difference score of 0). Lastly, residual outliers were examined (z-scores of the standardized residuals larger than 2.58, the two-tailed .01 significance level). One such outlier had a differentiation score of 0 for the moral reasoning scale and was dropped, making the final sample $n = 204$.

Study 2

The second study addressed Hypotheses 3a through 8 by examining how being primed with a specific moral reasoning choice influences subsequent well-being. Because this study looked at between-subject differences (i.e., how different priming conditions influence outcomes), an experimental design with multiple conditions was appropriate. This method has also been employed in previous studies examining athletes and fan moral reasoning strategies (e.g. Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015).

Participants and Sampling

Study 2 used the same news story from Study 1 (Figure 5.1), thus necessitating the same purposive sampling of Patriots fans from Study 1, with one additional

requirement. In addition to screening for fandom with the New England Patriots, this study also required participant political ideology to be specific. Only political Independents, Democrats, and/or liberals served as participants. This is because the study was only concerned with how moral reasoning strategies influence participants that are exposed to troubling/objectionable information. In other words, conservative Patriots fans might have no issue with Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs. Thus, they do not have to rationalize or decouple their initial response to his controversial beliefs. Conservative individuals and/or those identifying as Republicans were therefore excluded from Study 2.

As with Study 1, respondents were recruited from Qualtrics' panelists. This sample was a completely independent sample from Study 1. Quotas were used to ensure that the sample splits gender equally, and participants were screened for political ideology.

Materials and Procedure

After reading the consent statement and agreeing, respondents began the questionnaire by answering the same demographic variables, measured the same way, as in Study 1. First, biological sex was used, as well as gender identity and sexual orientation. Race/ethnicity and age were also asked.

Following those variables, the same two questions about political identity from Study 1 were asked. For this study, these questions also acted as screening questions to identify the needed participants for the study. First, political ideology was measured by asking respondents "When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?" Response options range from 1 ("Very Liberal") to 7 ("Very Conservative). Second,

respondents reported their political party affiliation (“Democrat,” “Republican,” “Independent,” or “Third Party/Other”). For screening purposes, participants that answered the first question from 1 (“Very Liberal”) to 4 (“Neutral”) were allowed to continue. Those that answered from 5 (“Somewhat Conservative”) to 7 (“Very Conservative”) were taken to a new page that ended the questionnaire for them, stating “Thank you. No need to continue.” For the second question, participants that answered “Independent” or “Democrat” were allowed to continue. Those that answered “Republican” were taken to a new page that ended the questionnaire for them, stating “Thank you. No need to continue.”

Sport Team Identification.

Along with the same demographic and political ideology variables from Study 1, the same Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R) was assessed to measure participants’ team identification. Refer to Table 5.1 for these items. Asking these questions prior to priming participants ensured team identification responses were not influenced by the different conditions.

Stimulus and Moral Reasoning Conditions.

Once participants answered the demographic and SSIS-R questions, they were randomly assigned to one of four priming conditions: moral coupling, moral decoupling, moral rationalization, and a control condition. Participants were then asked to read and reflect on statements intended to make different moral reasoning strategies differentially accessible. This same procedure has been used in prior studies examining moral reasoning strategies as independent variables with regard to immoral acts committed by athletes (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015).

In each condition, the participants were asked to read three statements, reflect upon a situation to which those statements might apply, and describe that situation in writing. For the purposes of this study, the statements were adapted to consider political statements instead of immoral actions. The statements for all four priming conditions are listed in Table 5.3.

For the moral coupling condition, participants were presented with statements adapted from Lee and Kwak (2015). The moral decoupling statements were adapted from Bhattacharjee and colleagues (2013). The moral rationalization condition statements were adapted from Bandura et al. (1996). Lastly, the control condition contained three statements unrelated to moral reasoning. Previous studies in this area have used statements about humor in this situation (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015). However, humor makes light of seriousness, which could indirectly affect moral reasoning. Thus, the control condition in this experiment contained statements about the current state of sports reporting in an attempt toward a more neutral condition.

Table 5.3

Statements Priming Moral Reasoning Strategies (Adapted from Lee et al., 2015)

Item
Moral Coupling Condition (Lee & Kwak, 2015)
These days, we often fail to let someone's controversial political beliefs affect our view of their value to society.
People who achieve great things should not be given a free pass if their political beliefs are highly controversial.
It is important to take into account someone's political beliefs when assessing their job performance.
Moral Decoupling Condition (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013)
These days, we are often too quick to let someone's controversial political beliefs affect our view of their value to society.
Even if someone makes a controversial political statement, we should not let this color our judgment of their great achievements.
It is inappropriate to take into account someone's political beliefs when assessing their job performance.

Moral Rationalization Condition (Bandura et al., 1996)

These days, we often fail to consider that speaking out on political issues is not as bad as some other horrible things that people do.

People should not always be at fault for their controversial political beliefs because situational pressures are often so high.

It is important to take into account that some controversial political statements are okay because they really don't do much harm.

Control Condition

These days, sports reporters have more access than they used to.

Sports articles that use personal pronouns ("I" or "me") are just as informational as articles that only don't.

These days, sports reporters do a good job of being relatable to their readers.

Note: Participants randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants asked to read and reflect on the three presented statements, followed by describing a brief situation in which those statements would apply.

News Article.

After reading, reflecting, and writing about their scenario that related to their statements, participants were then told that the study was examining how the wording in an article can influence feelings of positivity/negativity after reading it. They were then presented with an article to read (the news story) and responded to questions related to the article following it. The news story was the same article from Study 1. Again, the story from NESN.com focused on the New England Patriots rookie Justin Rohrwasser and accusations that he was associated with far-right groups and has supported controversial statements, including statements from Donald Trump that denigrate the take-a-knee movement. After reading the article, the participants were presented with questions about their various state well-being constructs.

Well-Being Outcome Variables

For Study 2, all three general types of well-being frequently examined in media psychology literature were measured: social, eudaimonic, and hedonic. In the psychology literature, there are myriad ways to measure and conceptualize well-being. However, one

of the key distinctions is trait- versus state well-being, including within team identification. The researcher must be aware of whether they are measuring long-term well-being that may influence attitudes or behavior (trait) or more short-term emotions or moods that may be outcomes of other behaviors or activities (state). This distinction is a key point for all the following scales regarding psychological health. Generally, high scores on each scale reflect better psychological health.

Social Well-Being.

Both trait and state social well-being have been found to be linked to sport team identification (Wann, 2006b). While trait well-being has been examined extensively in team identification literature, state well-being studies are few and far between (Wann & James, 2019).

The seminal piece that developed the Team Identification – Social Psychological Well-Being model (Wann, 2006c) used the 16-item Collective Self-esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) to measure social well-being. However, this scale assesses trait-level social well-being. For example, the statement “[Sports Team] are an important reflection of who I am” signifies a more long-term type of connection, developed over many experiences and interactions with other group members. Although the items were modified (changing “overall” to “right now”) to reflect more state-level social well-being (see: Wann, Polk, et al., 2011), the general wording remains more akin to the trait-level. As such, this scale was not used in this study.

Another social well-being scale that has been used in team identification research (including by Daniel Wann, the creator of the TI-SPWB model) is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS; Diener et al., 1985). This scale was modified by Wann and Pierce

(2005) to evaluate social life (which they cleverly name the Satisfaction with *Social Life Scale*, SSLS). In their study, the SSLS had moderate correlation with the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES, $r = .45$). However, the CSES revealed a significant gender difference, and the SSLS did not. Further, the SSLS only has five items (compared to CSES's sixteen) and has been used by others examining team identification and group well-being (Phua, 2012; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Wann, Martin, et al., 2008; etc.). Thus, the Satisfaction with Social Life Scale was used to measure social well-being in this study. The scale consists of five 7-likert items ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). In an effort to make the scale evaluate state well-being, Wann and colleagues (2008) adjusted the wording. For example, "The conditions of my social life are excellent" was changed to "The *current* conditions of my social life are excellent." These changes were also used in this study. The statements are listed in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Statements on the Satisfaction with Social Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) as Modified by Wann et al., (2008)

Item
1. "In most ways, my social life is currently close to my ideal."
2. "The current conditions of my social life are excellent."
3. "I am currently satisfied with my social life."
4. "Right now, I have gotten the important things I want in my social life."
5. "I would change almost nothing about my current social life."

Note: Respondents asked to report their degree of agreement with each statement from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree")

Personal Well-Being.

Because well-being was hypothesized/operationalized as being an outcome in Study 2, state-level measures were more appropriate: the goal was to determine if one's

well-being could be manipulated, suggesting a more fluctuating conceptualization of the constructs. Further, personal well-being is typically conceptualized as having two components: eudaimonic and hedonic. For this study, the scales developed by Huta and Ryan (2010), and later validated and explicated (Huta, 2013), were the foundation for the operationalizations of personal well-being.

Eudaimonic Well-Being.

According to Huta (2013), the eudaimonia functions – i.e., feelings related to eudaimonic motives of activities, which include learning skills or striving to be better – that can be used to evaluate state-level eudaimonic well-being include: (1) meaning; (2) elevating experience; and (3) self-connectedness. These three scales as used for Study 2 are listed in Table 5.5.

Meaning relates more to eudaimonia “by generating a sense that one’s actions and experiences have personal significance, are valuable, and are important in some broader context” (Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 758). Originally developed by Huta and Ryan (2010), the original 12-item scale has been shortened reliably to two items. Participants were asked to report their agreement on two items, from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

Elevating experience refers to feelings like inspiration, awe, and “transcendence or sense of connection with a greater whole” (Huta, 2013, p. 142). The scale used here was developed by developed by Huta and Ryan (2010), originally with thirteen items. The shortened version of five items has been found to be reliable (Huta, 2013), and agreement with each item is measured from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

Self-connectedness evaluates the degree to which a person knows themselves and is related to “the eudaimonic concepts of personal expressiveness and self-realization values” (Huta, 2013, p. 144). Developed by Huta (Huta, 2012), self-connectedness is measured by five items, from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

Table 5.5

Statements on the Eudaimonic Scales (Adapted from Huta, 2013)

Item
Meaning (Huta & Ryan, 2010)
1. “Being a fan of the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me feel meaningful.”
2. “Being a fan of the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me feel valuable.”
Elevating Experience (Huta & Ryan, 2010)
1. “Currently, I feel in awe.”
2. “Currently, I feel deeply appreciating.”
3. “Currently, I feel morally elevated.”
4. “Currently, I feel inspired.”
5. “Currently, I feel part of something greater than myself.”
Self-Connectedness (Huta, 2012)
1. “Rooting for the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me feel connected with myself.”
2. “Rooting for the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me feel that I know who I am.”
3. “Rooting for the <i>New England Patriots</i> gives me a clear sense of my values.”
4. “Rooting for the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me aware of how I feel.”
5. “Rooting for the <i>New England Patriots</i> makes me aware of what matters to me.”

Note: Respondents asked to report their degree of agreement with each statement from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”)

Hedonic Well-Being.

Hedonic functions, or feelings related to motives like pleasure seeking, relaxation, and balance, include: (1) positive affect; (2) negative affect; and (3) carefreeness. These three measures as used in Study 2 are listed in Table 5.6.

While *positive affect* can relate to both eudaimonic pursuits and hedonic pursuits, it is more often found to be an indicator of hedonic state well-being. (Huta, 2012).

Similarly, *negative affect* was found to relate to hedonia, but not to eudaimonia,

indicating the same (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Developed by Diener and Emmons (1984), the affect scale refers to “emotional self-regulation, aimed at restoring one’s normal level of affect after it has been disrupted... or enhancing one’s affect (Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 739). Thus, in Study 2, participants were asked to report their agreement with four positive affect statements and five negative affect statements, from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

Carefreeness “includes not only an affective component but also a cognitive component representing a release from concerns” (Huta, 2013, p. 144), as well as having time to recharge. This was the third type of hedonic well-being used by Huta (2013) and was used in Study 2 as well. The scale includes six statements (Huta & Ryan, 2010), measured from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

Table 5.6

Statements on the Hedonic Scales (Adapted from Huta, 2013)

Item
Positive Affect (Diener & Emmons, 1984)
1. “Currently, I feel happy”
2. “Currently, I feel joyful”
3. “Currently, I feel pleased”
4. “Being a fan of the <i>New England Patriots</i> brings me enjoyment/fun.”
Negative Affect (Diener & Emmons, 1984)
1. “Currently, I feel depressed/blue.”
2. “Currently, I feel unhappy.”
3. “Currently, I feel frustrated.”
4. “Currently, I feel angry/hostile.”
5. “Currently, I feel worried/anxious.”
Carefreeness (Huta & Ryan, 2010)
1. “Currently, I am carefree.”
2. “Currently, I am free of concerns.”
3. “Currently, I am detached from my troubles.”
4. “Currently, I feel easygoing.”
5. “Currently, I feel lighthearted.”

6. "Currently, I feel happy-go-lucky."

Note: Respondents asked to report their degree of agreement with each statement from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree")

Manipulation Check

Following the strategy of Stratmoen, Lawless, and Saucier (2019), there was one question used as a manipulation check that asked respondents to assess the political ideology of Justin Rohrwasser. This made sure they correctly identified Rohrwasser, as presented in the article, as a right-wing conservative.

Debrief

Following the psychological health questions, participants were debriefed and notified of the actual intent of the experiment.

Statistics and Analysis

To test the effects of primed moral reasoning condition and team identification on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, a 4 (moral reasoning condition) by 3 (low/moderate/high team identification) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used for each personal well-being type as the outcome. For the hedonic well-being MANOVA, positive affect, negative affect, and carefreeness were the dependent variables since they indicate hedonic processes. For the eudaimonic well-being MANOVA, meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness were the dependent variables since they indicate eudaimonic processes. To test the effects of primed moral reasoning condition and team identification on social well-being, a 4 (moral reasoning condition) by 3 (low/moderate/high team identification) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used, where the only dependent variable representing social well-being was the Satisfaction with Social Life Scale (SSLS).

To determine the sufficient sample size, a power analysis for a MANOVA with 12 groups predictor variables (condition by team ID) and three response variables was conducted in G*Power using an alpha of 0.05, a power of 0.80, and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.0625$) (Faul et al., 2007). This resulted in a suggested total sample size of 156.

6. RESULTS

Study 1 – Survey

Descriptive Demographic Statistics

Respondents ranged from ages 18 to 65+ ($M = 41.28$, $SD = 12.05$) and skewed slightly toward older ages (skewness = .60, kurtosis = 3.02, median = 38). Age and all other basic demographic breakdowns by gender identity can be seen in Table 6.1. Quotas were used to ensure that the sample had an equal gender split, and results show that this goal was nearly achieved. Biological sex (“What was your sex at birth, as shown on your birth certificate?”) and gender identity (“How do you describe yourself?”, with male, female, transgender, and “I do not identify as male, female, or transgender” as options) were measured. At birth, 42.6% ($n = 87$) of the sample were assigned male and 57.4% ($n = 117$) female. 43.1% ($n = 88$) of the sample identified as men, 56.9% ($n = 116$) as women. Sexual orientation was measured, as well, with 93.6% ($n = 191$) identifying as straight/heterosexual, 2.5% as gay or lesbian ($n = 5$), 3.4% bisexual ($n = 7$), and .5% other ($n = 1$). 57.4% of the sample identified as White non-Latino/a ($n = 117$), 15.7% as Latino/a ($n = 32$), 24.0% as Black or African American ($n = 49$), 1.0% as Asian or Asian American ($n = 2$), 1.5% as biracial ($n = 3$) and .5% as other ($n = 31$).

Region of the United States where respondents resided was also recorded. Note that all respondents that completed the questionnaire reported being New England Patriots fans “at least a little bit.” Thus, the Patriots fan respondents were from the following regions: with 36.8% ($n = 75$) residing in New England (ME, NH, etc.), 16.2% ($n = 33$) in the Middle Atlantic (NY, NJ, etc.), 4.9% ($n = 10$) in the East North Central (WI, IL, etc.), 3.9% ($n = 8$) in the West North Central (MN, IA, etc.), 12.3% ($n = 25$) in

the South Atlantic (DE, MD, etc.), 2.5% ($n = 5$) in the East South Central (KY, AL, etc.), 7.4% ($n = 15$) in the West South Central (OK, TX, etc.), 4.9% ($n = 10$) in the Mountain (MT, CO, etc.), and 11.3% ($n = 23$) in the Pacific region (CA, HI, etc.).

When asked how they usually describe their political party affiliation, 57.4% ($n = 117$) identified as Democrat, 28.4% ($n = 58$) identified as Republican, 12.3% ($n = 25$) identified as Independent, and 2.0% ($n = 4$) identified as third party/other. For the question about political ideology (“When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?”), 21.1% ($n = 43$) identified as Very Liberal, 10.3% ($n = 21$) identified as Liberal, 9.8% ($n = 20$) identified as Somewhat Liberal, 11.3% ($n = 23$) identified as Neither Liberal nor Conservative, 10.3% ($n = 21$) identified as Somewhat Conservative, 17.6% ($n = 36$) identified as Conservative, and 19.6% ($n = 40$) identified as Very Conservative. In terms of ideology (“When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?”), the respondents were fairly normally distributed, with the mean near “4 = neither Liberal nor Conservative” ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 2.23$, skewness = $-.12$, kurtosis = 1.53 , median = 4). Republicans ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.76$) reported being significantly more conservative than Democrats ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 2.20$, $p < .001$) and Independents ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.52$; $p < .05$), and marginally more conservative than 3rd Party/Other ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 2.45$, $p = .07$); $F(3,203) = 16.74$, $p < .001$.

Despite only 28.4% describing themselves as usually Republican, respondent ideology was fairly normally distributed. This could be an indicator that, either recently or otherwise, the reputation about the Republican party in the United States has taken a hit and therefore fewer people identify with the party label even if they have conservative ideologies. Or, this is simply an indicator of the political leanings of Patriots fans.

American football being a traditionally masculine-dominated sport may appeal more to people that are more conservative or traditional in nature, regarding gender roles or toughness (Scharrer & Warren, 2021). Thus, perhaps some of the fans identifying as Democrat have more conservative attitudes towards some of those more traditionally held values, making football more attractive to them.

Table 6.1

<i>Descriptive Statistics - Demographics</i>			
Variable	Men (n= 88)	Women (n = 116)	Total (n = 204)
Gender Identity Percentage	43.14%	56.86%	100.00%
Sex at Birth			
Male	98.86%	0.00%	42.65%
Female	1.14%	100.00%	57.35%
Sexual Orientation			
Straight/Heterosexual	90.91%	95.69%	93.63%
Gay/Lesbian	2.27%	2.59%	2.45%
Bisexual	6.82%	0.86%	3.43%
Other	0.00%	0.86%	0.49%
Race			
White/Caucasian	70.45%	47.41%	57.35%
Black/African American	6.82%	37.07%	24.02%
Hispanic/Latino	20.45%	12.07%	15.69%
Asian/Asian American	1.14%	0.86%	0.98%
Biracial/Multiracial	0.00%	2.59%	1.47%
Other	1.14%	0.00%	0.49%
Region			
New England	12.50%	55.17%	36.76%
Middle Atlantic	29.55%	6.03%	16.18%
East North Central	10.23%	0.86%	4.90%
West North Central	4.55%	3.45%	3.92%
South Atlantic	13.64%	11.21%	12.25%
East South Central	4.55%	0.86%	2.45%
West South Central	7.95%	6.90%	7.35%
Mountain	2.27%	6.90%	4.90%
Pacific	14.77%	8.62%	11.27%
Political Party Affiliation			

Democrat	42.05%	68.97%	57.35%
Republican	42.05%	18.10%	28.43%
Independent	15.91%	9.48%	12.25%
Third Party/Other	0.00%	3.45%	1.96%
Age			
<i>M (SD)</i>	41.28 (12.05)	39.27 (11.67)	40.14 (11.84)
Skewness	.46	.72	.60
Kurtosis	2.66	3.39	3.02
Political Ideology (1 = Strongly Liberal, 7 = Strongly Conservative)			
<i>M (SD)</i>	4.56 (2.11)	3.77 (2.27)	4.11 (2.23)
Skewness	-.35	.06	-.12
Kurtosis	1.72	1.48	1.53

Scale Reliability

The descriptive statistics of the items comprising each of the five scales are in Tables 6.2 – 6.4. All were within acceptable ranges of skew and kurtosis. **The Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R)** measuring **team identification** consisted of seven Likert items measured from 1 (“A little important” or “Slightly a fan”) to 7 (“Very important” or “Very much a fan”) (see: Table 6.2). The scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .94 ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.70$, skewness = $-.88$, kurtosis = 2.56 , median = 5.86).

Table 6.2

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised

Item	Mean	(SD)
1. How important to you is it that the New England Patriots win?	5.35	(1.74)
2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots?	5.29	(1.77)
3. How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the New England Patriots?	4.90	(1.99)
4. During the season, how closely do you follow the New England Patriots via any of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, on television news or a newspaper, or the Internet?	5.26	(1.86)
5. How important is being a fan of the New England Patriots to you?	5.29	(2.10)
6. How much do you dislike the New England Patriots greatest rivals?	4.56	(2.14)

7. How often do you display the New England Patriots name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	4.75	(2.29)
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Note: n = 204.

The moral reasoning coping strategies consisted of three scales, **moral decoupling** (three items), **moral rationalization** (three items) and **moral coupling** (two items), with response options from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”). To test the Model fit of three concepts, a confirmatory factor analysis was implemented with the lavaan package in R using maximum likelihood estimation (Rosseel, 2012). Model fit was assessed with the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic, along with various other fit indices, as outlined by (Kline, 2011). These indices and their respective ranges regarded as adequate fit are: comparative fit index (CFI), $\geq .90$; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), $< .05$ preferred, $.05 - .08$ reasonable; and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR), $< .10$. The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the moral reasoning coping strategies Model was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(17) = 16.89$, $p = .46$, thus suggesting that the null hypothesis that the Model was a perfect fit was accepted. The remaining fit indices were within acceptable range, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .000, 90% CI [.000, .063], SRMR = .036, BIC = 5794.33. All factor loadings for each moral reasoning strategy were statistically significant, with all 8 loadings ranging from 1.25 to 1.83.

In testing the scale reliability (Table 6.3), the **moral decoupling** scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .87 ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.61$, skewness = $-.88$, kurtosis = 3.27 , median = 5.33). Likewise, **moral rationalization** ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.60$, skewness = $-.65$, kurtosis = 2.80 , median = 5.00) and **moral coupling** ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.90$, skewness = $-.44$, kurtosis = 2.11 , median = 5.00) were reliable.

Table 6.3*Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Moral Reasoning Scales*

Item	Mean	(SD)
Moral Decoupling		
1. Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs do not change my assessment of his football ability.	5.15	(1.77)
2. Judgments of Justin Rohrwasser's ability should remain separate from judgments of his political beliefs.	4.90	(1.80)
3. Controversial political beliefs should not affect our view of Justin Rohrwasser's achievements.	5.09	(1.82)
Moral Rationalization		
1. Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs are not as bad as some other horrible things that people do.	5.27	(1.74)
2. It is important to take into account that Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs do not really do much harm.	4.95	(1.90)
3. Justin Rohrwasser should not be at fault for making a controversial political statement because the pressures of modern politics are so high.	4.86	(1.89)
Moral Coupling		
1. People need to let their view of Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs affect their assessment of his football ability.	4.63	(2.06)
2. It is important to take into account Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs when assessing his football ability.	4.57	(2.08)

Note: $n = 204$.

Table 6.4*Descriptive Statistics - Independent and Dependent Variables*

Variable	Men (n= 88)				Women (n = 116)				Total (n = 204)			
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt
Moral Reasoning Strategies												
Moral Decoupling	4.98	(1.52)	- .67	3.02	5.32	(1.66)	-1.06	3.58	5.17	(1.61)	- .88	3.27
Moral Rationalization	4.83	(1.54)	- .55	2.79	5.17	(1.63)	- .76	2.90	5.02	(1.60)	- .65	2.80
Moral Coupling	4.18	(1.78)	- .24	2.06	4.91	(1.93)	- .67	2.34	4.60	(1.90)	- .44	2.11
SSIS-R	4.73	(1.78)	- .52	2.00	5.30	(1.60)	-1.21	3.39	5.06	(1.70)	- .88	2.56

Exploratory Inferential Statistics for Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised

Summary and inferential statistics were run to examine the New England Patriot **team identification (SSIS-R)** of the sample by various demographic groups (see: Table 6.5). First, an independent samples t-test showed that respondents identifying as **female** ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.60$) reported significantly higher identification than those identifying as **male** ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(176) = -2.39$, $p < .05$. However, 55.2% of female respondents also reported being from New England, compared to only 12.5% of male respondents being from New England ($\chi^2 (1, 204) = 39.19$, $p < .001$). Yet, when comparing within only region, men ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.22$) and women ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 1.12$) in New England did not differ, nor did men ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.78$) and women ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.66$) outside of New England.

Due to the small sample sizes for some categories for race/Latina/o ethnicity, Asian/Asian American, bi-/multi-racial, and other were collapsed into one dummy variable called “Other” ($n = 6$). A one-way ANOVA of **team identification** was run to test differences in team identification by **race/ Latina/o ethnicity**. Levene’s F test showed that the variances for *were not* equal ($p < .001$). Thus, the Welch’s F test was used. The ANOVA revealed that **team identification** differed by **race/ Latina/o ethnicity** (Welch’s $F(3, 21.85) = 11.18$, $p < .001$). Games-Howell post hoc comparisons were used to determine where mean differences existed. Black/African American Patriots fans (95% CI [5.57, 6.10]) had a significantly higher team identification than both **White/Caucasian** (95% CI [4.71, 5.36]) and **Hispanic/Latinx** (95% CI [3.61, 4.83]) fans. No other significant differences existed

Next, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine differences in **team identification** by **region** in the U.S. There was a statistically significant difference Among groups as determined by the one-way ANOVA ($F(8,195) = 7.72, p < .001$). Levene's test showed that the variances for SSIS-R were not equal, $F(8,195) = 6.71, p < .001$. Thus, the Games-Howell post hoc test was used for multiple comparisons. This showed that – as one might expect – those residing in **New England** (95% CI [5.76, 6.27]) reported significantly higher Patriots team identification than four other regions: **West North Central** (95% CI [2.87, 4.70], $p < .01$), **South Atlantic** (95% CI [3.58, 5.12], $p < .01$), **West South Central** (95% CI [3.17, 4.58], $p < .001$), and **Pacific** (95% CI [4.82, 5.29], $p < .05$). In fact, those were the only significant differences. Due to the results of the ANOVA and the small sample sizes of some of the regions, the region variable was collapsed into New England and Other Regions, and a new independent samples t-test was run. Levene's test showed that the variances for SSIS were unequal, $p < .001$. Results showed that respondents residing in **New England** ($M = 6.02, SD = 1.12$) reported significantly higher identification than those residing in all **other regions** ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.73$), $t(199.36) = -7.58, p < .001$.

Lastly, another one-way ANOVA of team identification revealed a statistically significant difference by **political party affiliation** ($F(3,200) = 12.06, p < .01$). Levene's test showed that the variances for SSIS-R *were* equal, $p = .36$. Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that the only significant difference was that those identifying as **Democrat** (95% CI [5.05, 5.64]) reported significantly higher Patriots team identification than those identifying as **Independent** (95% CI [3.53, 4.77], $p < .01$). **Democrats** reported higher identification than **Republicans**, but not significantly so. However, only two

Independent/Third Party/Other respondents also reported being from New England, compared to 55.56% of Democrat respondents being from New England ($\chi^2(2, 204) = 42.06, p < .001$).

Table 6.5

<i>Inferential Statistics - Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised</i>								
Variable	Group (N)		Group (N)		Group (N)		Group (N)	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Gender	Men (n = 88)		Women (n = 116)					
	4.73 ^a	(1.78)	5.30 ^a	(1.60)				
T-Test	<i>t</i> (176) = -2.39, <i>p</i> < .05							
Race/Ethnicity	White/Cauc. (n = 117)		Black/AA (n = 49)		Hisp./Lat. (n = 32)		Other (n = 6)	
	5.04 ^c	(1.78)	5.83 ^c	(0.93)	4.22 ^c	(1.70)	3.57	(2.07)
ANOVA	Welch's <i>F</i> (3, 21.85) = 11.18, <i>p</i> < .001							
Region	New Eng. (n = 75)		Other (n = 129)					
	6.02 ^c	(1.12)	4.50 ^c	(1.73)				
T-Test	<i>t</i> (199.36) = 7.58, <i>p</i> < .01							
Party Affiliation	Dem. (n = 117)		Rep. (n = 58)		Ind. (n = 25)		3rd/Other (n = 4)	
	5.35 ^b	(1.62)	4.94	(1.81)	4.15 ^b	(1.50)	3.96	(0.99)
ANOVA	<i>F</i> (3,200) = 12.06, <i>p</i> < .01							

Note. $N = 204$. Means within the same row with matching superscripts are statistically significantly different, + = $p < .10$, a = $p < .05$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .001$.

Independent and Dependent Variable Correlations

A Pearson's correlation test was conducted to evaluate the bivariate relationships among dependent and independent variables (Table 6.6). Among dependent variables, **moral decoupling** had a strong positive statistically significant correlation with **moral rationalization** ($r = .82, p < .001$), but was not significantly associated with **moral coupling**. This lack of correlation is surprising due to prior research which found them to be negatively correlated (Choi & Lee, 2021; Lee et al., 2016), as well as the statements in the scales being nearly direct opposites. For example, consider "Judgments of Justin

Rohrwasser's ability should remain separate from judgments of his political beliefs" (**decoupling**) versus "It is important to take into account Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs when assessing his football ability" (**coupling**). There was, however, a statistically significant weak correlation between **moral rationalization** and **moral coupling** ($r = .29, p < .001$).

Among the independent variables, **age** had a statistically significant and negative weak correlation with the **Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised** ($r = -.20, p < .01$). **Political ideology** was not significantly correlated with team identification or any moral reasoning variable.

Between the independent and dependent variables, **age** was also significantly and negatively correlated to the independent variable **moral coupling** ($r = -.32, p < .001$). So, the older the respondent, the lower they reported their team identification to be and the less they agreed with statements suggesting that one's political beliefs should be considered in job performance.

Team identification was significantly and positively associated with all three dependent variables: weakly correlated with **moral decoupling** ($r = .36, p < .001$) and moderately correlated with both **moral rationalization** ($r = .46, p < .001$) and **moral coupling** ($r = .45, p < .001$). It is interestingly that team identification was positively correlated with both decoupling and coupling, as the two scales asked nearly opposite questions. This enigma will also come up again during hypothesis testing and will be discussed more later.

Table 6.6

Pairwise Correlations for Scales

Variable	Age	MD	MR	MC	SSIS	Pol.
1. Age	--					
2. Moral Decoupling	.00	--				
3. Moral Rationalization	-.09	.82 ***	--			
4. Moral Coupling	-.32 ***	.11	.29 ***	--		
5. SSIS-R	-.20 **	.36 ***	.46 ***	.45 ***	--	
6. Political Ideology	-.01	.11	.11	-.10	.00	--

Note. $n = 204$. Moral Decoupling represents the mean of three items. Moral Rationalization represents the mean of three items. Moral Coupling represents the mean of two items. These eight items were measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). SSIS-R represents the mean of seven items on the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, with higher numbers representing stronger identification. Political ideology represents the one 7-point ordinal item, from 1 ("Strongly Liberal") to 7 ("Strongly Conservative").

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

The first set of hypotheses predicted that when presented with the article about Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, Patriots fans' team identification would be positively associated with both moral decoupling (H1a) and moral rationalization (H1b) and negatively associated with moral coupling (H1c). To test this first set of hypotheses, ordinary least squares hierarchical regression Models were used for each moral reasoning coping strategy as dependent variables. Table 6.7 shows the beta coefficients, r^2 , F-stats, Δr^2 from previous step, and ΔF -stat from previous step.

Team Identification and Moral Reasoning Strategies.

Seven control variables were used throughout all three analyses. **Gender identity** was used as a dichotomous variable ("male" = 0, "female" = 1). **Age** was a continuous variable. All values for both ethnicity and **political party affiliation** were converted to their own dummy variables, less reference variables. For **ethnicity**, White non-Latino/a was the reference category (thus excluded), with dummy variables for Hispanic/Latinx

and Black/African American. Again, due to the small sample sizes for the other categories, Asian/Asian American, bi-/multi-racial, and other were collapsed into one dummy variable called “Other” ($n = 6$). For political affiliation, Democrat was the reference category (thus excluded), with a dummy variable for Republican. Due to the small sample sizes for the other categories, Independent and Third Party/Other were collapsed into one dummy variable called “Independent/3rd Party/Other” ($n = 29$). Model 1 shows the regression analyses for the three independent variables with just control variables included.

Model 2 included the **Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised** to test H1a, H2a, and H3a, regarding how sports team identification was associated with the three moral reasoning strategies after accounting for the control variables. Results for Model 1 and Model 2 are reported together below.

Moral Decoupling.

Hypotheses 1a predicted that when presented with an article about Justin Rohrwasser’s controversial political beliefs, respondents’ **team identification** with the New England Patriots would be positively associated with the **moral decoupling** coping strategy, i.e., agreement with statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should independently be evaluated. The detailed results of the multiple regression appear in Table 6.7.

Model 1 shows how **gender, age, ethnicity, and political affiliation** predict agreement with the **moral decoupling** coping strategy. This Model explained 17% of the variance ($r^2 = .17$, $F(7, 196) = 5.65$, $p < .001$). **Gender** and **age** were not significantly associated with respondent moral decoupling. For **ethnicity**, having both Black/African

Americans and Hispanic/Latinx identities was significantly associated with moral decoupling. Holding all else constant, **Black/African American** respondents ($b = .95$, $SE = .29$, $p < .001$) reported a .95 unit higher agreement with moral decoupling statements compared to White non-Latinx respondents. Contrarily, **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents ($b = -.97$, $SE = .31$, $p < .01$) reported a .97 unit lower agreement with moral decoupling statements compared to White non-Latinx respondents. For **political affiliation**, **Republican** was marginally significantly associated with moral decoupling, and **Independent/Third Party/Other** affiliation was not significant. Holding all else constant, Republican respondents ($b = .46$, $SE = .26$, $p < .08$) reported .47 unit higher agreement with moral decoupling statements compared to Democrats.

In sum, when only considering demographic variables and political affiliation, **Black/African American** and **Republican** Patriots fans were generally more likely to agree with separating Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs from his ability as a football player, compared to White/non-Latinx and Democratic fans, while Hispanic/Latinx fans were less likely to agree with moral decoupling, compared to White/non-Latinx fans.

Model 2 included the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised as a predictor to test whether respondent **team identification** influenced agreement with the **moral decoupling** statements. This Model explained 23% of the variance ($r^2 = .23$, $F(8, 195) = 7.31$, $p < .001$). Model 2 explained significantly more variance in moral decoupling compared to Model 1 ($\Delta r^2 = .06$, $F(8, 195) = 15.95$, $p < .001$). Once again, age and gender identity were not significant predictors. Net of other variables, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with moral decoupling than White/non-Latinx ($b = .84$, $SE = .28$, $p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had

significantly lower agreement with moral decoupling White/non-Latinx ($b = -.74$, $SE = .30$, $p < .05$). Likewise, **Republican** respondents still had marginally significantly higher agreement with moral decoupling than Democrats ($b = .47$, $SE = .25$, $p = .07$).

For level of **team identification**, the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised was significantly and positively associated with **moral decoupling** ($b = .25$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). Holding all else constant, a one unit increase in **team identification** with the Patriots predicted a .25 unit increase in agreement with **moral decoupling** or separating Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs from his ability as a football player.

The more that respondents identified with the New England Patriots, the more they agreed that Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs should not be considered when assessing his football ability, even after accounting for political party affiliation and demographic variables. This suggests that the more closely identified the respondent was with the Patriots, the more they felt the need to cope when exposed to potentially troubling information about a Patriots player. Thus, H1a was supported.

Moral Rationalization.

The second regression analysis examined Hypotheses 1b, when presented with an article about Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, respondents' **team identification** with the New England Patriots would be positively associated with the **moral rationalization** coping strategy, i.e., agreement with statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of the player's controversial political beliefs. The detailed results of the multiple regression appear in Table 6.7.

Model 1 shows how the control variables **gender**, **age**, **ethnicity**, and **political affiliation** influence agreement with the **moral rationalization**. This Model explained 22% of the variance ($r^2 = .22$, $F(7, 196) = 7.99$, $p < .001$). **Gender** and **age** were not significantly associated with respondent moral rationalization. As with moral decoupling, both **Black/African Americans** and **Hispanic/Latinx** identities were significantly associated with moral rationalization. Holding all else constant, **Black/African American** respondents ($b = 1.00$, $SE = .28$, $p < .001$) reported a 1.00 unit higher agreement with **moral rationalization** statements compared to White non-Latinx respondents. Contrarily, **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents ($b = -1.05$, $SE = .30$, $p < .001$) reported a 1.05 unit lower agreement with **moral rationalization** statements compared to White/non-Latinx respondents. For political affiliation, **Republican** was not significant, but **Independent/Third Party/Other** was marginally significantly associated with **moral rationalization**. Holding all else constant, **Third Party/Other** respondents ($b = -.60$, $SE = .31$, $p = .06$) reported .60 unit lower agreement with **moral rationalization** statements compared to Democrats.

In sum, when only considering demographic variables and political affiliation, **Black/African American** Patriots fans were generally more likely to agree with the rationalizing or downplaying of Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs, compared to White/non-Latinx fans, while **Hispanic/Latinx** and **Independent/Third Party/Other** Patriots fans were less likely to agree with this moral rationalization, compared to White/non-Latinx and Democratic fans.

Model 2 included the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised as a predictor to test whether respondent **team identification** influenced agreement with the **moral**

rationalization statements. This Model explained 32% of the variance ($r^2 = .32$, $F(8, 195) = 11.19$, $p < .001$). Model 2 explained significantly more variance in moral rationalization compared to Model 1 ($\Delta r^2 = .09$, $F(8, 195) = 26.34$, $p < .001$). Once again, **age** and **gender identity** were not significant predictors. Net of other variables, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with moral rationalization than White/non-Latinx ($b = .87$, $SE = .26$, $p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had significantly lower agreement with moral rationalization than White/non-Latinx ($b = -.77$, $SE = .28$, $p < .01$). **Independent/Third Party/Other** respondents were no longer marginally significantly lower in agreement with moral rationalization than Democrats.

For level of **team identification**, the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised was significantly and positively associated with **moral rationalization** ($b = .32$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$). Holding all else constant, a one unit increase in **team identification** with the Patriots predicted a .32 unit increase in agreement with **moral rationalization** or downplaying of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

Thus, the more that respondents identified with the New England Patriots, the more they agreed that Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs should be rationalized as not a big deal or are not his fault, even after accounting for political party affiliation and demographic variables. This suggests that the more closely identified the respondent was with the Patriots, the more they felt the need to cope when exposed to potentially troubling information about a Patriots player. Thus, H1b was supported.

Moral Coupling.

The third regression analysis examined Hypotheses 1c, which predicted that when presented with an article about Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, respondents' **team identification** with the New England Patriots would be negatively associated with the **moral coupling** strategy, i.e., agreement with statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly. The detailed results of the multiple regression appear in Table 6.7.

Model 1 shows how the control variables **gender**, **age**, race/Latino/a **ethnicity**, and **political affiliation** influence agreement with the moral coupling coping strategy. This Model explained 39%(!) of the variance ($r^2 = .39$, $F(7, 196) = 17.79$, $p < .001$). As with both decoupling and rationalization, **gender** was not significantly associated with respondent agreement with **moral coupling** statements. However, **age** was significantly and negatively associated with **moral coupling** ($b = -.05$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). A one-year increase in respondent **age** was associated with a .05 decrease in agreement with statements suggesting that Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs should be considered in evaluations of his ability as a football player.

For ethnicity, having both **Black/African Americans** and **Hispanic/Latinx** identities was significantly associated with moral coupling. Holding all else constant, **Black/African American** respondents ($b = .84$, $SE = .29$, $p < .01$) reported a .84 unit higher agreement with **moral coupling** statements compared to White/non-Latinx respondents. Contrarily, **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents ($b = -1.22$, $SE = .31$, $p < .01$) reported a 1.22 unit lower agreement with moral coupling statements compared to White/non-Latinx respondents.

For political affiliation, both **Republican** and **Independent/Third Party/Other** were significantly associated with **moral coupling**. Holding all else constant, **Republican** respondents ($b = -1.26, SE = .27, p < .001$) reported 1.26 unit lower agreement with moral coupling statements compared to Democrats. Similarly, **Independent/Third Party/Other** respondents ($b = -1.12, SE = .33, p < .01$) reported 1.12 unit lower agreement with **moral coupling** statements compared to Democrats.

In sum, when only considering demographic variables and political affiliation, **Black/African American** Patriots fans were generally more likely to agree with **morally coupling** or jointly considering Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs and his ability as a football player, compared to White/non-Latinx respondents. Interestingly, this positive association was also found for the opposite moral reasoning strategies of moral decoupling and rationalization. Alternatively, **Hispanic/Latinx, Republican, and Independent/Third Party/Other** Patriots fans were less likely to agree with **moral coupling**, compared to White/non-Latinx and Democratic fans. The positive **Republican** association is opposite that of both the moral decoupling and rationalization associations of the same nature.

Model 2 included the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised as a predictor to test whether respondent **team identification** influenced agreement with the **moral coupling** statements. This Model explained 46% of the variance ($r^2 = .45, F(8, 195) = 19.92, p < .001$). Model 2 explained significantly more variance in moral coupling compared to Model 1 ($\Delta r^2 = .06, F(8, 195) = 27.71, p < .001$). Once again, **gender** identity was not significant. **Age** was still significantly and negatively associated with **moral coupling** ($b = -.04, SE = .01, p < .001$). Net of other variables, **Black/African**

American respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral coupling** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .70, SE = .28, p < .05$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** ($b = -.96, SE = .30, p < .01$) respondents still had significantly lower agreement with moral coupling White/non-Latinx. Likewise, **Republican** ($b = -1.26, SE = .25, p < .001$) and **Independent/Third Party/Other** ($b = -.89, SE = .32, p < .01$) respondents still had significantly lower agreement with moral coupling than Democrats.

For level of **team identification**, the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised was significantly and positively associated with **moral coupling** ($b = .31, SE = .07, p < .001$). Holding all else constant, a one unit increase in **team identification** with the Patriots predicted a .31 unit increase in agreement with **moral coupling** or jointly considering Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs and his ability as a football player.

Therefore, the more that respondents identified with the New England Patriots, the more they agreed that Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs should be jointly considered with his football abilities even after accounting for political party affiliation and demographic variables. This suggests that the more closely identified the respondent was with the Patriots, the more they felt the need to incorporate the potentially troubling off-field information about a Patriots player with his on-field performance, the opposite of the predicted result. Thus, H1c was rejected.

Overall, team identification was associated positively with all three moral reasoning coping strategies despite decoupling and coupling consisting of contradictory opinions. Interestingly, Republicans were in significantly greater agreement with statements of separating the player's (right-wing) beliefs and his ability. Alternatively,

Republicans were in significantly lower agreement with statements of jointly considering the player's beliefs and his ability compared to Democrats. This is despite the political beliefs associated with the player being more conservative in ideology. Further, in a post-hoc analysis, in which the same regression for moral coupling was performed but with Republican as the reference group for political affiliation, Independent/Third Party/Other was not significantly different than Republican, while it was for Democrat. This suggests that the difference may instead be in Democrats' agreement with moral coupling, which is in line with the current sentiment regarding politics and sports. However, the next set of regressions offers a more robust analysis with regard to political identity.

Political Ideology as a Moderator.

The second set of hypotheses built upon the first set and predicted that respondent **political ideology** would moderate the relationship established in the prior section between team identification with the Patriots and the three moral reasoning strategy outcome variables when presented with Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, such that as political ideological identity becomes more conservative: (H2a) the relationship between **team identification** and **moral decoupling** will weaken; (H2b) the relationship between **team identification** and **moral rationalization** will weaken; and (H2c) the relationship between **team identification** and **moral coupling** will strengthen. To test this, two additional regression Models added to the previous Models 1 and Models 2 from the first set of hypotheses above for each moral reasoning coping strategy. First, Model 3 added political ideology as a predictor variable. Then, Model 4 included the interaction of SSIS-R and political ideology. Again, Table 6.7 shows the beta coefficients, r^2 , F -stats, Δr^2 from previous step, and ΔF -stat from previous step.

Moral Decoupling.

Model 3 included **political ideology** as a predictor to test whether it predicted agreement with the **moral decoupling** statements. This Model explained 23% of the variance ($r^2 = .23$, $F(9, 194) = 6.56$, $p < .001$). Model 3 did not explain significantly more variance in **moral decoupling** ($\Delta r^2 = .00$, $F(9, 194) = 0.65$, $p = .42$). As with Model 2, **age** and **gender** identity were not significant predictors of moral decoupling. Also in line with Model 2, net of all other variables, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral decoupling** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .80$, $SE = .28$, $p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral decoupling** White/non-Latinx ($b = -.73$, $SE = .30$, $p < .05$). **Republican** respondents were no longer marginally significantly higher in agreement with **moral decoupling** than Democrats ($b = .36$, $SE = .28$, $p = .20$). Also, **team identification** was still significantly and positively associated with **moral decoupling** ($b = .26$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). Holding all else constant (including political affiliation and ideology), a one unit increase in **identification** with the Patriots predicted a .26 unit increase in agreement with **moral decoupling** or the separation of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs and his ability as a football player.

Political ideology was a not significant predictor of **moral decoupling** ($b = .04$, $SE = .05$, $p = .42$). Therefore, holding all else constant, political ideology on its own was not associated with agreement with separating Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs from his ability as a football player.

Model 4 included the interaction of political ideology and team identification to test whether political ideology moderated the relationship between **team identification**

and agreement with the **moral decoupling** statements. This Model explained 25% of the variance ($r^2 = .25$, $F(10, 193) = 6.58$, $p < .001$). The inclusion of the interaction approached significance in explaining more variance in moral decoupling ($\Delta r^2 = .01$, $F(10, 193) = 3.11$, $p = .08$). As with Model 3, **age**, **gender identity**, and **political party affiliation** were not significant predictors of **moral decoupling**. Likewise, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral decoupling** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .75$, $SE = .28$, $p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral decoupling** White/non-Latinx ($b = -.68$, $SE = .30$, $p < .05$). **Team identification** was still significantly and positively associated with **moral decoupling** ($b = .46$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$).

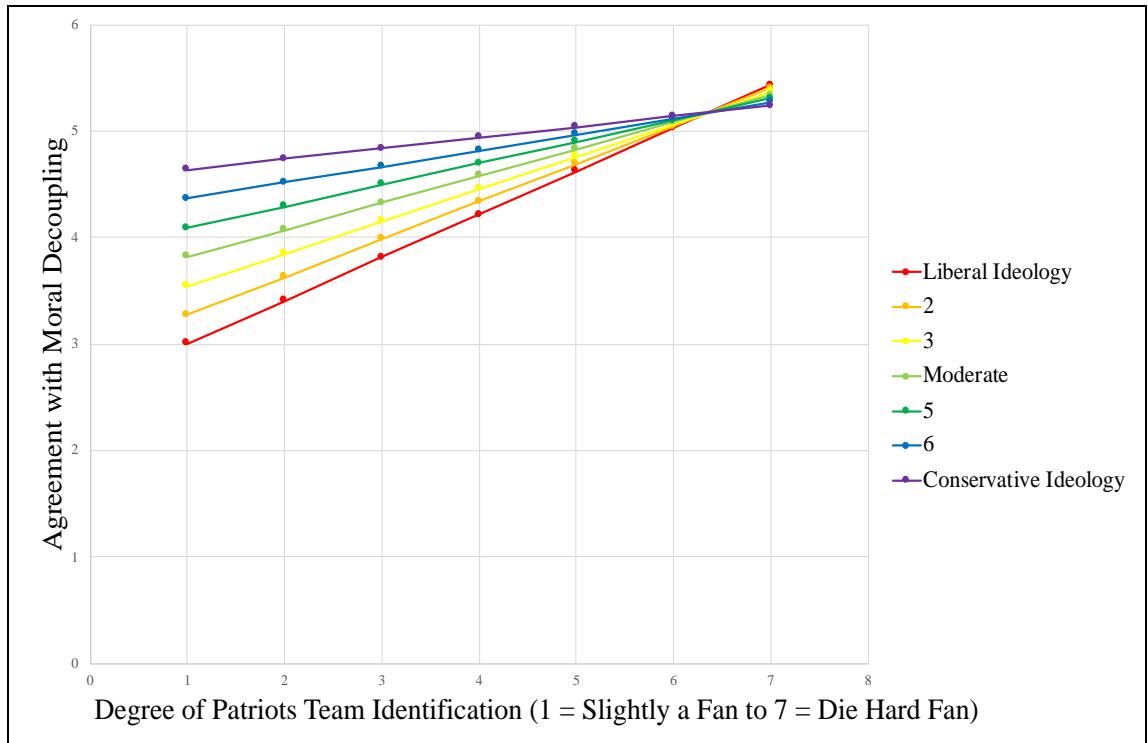
When the interaction of **political ideology** and **team identification** was included, contrary to Model 3, **political ideology** on its own became associated in the positive direction with **moral decoupling** ($b = .32$, $SE = .17$, $p = .05$). This suggests that holding all else constant, each unit a respondent in the sample reported being more conservative was associated with a .30 unit increase in agreement with separating Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs from his ability as a football player. However, the **interaction** of **team identification** and **political ideology** was also marginally significant in the *negative* direction ($b = -.05$, $SE = .03$, $p = .08$).

Therefore, while both Patriot **team identification** and **political ideology** were positively associated with **moral decoupling**, their **interaction** was negatively associated. This suggests that the positive relationship between **team identification** and agreement with **moral decoupling** statements weakens as **political ideology** moves in

the conservative direction. Figure 6.1 graphically depicts this interaction. The effect decreases linearly, with more liberal respondents having a steeper slope relating **team identification** and **moral decoupling**. Essentially, the effect of **team identification** on **moral decoupling** was .05 units lower for each unit of movement towards more conservative **ideology**. In other words, when presented with an article about Patriots' player Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, stronger Patriots **team identification** increased agreement with separating Rohrwasser's political beliefs from his football abilities. But, this increased agreement was greater for more liberal fans, suggesting they felt more of a need to use this moral reasoning strategy to cope with Rohrwasser's controversial (and more conservative) beliefs the more that they identified with the Patriots. It should be noted, however, that this moderating effect was only marginally significant, thus H2a was technically not supported. Yet, more than half of social psychology journal articles published in the last twenty years have reported at least one *p* value described as marginally significant in hypothesis testing (Pritschet et al., 2016)

Figure 6.1

Regression Slopes for Moral Decoupling based on Team Identification and Political Ideology



Note: Regression slopes for agreement with decoupling calculated from the beta coefficients for Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised, Political Ideology, and their interaction.

Moral Rationalization.

For the **moral rationalization** regression analysis, Model 3 included **political ideology** as a predictor to test whether it predicted agreement with the **moral rationalization** statements. (See: Table 6.7). This Model explained 32% of the variance ($r^2 = .32$, $F(9, 194) = 10.13$, $p < .001$) and did not explain significantly more variance in moral rationalization ($\Delta r^2 = .01$, $F(9, 194) = 1.46$, $p = .23$). As with Model 2, **age** and **gender identity** were not significant predictors of **moral rationalization**. Also in line with Model 2, net of all other variables, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral rationalization** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .81$, $SE = .26$, $p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral rationalization** White/non-Latinx ($b = -.75$, $SE = .28$, $p < .01$).

Also, **team identification** was still significantly and positively associated with **moral rationalization** ($b = .32, SE = .06, p < .001$). Holding all else constant (including **political affiliation** and **ideology**), a one unit increase in Patriot team identification predicted a .32 unit increase in agreement with **moral rationalization** statements or the downplaying or rationalizing of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

Political ideology was a not significant predictor of **moral rationalization** ($b = .06, SE = .05, p = .23$). Thus, holding all else constant, **political ideology** on its own was not associated with agreement with **moral rationalization** statements or the downplaying or rationalizing of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

Model 4 included the interaction of **political ideology** and **team identification** to test whether **political ideology** moderated the relationship between **team identification** and agreement with the **moral rationalization** statements. This Model explained 34% of the variance ($r^2 = .34, F(10, 193) = 10.00, p < .001$). The inclusion of the interaction was statistically significant in explaining more variance in **moral rationalization** ($\Delta r^2 = .02, F(10, 193) = 6.36, p < .05$). As with Model 3, **age** and **gender identity** were not significant predictors of **moral rationalization**. Likewise, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral rationalization** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .75, SE = .26, p < .01$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral rationalization** White/non-Latinx ($b = -.68, SE = .28, p < .05$). **Team identification** was still significantly and positively associated with **moral rationalization** ($b = .57, SE = .12, p < .001$).

When the **interaction** of **political ideology** and **team identification** was included, contrary to Model 3, **political ideology** on its own became significantly

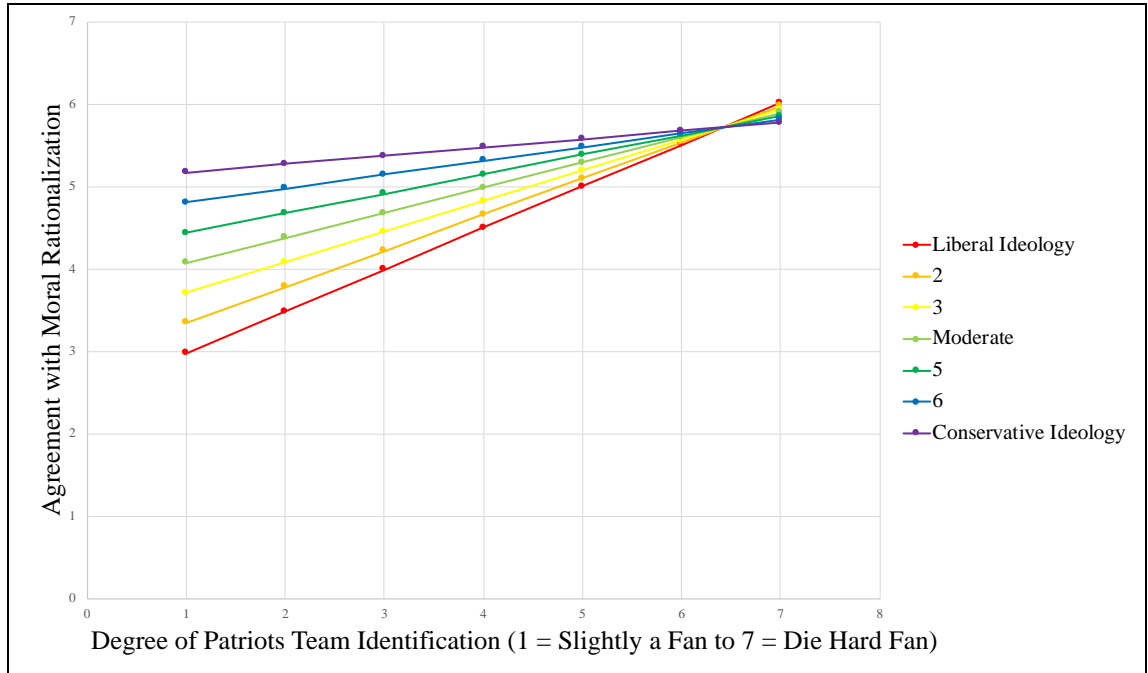
associated in the positive direction with **moral rationalization** ($b = .43$, $SE = .16$, $p < .01$). This suggests that holding all else constant, each unit a respondent in the sample reported being more conservative was associated with a .43 unit increase in agreement with **moral rationalization** statements or downplaying or rationalizing Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

However, the **interaction** of **team identification** and **political ideology** was also significant in the *negative* direction ($b = -.07$, $SE = .03$, $p < .05$).

Therefore, while both Patriot **team identification** and **political ideology** were positively associated with **moral rationalization**, their **interaction** was negatively associated. This suggests that the positive relationship between **team identification** and agreement with **moral rationalization** statements weakens as **political ideology** moves in the conservative direction. Figure 6.2 graphically depicts this interaction. The effect decreases linearly, with more liberal respondents having a steeper slope relating **team identification** and **moral rationalization**. Essentially, the effect of **team identification** on **moral rationalization** was .07 units lower for each unit of movement towards more conservative **ideology**. In other words, when presented with an article about Patriots' player Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, stronger Patriots **team identification** increased agreement with downplaying or rationalizing Rohrwasser's political beliefs. But, this increase was greater for more liberal fans, suggesting they felt more of a need to use this moral reasoning strategy to cope with Rohrwasser's controversial (and more conservative) beliefs the more that they identified with the Patriots. Thus, H2b was supported.

Figure 6.2

Regression Slopes for Moral Rationalization based on Team Identification and Political Ideology



Note: Regression slopes for agreement with rationalization calculated from the beta coefficients for Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised, Political Ideology, and their interaction.

Moral Coupling.

Finally, for the moral coupling regression analysis, Model 3 included **political ideology** as a predictor to test whether it influenced respondent agreement with the **moral coupling** statements that Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs should be jointly considered when assessing his ability as a football player (See: Table 6.7). This Model explained 45% of the variance ($r^2 = .45$, $F(9, 194) = 17.62$, $p < .001$) but did not explain significantly more variance in **moral coupling** ($\Delta r^2 = .00$, $F(9, 194) = .00$, $p = .95$). As with Model 2, **gender identity** was not a significant predictor. **Age** was still significantly and negatively associated with **moral coupling** ($b = -.04$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). Net of other variables, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly

higher agreement with **moral coupling** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .70, SE = .28, p < .05$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** ($b = -.96, SE = .30, p < .01$) respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral coupling** White/non-Latinx. Likewise, **Republican** ($b = -1.27, SE = .28, p < .001$) and **Independent/3rd Party/Other** ($b = -.89, SE = .32, p < .05$) respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral coupling** than **Democrats**. Also in line with Model 2, **team identification** was still significantly and positively associated with **moral coupling** ($b = .31, SE = .07, p < .001$). Holding all else constant (including **political affiliation and ideology**), a one unit increase in Patriot **team identification** predicted a .31 unit increase in agreement with **moral coupling** or jointly considering Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs and his ability as a football player. Meanwhile, **political ideology** was not significantly associated with **moral coupling** ($b = .00, SE = .05, p = .95$).

Model 4 included the **interaction** of **political ideology** and **team identification** as a predictor of **team identification** to test whether **political ideology** moderated the relationship between **team identification** and agreement with the **moral coupling** statements. This Model explained 45% of the variance ($r^2 = .45, F(10, 193) = 15.97, p < .001$). The inclusion of the interaction was not statistically significant in explaining more variance in **moral coupling** ($\Delta r^2 = .00, F(10, 193) = 1.08, p = .30$). As with Model 3, **gender identity** was not a significant predictor of **moral coupling**. Likewise, **age** was still significantly and negatively associated with moral coupling ($b = -.04, SE = .01, p < .001$). A one-year increase in respondent **age** was associated with a .04 unit decrease in agreement with **moral coupling** statements suggesting that Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs should be considered when assessing his ability as a

football player. Also, **Black/African American** respondents still had significantly higher agreement with **moral coupling** than White/non-Latinx ($b = .73, SE = .28, p < .05$), and **Hispanic/Latinx** ($b = -.98, SE = .30, p < .01$) respondents still had significantly lower agreement with **moral coupling** White/non-Latinx.

Alternatively, **team identification** was no longer statistically significantly associated with **moral coupling** ($b = .19, SE = .13, p = .14$). As with Model 3, **political ideology** on its own was not significantly associated with **moral coupling** ($b = -.16, SE = .17, p = .33$).

Lastly, the **interaction** of **team identification** and **political ideology** was also non-significant in its association with **moral coupling** ($b = .03, SE = .03, p = .30$).

Therefore, neither Patriot **team identification** nor **political ideology** were associated with respondents' level of agreement with **moral coupling** or jointly considering Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs in assessing his ability as a football player. Moreover, the **interaction** of **team identification** and **team identification** was non-significant. In other words, when presented with an article about Patriots' player Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, in no way was Patriots **team identification** or **political ideology** associated with agreement with jointly considering his controversial political beliefs in assessing his ability as a football player. This suggests that neither strongly identified fans, nor strongly liberal or conservative fans, felt more of a need to use this moral reasoning strategy to cope with Rohrwasser's controversial beliefs. Based on this analysis, H2c was rejected.

Table 6.7

Hierarchical Regressions Regression Models for the Three Moral Reasoning Coping Strategies as Outcomes

	Model 1 (Controls)			Model 2 (SSIS)			Model 3 (Pol. ID)			Model 4 (Int.)		
	MD	MR	MC	MD	MR	MC	MD	MR	MC	MD	MR	MC
Demographics												
Age	.00	-.01	-.05***	.01	.00	-.04***	.01	.00	-.04***	.01	-.01	-.04***
Gender (Male Ref)	.09	-.01	-.04	.01	-.10	-.14	.03	-.08	-.13	.03	-.16	-.10
Race/Ethnicity												
White/Caucasian (Ref)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Black/African American	.95**	1.00***	.84**	.84**	.87**	.70*	.80**	.81**	.70*	.75**	.75**	.73*
Hispanic/Latinx	-.97**	-1.05***	-1.22**	-.74*	-.77**	-.96**	-.73*	-.75**	-.96**	-.68*	-.68*	-.98**
Other	-.91	-1.02	-1.00	-.54	-.58	-.56	-.54	-.57	-.56	-.58	-.63	-.54
Political Party												
Democrat (Ref)	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Republican	.46 [†]	.29	-1.26***	.47 [†]	.29	-1.26***	.36	.15	-1.27***	.25	.01	-1.20***
Ind./3rd Party/Other	-.24	-.60 [†]	-1.12***	-.04	-.36	-.89**	-.08	-.41	-.89**	-.12	-.47	-.87**
SSIS	---	---	---	.26***	.32***	.31***	.26***	.32***	.31***	.46***	.57***	.19
Political Ideology	---	---	---	---	---	---	.04	.06	.00	.32*	.43**	-.16
SSIS x Pol. ID	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	-.05 [†]	-.07*	.03
Intercept	4.99***	5.45***	7.06***	3.36***	3.49***	5.16***	3.20***	3.27***	5.15***	2.28***	2.04***	5.70***
R^2	.17	.22	.39	.23	.32	.45	.23	.32	.45	.25	.34	.45
F	5.65***	7.99***	17.79***	7.31***	11.19***	19.92***	6.56***	10.13***	17.62***	6.28***	10.00***	15.97***
ΔR^2	---	---	---	.063	.093	.062	.002	.005	.000	.013	.021	.003
ΔF	---	---	---	15.95***	26.34***	21.71***	.65	1.46	.00	3.11 [†]	6.36*	1.08

Note. $N = 204$. Each column represents a regression model. Moral Decoupling represents the mean of three items. Moral Rationalization represents the mean of three items. Moral Coupling represents the mean of two items. These eight items were measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). SSIS-R represents the mean of seven items on the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, with higher numbers representing stronger identification. Political ideology represents the one 7-point ordinal item, from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). [†] $p \leq .1$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Study 1 Discussion

These results address the hypotheses in which moral reasoning strategies were the outcome variables. Using survey data, the purpose of this study was to determine how political ideology and team identification predict respondents' moral reasoning choices when presented with controversial political beliefs of a National Football League player from a team with which they identified.

When presented with an article about Patriots rookie kicker Justin Rohrwasser's associations with far-right political ideologies, respondents differed in the degree to which they agreed with statements about moral reasoning strategies. Specifically, in line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, respondents' level of team identification was associated positively with the strategies of moral rationalization and moral decoupling. Thus, the stronger that respondents in this sample identified with the Patriots, the more they tended to agree with statements that either downplayed or rationalized Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs or felt they should not be considered in assessing his ability as a football player.

However, contrary to Hypothesis 1c, respondents' level of team identification was also associated positively with the strategies of moral coupling. The stronger that respondents in this sample identified with the Patriots, the more they tended to agree with statements Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs *should* be considered in assessing his ability as a football player. Thus, team identification was positively associated with both moral decoupling and moral coupling, two strategies with opposite meaning (Lee et al., 2015).

When testing Hypotheses 2a – 2c, a similar pattern emerged. That is, in line with both Hypotheses 2a and 2b, team identification was still positively associated with both moral decoupling and moral rationalization, but political ideology weakened that relationship. Namely, while increased team identification still led to increases in agreement with these statements, this relationship was stronger for more liberally identifying respondents than it was for more conservatively identifying respondents. This supports the notion that when presented with information about an athlete they feel connected to engaging in scrupulous activities or having objectionable connections, sports fans may react in ways that show bias towards the athlete because of that connection (Ungar & Sev'er, 1989). More specifically, when sports fans root for the player in question, they are more likely to rationalize, downplay, or separate the immoral act or objectionable connection from evaluations of the player's abilities because doing so helps alleviate some of the negative feelings they might initially feel from interacting with news of the player's acts or connections (Lee et al., 2016).

Contrary to Hypothesis 2c, respondents' political ideology did *not* moderate the relationship between team identification and agreement with moral coupling. In fact, the inclusion of the moderator also caused team identification to no longer be significantly associated with moral coupling. The response of moral coupling is usually associated with immoral acts that are deemed too reprehensible to be ignored or set aside when considering a public figure's professional abilities (Lee & Kwak, 2015). So, perhaps for fans in this survey, Rohrwasser's political associations and social media posts were not considered overly indefensible, so his political associations could be overlooked or downplayed, regardless of fan political ideology.

Instead of team identification or political ideology being a predictor of moral coupling, political affiliation, race/Latino/a ethnicity, and age were actually associated with agreement with statements of jointly considering Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs when assessing his ability as a football player. Democrats in the sample were significantly more likely to agree with moral coupling compared to either Republicans or Independent/Third Party/Other respondents. And, younger respondents were more likely to agree with moral coupling.

Race/Latino/a ethnicity actually presented the same paradox from Hypotheses 1a – 1c. Black/African American respondents reported significantly higher agreement with moral rationalizing, moral decoupling, *and* moral coupling compared to White/Caucasian respondents. And, Hispanic/Latinx respondents reported significantly lower agreement with moral rationalizing, moral decoupling, *and* moral coupling compared to White/Caucasian respondents.

Black/African American Patriots fans also reported the highest average team identification compared to both White/Caucasian and Hispanic/Latinx fans. It appears no previous study on team identification has examined, let alone revealed, such findings.

In addition to that finding regarding team identification, women in the sample had significantly higher team identification than men, which is counter to many of the previous studies on the subject women (Wann & James, 2019). As expected, those residing in New England reported higher team identification with the New England Patriots than anywhere else. And, Democrats reported significantly higher team identification than Independents in the sample. Lastly, as respondents got older, their team identification decreased. This is notable, as research has found no relationship (e.g.,

Toder-Alon et al., 2019; Wann et al., 2001), a positive relationship (Murrell & Dietz, 1992), or a negative relationship between age and team identification (E. Kim & Gower, 2017)

While the results point to the moral reasoning strategies that were generally expected, these analyses cannot infer whether such responses were successful. In other words, moral reasoning strategies are used by ingroup members to cope with a threat to that group identity (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015). The question arises, then: did the coping mechanisms measured in this survey reduce respondents' cognitive dissonance or perceived identity threat and help restore or improve psychological health? Thus, study two is presented next. Study 2 uses the moral reasoning strategies examined above as experimental conditions to determine how or if such moral reasoning strategies influence participant psychological health following exposure to an NFL player's controversial political beliefs.

Study 2 – Experiment

The second study addressed Hypotheses 3a through 8 through experimental design to examine how being primed with a specific moral reasoning choice influences subsequent well-being. Specifically, a new sample of participants was recruited and asked about team identification with the New England Patriots. Following that, the same two questions about political identity from Study 1 were asked and used as screening questions to identify the needed participants for the study. First, political ideology was measured by asking respondents “When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?” Response options range from 1 (“Very Liberal”) to 7 (“Very Conservative”). Second, respondents reported their political party affiliation (“Democrat,” “Republican,”

“Independent,” or “Third Party/Other”). For screening purposes, participants that answered the first question from 1 (“Very Liberal”) to 4 (“Neutral”) were allowed to continue. Those that answered from 5 (“Somewhat Conservative”) to 7 (“Very Conservative”) were taken to a new page that ended the questionnaire for them, stating “Thank you. No need to continue.” For the second question, participants that answered “Independent” or “Democrat” were allowed to continue. Those that answered “Republican” were taken to a new page that ended the questionnaire for them, stating “Thank you. No need to continue.”

After that, they were randomly assigned into one of four conditions meant to prime moral reasoning: moral decoupling, moral rationalization, moral coupling, and a control. After reading statements regarding their specific moral reasoning strategy and writing a scenario in which such strategy comes into play, participants were asked to read the same article about Justin Rohrwasser as was used in Study 1. After reading, they were asked several questions about their social, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being measured on 7-point scales.

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents ranged from ages 18 to 65+ ($M = 55.47$, $SD = 14.23$) and skewed toward younger ages (skewness = -1.25, kurtosis = 3.17, median = 65+). Age and all other basic demographic breakdowns by gender identity can be seen in Table 6.8. Quotas were used to ensure that the sample had an equal gender split. Biological sex (“What was your sex at birth, as shown on your birth certificate?”) and gender identity (“How do you describe yourself?”, with male, female, transgender, and “I do not identify as male, female, or transgender” as options) were measured. At birth, 53.17% ($n = 151$) of the

sample were assigned male and 46.45% ($n = 133$) female. 53.52% ($n = 152$) of the sample identified as male, 45.77% ($n = 130$) as female, and 0.70% ($n = 2$) did not identify as male, female, or transgender. Sexual orientation was measured, as well, with 91.90% ($n = 261$) identifying as straight/heterosexual, 3.17% as gay or lesbian ($n = 6$), 4.93% bisexual ($n = 14$), and 1.06% other ($n = 3$). 92.25% of the sample identified as White non-Latino/a ($n = 262$), 0.35% as Latino/a ($n = 1$), 3.17% as Black or African American ($n = 9$), 2.82% as Asian or Asian American ($n = 8$), 0.35% as Native American ($n = 1$), 0.70% as biracial ($n = 2$) and 0.35% as other ($n = 1$).

Region of the United States where respondents resided was also recorded, with 76.76% ($n = 218$) residing in New England (ME, NH, etc.), 3.87% ($n = 11$) in the Middle Atlantic (NY, NJ, etc.), 2.11% ($n = 6$) in the East North Central (WI, IL, etc.), 1.06% ($n = 3$) in the West North Central (MN, IA, etc.), 7.39% ($n = 21$) in the South Atlantic (DE, MD, etc.), 0.35% ($n = 1$) in the East South Central (KY, AL, etc.), 1.06% ($n = 3$) in the West South Central (OK, TX, etc.), 3.17% ($n = 9$) in the Mountain (MT, CO, etc.), and 4.23% ($n = 12$) in the Pacific region (CA, HI, etc.).

For their political party affiliation, 55.28% ($n = 157$) identified as Democrat, 44.01% ($n = 125$) identified as Independent, and .70% ($n = 2$) identified as third party/other. Note that sample selection required the participants to respond as *not* Republican on this question. A similar criterion was used for political ideology. For the question about political ideology (“When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?”), 14.79% ($n = 42$) identified as Very Liberal, 23.24% ($n = 66$) identified as Liberal, 26.76% ($n = 76$) identified as Somewhat Liberal, and 35.21% ($n = 100$) identified as Neither Liberal nor Conservative. For this item, the respondents were fairly

normally distributed, ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.07$, skewness = $-.37$, kurtosis = -1.84 , median = 3.00).

After reading statements regarding their specific moral reasoning strategy, participants were asked to briefly write a scenario in which such strategy comes into play. Answers ranged from 1 to 105 ($M = 16.29$, $SD = 16.71$). The following are some examples to show that reading the statements were understood correctly. For **moral coupling**: “Ones political beliefs if extreme may indicate more basic parts of their character” and “Curt Shilling did some great things as a Red Sox picture but his political views are antithetical to mine and I would not follow any team he was on if he were still active” **Moral decoupling**: “When doing a performance review at a place of employment, a person's politics should not be taken into account no matter how obnoxious.” and “If Tom Brady were to say he is a big Trump supporter it wouldn't change the way i think about him on the field”. **Moral rationalization**: “If someone is misinformed about an issue. he//she should be educated vs seen as at fault.” and “Somebody may be hit with a question at a time when they are not prepared and say something off the cuff.” Lastly, for the **control** about sports reporting and journalists: “Sports reporters are right on the scene and in the locker rooms. ESPN does whole shows with opinions and interviews of players.” and “Reporter met with an athlete in a social situation and described the athlete’s humanity”.

Table 6.8

<i>Descriptive Statistics – Demographics</i>				
Variable	Men (n= 152)	Women (n = 130)	Not M, W, or Trans (n = 2)	Total (n = 284)
Gender Identity Percentage	53.52%	45.77%	0.70%	100.00%
Sex at Birth				

Male	99.34%	0.00%	0.00%	53.17%
Female	0.66%	100.00%	100.00%	46.83%
Sexual Orientation				
Straight/Heterosexual	94.74%	90.00%	0.00%	91.90%
Gay/Lesbian	2.63%	1.54%	0.00%	2.11%
Bisexual	2.63%	6.92%	50.00%	4.93%
Other	0.00%	1.54%	50.00%	1.06%
Race				
White/Caucasian	94.08%	90.00%	100.00%	92.25%
Black/African American	1.32%	5.38%	0.00%	3.17%
Hispanic/Latino	0.00%	0.77%	0.00%	0.35%
Asian/Asian American	3.29%	2.31%	0.00%	2.82%
Native American	0.66%	0.00%	0.00%	0.35%
Biracial/Multiracial	0.00%	1.54%	0.00%	0.70%
Other	0.66%	0.00%	0.00%	0.35%
Region				
New England	67.11%	87.69%	100.00%	76.76%
Middle Atlantic	5.92%	1.54%	0.00%	3.87%
East North Central	2.63%	1.54%	0.00%	2.11%
West North Central	1.32%	0.77%	0.00%	1.06%
South Atlantic	9.87%	4.62%	0.00%	7.39%
East South Central	0.66%	0.00%	0.00%	0.35%
West South Central	1.97%	0.00%	0.00%	1.06%
Mountain	4.61%	1.54%	0.00%	3.17%
Pacific	5.92%	2.31%	0.00%	4.23%
Political Party Affiliation				
Democrat	51.32%	60.77%	0.00%	55.28%
Independent	48.03%	39.23%	50.00%	44.01%
Third Party/Other	0.66%	0.00%	50.00%	0.70%
Age				
<i>M (SD)</i>	61.19 (9.24)	49.28 (15.82)	23.00 (4.24)	55.47 (14.23)
Skewness	-2.70	-.48	---	-1.25
Kurtosis	9.49	1.85	---	3.17
Political Ideology (1 = Strongly Liberal, 7 = Strongly Conservative)				
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.95 (1.03)	2.70 (1.09)	1.00 (0.00)	2.82 (1.07)
Skewness	-.56	-.18	---	-.37
Kurtosis	2.11	1.71	---	1.84

Scale Reliability

The descriptive statistics of the items comprising the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised as well as the seven psychological health variables are in Tables 6.9-6.12. All were within acceptable ranges of skew and kurtosis. See Table 6.13 for overall descriptive statistics for each broken down by gender identity. **The Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R)** measuring **team identification** consisted of seven Likert items measured from 1 (“A little important” or “Slightly a fan”) to 7 (“Very important” or “Very much a fan”). The overall scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .92 ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.66$, skewness = $-.12$, kurtosis = 1.98 , median = 4.00).

Table 6.9

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised

Item	Mean	(SD)
1. How important to you is it that the New England Patriots win?	4.35	(1.87)
2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots?	4.45	(2.01)
3. How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the New England Patriots?	4.14	(2.08)
4. During the season, how closely do you follow the New England Patriots via any of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, on television news or a newspaper, or the Internet?	4.80	(2.00)
5. How important is being a fan of the New England Patriots to you?	3.86	(2.01)
6. How much do you dislike the New England Patriots greatest rivals?	3.12	(1.85)
7. How often do you display the New England Patriots name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	2.47	(1.94)

Note: $n = 284$.

There were seven psychological health scales measuring various aspects of well-being (See: Tables 6.10-6.12). All seven scales consisted of a number of Likert items measured from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly Agree”).

For **social psychological health**, **Satisfaction with Social Life** contained five items: “In most ways, my social life is currently close to my ideal,” “The current conditions of my social life are excellent,” “I am currently satisfied with my social life,” “Right now, I have gotten the important things I want in my social life,” and “I would change almost nothing about my current social life.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .93 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.43$, skewness = .01, kurtosis = 2.28, median = 3.83).

Table 6.10

<i>Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Social Psychological Health Scale</i>			
	Item	Mean	(SD)
Satisfaction with Social Life			
	In most ways, my social life is currently close to my ideal.	3.58	(1.56)
	The current conditions of my social life are excellent.	3.74	(1.58)
	I am currently satisfied with my social life.	4.04	(1.66)
	Right now, I have gotten the important things I want in my social life.	4.15	(1.60)
	I would change almost nothing about my current social life.	3.71	(1.64)

Note: $n = 284$.

For **eudaimonic well-being**, there were three scales with twelve items combined. **Meaning** contained two items: “Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel meaningful” and “Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel valuable.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .89 ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.43$, skewness = .16, kurtosis = 2.70, median = 3.50). **Elevating Experience** contained five items: “Currently, I feel in awe,” “Currently, I feel deeply appreciating,” “Currently, I feel morally

elevated,” “Currently, I feel inspired,” and “Currently, I feel part of something greater than myself.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .74 ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.95$, skewness = -.25, kurtosis = 3.80, median = 3.83). Lastly, **Self-Connectedness** also contained five items: “Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel connected with myself,” “Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel that I know who I am,” “Rooting for the New England Patriots gives me a clear sense of my values,” “Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of how I feel,” and “Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of what matters to me.” This scale was also reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .95 ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.43$, skewness = .04, kurtosis = 2.44, median = 3.50).

Table 6.11

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Eudaimonic Psychological Health Scale

Item	Mean	(SD)
Meaning		
Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel meaningful.	3.21	(1.51)
Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel valuable.	3.14	(1.51)
Elevating Experience		
Currently, I feel in awe.	2.77	(1.37)
Currently, I feel deeply appreciating.	4.17	(1.33)
Currently, I feel morally elevated.	3.83	(1.34)
Currently, I feel inspired.	3.76	(1.29)
Currently, I feel part of something greater than myself.	3.85	(1.41)
Self-Connectedness		
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel connected with myself.	3.42	(1.60)
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel that I know who I am.	3.29	(1.61)
Rooting for the New England Patriots gives me a clear sense of my values.	3.13	(1.54)
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of how I feel.	3.21	(1.53)

Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of what matters to me.	3.15	(1.53)
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Note: $n = 284$.

For **hedonic well-being**, there were three scales with fifteen items combined.

Positive Affect contained four items: “Currently, I feel happy,” “Currently, I feel joyful,” “Currently, I feel pleased,” and “Being a fan of the New England Patriots brings me enjoyment/fun.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .78 ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.14$, skewness = -.61, kurtosis = 3.22, median = 4.40). **Negative Affect** also contained five items: “Currently, I feel depressed/blue,” “Currently, I feel unhappy,” “Currently, I feel frustrated,” “Currently, I feel angry/hostile,” and “Currently, I feel worried/anxious.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .89 ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.45$, skewness = .28, kurtosis = 2.08, median = 3.00). Lastly, **Carefreeness** contained six items: “Currently, I am carefree,” “Currently, I am free of concerns,” “Currently, I am detached from my troubles,” “Currently, I feel easygoing,” “Currently, I feel lighthearted,” and “Currently, I feel happy-go-lucky.” This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s α of .87 ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.14$, skewness = -.16, kurtosis = 2.59, median = 3.57).

Table 6.12

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Coefficients of Hedonic Psychological Health Scale

Item	Mean	(SD)
Positive Affect		
Currently, I feel happy.	4.60	(1.40)
Currently, I feel joyful.	3.94	(1.43)
Currently, I feel pleased.	4.14	(1.44)
Being a fan of the New England Patriots brings me enjoyment/fun.	4.87	(1.47)
Negative Affect		
Currently, I feel depressed/blue.	3.07	(1.82)
Currently, I feel unhappy.	3.06	(1.68)
Currently, I feel frustrated.	3.82	(1.81)
Currently, I feel angry/hostile.	2.58	(1.51)

Currently, I feel worried/anxious.	3.90	(1.85)
Carefreeness		
Currently, I am carefree.	3.52	(1.50)
Currently, I am free of concerns.	3.01	(1.43)
Currently, I am detached from my troubles.	3.40	(1.39)
Currently, I feel easygoing.	4.43	(1.54)
Currently, I feel lighthearted.	3.58	(1.40)
Currently, I feel happy-go-lucky.	3.62	(1.45)

Note: n = 284.

Table 6.13*Descriptive Statistics - Independent and Dependent Variables*

Variable	Men (n= 152)				Women (n = 130)				Not M, W, or Trans (n = 2)		Total (n = 284)			
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	Skew	Kurt
SSIS-R	3.98	(1.64)	- .10	1.95	3.95	(1.69)	-.16	2.02	2.63	(0.53)	3.95	(1.66)	- .12	1.98
Social Well-Being														
Satisfaction with														
Social Life	4.13	(1.42)	- .13	2.38	3.46	(1.35)	.11	2.24	4.25	(2.24)	3.83	(1.43)	.01	2.28
Eudaimonic Well-Being														
Meaning	3.14	(1.42)	.16	2.70	3.2	(1.45)	.15	2.71	3.25	(1.77)	3.17	(1.43)	.16	2.70
Elevating														
Experience	3.81	(0.90)	- .09	3.75	3.71	(1.00)	- .38	3.76	2.67	(0.71)	3.76	(0.95)	- .25	3.80
Self-Connectedness	3.16	(1.45)	.16	2.34	3.35	(1.42)	- .11	2.61	3.08	(0.59)	3.25	(1.43)	.04	2.44
Hedonic Well-Being														
Positive Affect	4.51	(1.06)	- .52	3.15	4.08	(1.17)	- .65	3.17	2.00	(0.57)	4.30	(1.14)	- .61	3.22
Negative Affect	2.86	(1.31)	.47	2.19	3.66	(1.45)	- .04	2.05	6.42	(0.59)	3.25	(1.45)	.28	2.08
Carefreeness	3.78	(1.00)	- .20	3.20	3.23	(1.20)	.08	2.26	1.36	(0.51)	3.51	(1.14)	- .16	2.59

Correlations

A Pearson's correlation test was conducted to evaluate the bivariate relationships among dependent and independent variables (Table 6.14). **Political ideology** and the **team identification** questions were asked to participants prior to them reading the article about Justin Rohrwasser or being assigned an experimental condition. The seven **psychological health** variables, as well as **age** were asked after reading the article about Justin Rohrwasser and being assigned an experimental condition.

For the demographic variables, **age** was significantly correlated with **political ideology** ($r = .19, p < .001$), such that the older the participant was the less liberal they were. As participants got older, their **team identification** also increased, as there was a weak significant correlation with the **Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised** ($r = .15, p < .05$). This was opposite the relationship from Study 1. **Age** was also positively and significantly weakly associated with the **Satisfaction with Social Life** scale ($r = .23, p < .01$). **Age** was not significantly correlated with any **eudaimonic well-being** variables. However, for the **hedonic well-being** variables, **age** was positively and weakly associated with **positive affect** ($r = .28, p < .01$) and **carefreeness** ($r = .32, p < .01$). Alternatively, **age** was negatively and weakly associated with **negative affect** ($r = -.34, p < .01$).

Political ideology was also associated with various aspects of participants' **psychological health**. Political ideology was weakly associated with the **Satisfaction with Social Life** scale in the positive direction ($r = .19, p < .01$), although not with any **eudaimonic well-being** variables. The less liberal participants reported being, the more satisfied they were with their social lives. However, as with age, **political ideology** was

positively and weakly associated with **positive affect** ($r = .19, p < .01$) and **carefreeness** ($r = .20, p < .01$), and negatively and weakly associated with **negative affect** ($r = -.20, p < .01$). The less liberal participants reported being, the happier and more carefree they felt, while also reporting more negative feelings.

Team identification (SSIS-R) was positively associated with all three aspects of **eudaimonic well-being**, but only with **positive affect** for hedonic well-being. **Team identification** was moderately associated with both **meaning** ($r = .58, p < .01$) and **self-connectedness** ($r = .62, p < .01$) and weakly associated with **elevating experience** ($r = .23, p < .01$) and **positive affect** ($r = .27, p < .01$). Interestingly, **team identification** was not statistically significantly associated with **Satisfaction with Social Life**, despite many studies revealing associations between team identification and various social life measures (e.g. Theodorakis et al., 2012; Wann & Pierce, 2005).

The **Satisfaction with Social Life (SSLS)** was statistically significantly associated with all other **psychological health** scales. **SSLS** was positively weakly correlated with both **meaning** ($r = .13, p < .01$) and **self-connectedness** ($r = .13, p < .05$), and moderately correlated with **elevating experience** ($r = .45, p < .01$). For the **hedonic well-being** variables, **SSLS** was moderately associated with both **positive affect** ($r = .57, p < .01$) and **carefreeness** ($r = .60, p < .01$) in the positive direction and correlated with **negative affect** ($r = -.51, p < .001$) in the negative direction.

The **eudaimonic well-being** scales were all statistically significantly associated with one another. **Meaning** was positively weakly correlated with **elevating experience** ($r = .38, p < .01$) and strongly with **self-connectedness** ($r = .89, p < .01$). In addition, **meaning** was weakly correlated with both **positive affect** ($r = .34, p < .01$) and

carefreeness ($r = .19, p < .01$). **Elevating experience** and **self-connectedness** were correlated ($r = .38, p < .01$) in the positive direction, as well. **Elevating experience** was also moderately associated with **positive affect** ($r = .69, p < .01$), **carefreeness** ($r = .58, p < .01$), and **negative affect** ($r = -.40, p < .01$). **Self-Connectedness** was also moderately associated with both **positive affect** ($r = .34, p < .01$) and **carefreeness** ($r = .20, p < .01$).

Similarly, the **hedonic well-being** variables were all statistically significantly associated with one another. **Positive affect** was negatively strongly correlated with **negative affect** ($r = -.72, p < .01$) and positively strongly associated with **carefreeness** ($r = .77, p < .01$). Lastly, **negative affect** and **carefreeness** were negatively strongly correlated ($r = -.74, p < .01$).

Table 6.14*Pairwise Correlations for Scales*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Pol	Age	SSIS-R	SLS	Mean	Elev	Self-Con	Pos	Neg	Care
Political Ideology	2.82	(1.07)	--									
Age	55.47	(14.23)	.19 ***	--								
SSIS-R	3.95	(1.66)	.11	.15 *	--							
Sat. with Social Life	3.83	(1.43)	.19 **	.23 **	.09	--						
Meaning	3.17	(1.43)	.06	-.05	.58 **	.13 *	--					
Elevating Experience	3.76	(0.95)	.08	.14 *	.23 **	.45 **	.38 **	--				
Self-Connectedness	3.25	(1.43)	.06	-.03	.62 **	.13 *	.89 **	.38 **	--			
Positive Affect	4.30	(1.14)	.19 **	.28 **	.27 **	.57 **	.34 **	.69 **	.34 **	--		
Negative Affect	3.25	(1.45)	-.20 **	-.34 **	-.05	-.51 ***	-.02	-.40 **	-.03	-.72 **	--	
Carefreeness	3.51	(1.14)	.20 **	.32 **	.08	.60 **	.19 **	.58 **	.20 **	.77 **	-.74 **	--

Note. $n = 284$. SSIS-R represents the mean of seven items on the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, with higher numbers representing stronger identification. Political ideology represents the one 7-point ordinal item, from 1 ("Strongly Liberal") to 7 ("Strongly Conservative"). All psychological health scales are comprised of items all measured on a 7-point ordinal scale, from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Exploratory Inferential Statistics

Summary and inferential statistics were run to examine differences in both New England Patriot **team identification** and **psychological health** of the sample by various demographic groups. The summary of the results is organized by demographic variables in Tables 6.15-6.17. Due to only two participants identifying their **gender** as “Not male, female, or transgender,” those two participants were, unfortunately, dropped. Similarly, only one participant identified as “Third Party/Other” for **political affiliation**, thus they were also dropped from subsequent analyses. And, due to too few participants not identifying their **race/Latino/a ethnicity** as White/Caucasian to perform adequately powered analyses, they were collapsed into one category, thus creating a dummy variable consisting of White/Caucasian ($n = 259$) and participants of color ($n = 22$). Likewise, the few participants not identifying their **region** as New England were collapsed into one category, thus creating a dummy variable consisting of New England ($n = 215$) and Other ($n = 66$).

Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised

First, an independent samples t -test showed that **team identification** for participants identifying as **female** ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.69$) did not significantly differ from that of those identifying as **male** ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.63$), $t(279) = .16$, $p = .81$, a finding that contradicted the results of Study 1 where female respondents had higher team identification than male respondents.

Similarly, an independent samples t -test showed that **team identification** for **White/Caucasian** participants ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.67$) did not significantly differ from that of participants of color ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.66$), $t(279) = -.54$, $p = .59$.

For **region**, an independent samples *t*-test showed that, unsurprisingly, New England Patriots **team identification** for participants residing in **New England** ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.62$) was significantly higher than that of participants in the **other** group ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.52$), $t(279) = -4.65$, $p < .001$.

Lastly for political affiliation, an independent samples *t*-test showed that **team identification** for **Democrats** ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.73$) did not significantly differ from that of **Independents** ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(279) = -1.51$, $p = .13$.

Satisfaction with Social Life

For the **Satisfaction with Social Life Scale (SSLS)**, an independent samples *t*-test showed that participants identifying as **women** ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.35$) reported significantly lower **satisfaction with their social life** compared to those identifying as **men** ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.41$), $t(279) = 4.18$, $p < .001$.

An independent samples *t*-test showed that **SSLS** for **White/Caucasian** participants ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.41$) did not significantly differ from that of participants of color ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(279) = -1.34$, $p = .18$.

Interestingly, an independent samples *t*-test showed that participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.38$) had significantly lower **satisfaction with social life** compared to participants in the **other** regions group ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(279) = 2.68$, $p < .01$.

Lastly for political affiliation, Levene's test showed that the variances for SSLS were unequal, $p < .05$. The independent samples *t*-test revealed that **satisfaction with social life** for **Democrats** ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.32$) did not significantly differ from that of **Independents** ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(243.26) = -1.25$, $p = .21$.

Eudaimonic Well-Being

To examine demographic differences for the **eudaimonic well-being** variables of **meaning**, **elevating experience**, and **self-connectedness**, one-way MANOVAs were used. Using a MANOVA instead of individual ANOVAs is preferred when the dependent variables are highly correlated, as is the case here. In addition, a MANOVA helps with reducing the chance of type-1 error that might occur if only using individual ANOVA to test each dependent variable separately.

First, a one-way MANOVA of the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables revealed no significant differences by **gender**, $F(3, 277) = 1.50, p = .16$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .98$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Follow-up ANOVAs were also not significant.

For **race/Latino/a ethnicity**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables revealed no significant differences between **White/Caucasian** participants and participants of color, $F(3, 277) = 1.16, p = .32$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .99$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Follow-up *t*-tests were also not significant.

For **region**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables did reveal significant differences between **New England** participants and **participations from outside New England**, $F(3, 277) = 5.46, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$, $\eta^2 = .06$. For follow-up *t*-tests, Bonferroni-adjusted *p*-values were used, $.05/3 = .0167$. Participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.30, SD = 1.44$) had significantly higher **meaning** compared to participants in the **other** group ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.33$), $t(279) = -2.52, p = .012$. For **elevating experience**, participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.74, SD = .92$) did not differ from the **other** group ($M = 3.88, SD = .98$), $t(279) = 1.01, p = .31$. Lastly, participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.44$) had significantly

higher **self-connectedness** compared to participants in the **other** group ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(279) = -3.20$, $p < .01$.

Lastly for **political affiliation**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables revealed no significant differences between **Democrat** identifying participants and **non-Democrat participations**, $F(3, 277) = 2.00$, $p = .12$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .98$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Follow-up t -tests were also not significant.

Hedonic Well-Being

To examine demographic differences for the **hedonic well-being** variables of **positive affect**, **negative affect**, and **carefreeness**, one-way MANOVAs were used, which is preferred to individual ANOVAs when the dependent variables are highly correlated. In addition, a MANOVA helps with reducing the chance or type-1 error that might occur if only using individual ANOVA to test each dependent variable separately.

First, a one-way MANOVA of the three **hedonic well-being** variables revealed a significant difference by **gender**, $F(3, 277) = 9.01$, $p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .91$, $\eta^2 = .09$. For follow-up t -tests, Bonferroni-adjusted p -values were used, $.05/3 = .0167$. First, those identifying as **men** ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.04$) reported significantly higher **positive affect** at that time than those identifying as **women** ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(279) = 3.38$, $p < .001$. For **negative affect**, logically, the opposite pattern occurred. Those identifying as **men** ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.30$) reported significantly *lower* **negative affect** than those identifying as **women** ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.45$), $t(279) = -5.02$, $p < .001$. Lastly, and similarly to **positive affect**, **men** ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .99$) reported feeling significantly more **carefreeness** at that time than those identifying as **women** ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(279) = 4.37$, $p < .001$.

For **race/ethnicity**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **hedonic well-being** variables revealed no significant differences between **White/Caucasian** participants and **participations of color**, $F(3, 277) = 0.28, p = .88$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .99, \eta^2 = .00$. Follow-up t -tests were also not significant.

For **region**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **hedonic well-being** variables did reveal significant differences between **New England** participants and **participations from outside New England**, $F(3, 277) = 7.75, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .92, \eta^2 = .08$. For follow-up t -tests, Bonferroni-adjusted p -values were used, $.05/3 = .0167$. Participants residing in **New England** ($M = 4.27, SD = 1.13$) did not differ in their **positive affect** compared to participants in the **other** group ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.08$), $t(279) = 1.50, p = .14$. However, participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.37, SD = 1.41$) reported significantly higher **negative affect** compared to participants from the **other** group ($M = 2.72, SD = 1.40$), $t(279) = -3.28, p < .001$. And, participants residing in **New England** ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.11$) had significantly lower **carefreeness** compared to participants in the **other** group ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.07$), $t(279) = 3.91, p < .001$.

Lastly for **political affiliation**, a one-way MANOVA of the three **hedonic well-being** variables revealed no significant differences between **Democrat** identifying participants and **non-Democrat participations**, $F(3, 277) = 1.89, p = .13$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, \eta^2 = .02$. Follow-up t -tests were also not significant at the Bonferroni-adjusted p -value of $.05/3 = .0167$. The p -level was adjusted to reduce the chance of type-1 error from running individual tests on the dependent variables.

Table 6.15*Exploratory Differences in Means for Dependent and Independent Variables by Gender*

	Men (N = 151)		Women (N = 130)		<i>t</i> -test
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	
SSIS	4.00	(1.63)	3.95	(1.69)	$t(279) = .16, p = .81$
Sat. with Soc. Life	4.15	(1.41)	3.46	(1.35)	$t(279) = 4.18, p < .001$
Eud. Well-Being					
Meaning	3.16	(1.42)	3.20	(1.45)	$F(3,277) = 1.50, p = .16$
Elevating Experience	3.83	(0.88)	3.71	(1.00)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, \eta^2 = .02$
Self-Connectedness	3.17	(1.44)	3.35	(1.42)	
Hed. Well-Being					
Positive Affect	4.53	(1.04) ***	4.08	(1.17)	$F(3,277) = 9.01, p < .001$
Negative Affect	2.84	(1.30) ***	3.66	(1.45)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .91, \eta^2 = .09$
Carefreeness	3.80	(0.99) ***	3.23	(1.20)	

Note. $N = 281$. For eudaimonic and hedonic well-being *t*-tests, Bonferroni-adjusted *p*-values were used for significance, $.05/3 = .0167$

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 6.16*Exploratory Differences in Means for Dependent and Independent Variables by Region*

	N.E. (N = 215)		Other (N = 66)		<i>t</i> -test
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	
SSIS	4.22	(1.62) ***	3.17	(1.52)	$t(279) = -4.65, p < .001$

Sat. with Soc. Life	3.70	(1.38)	**	4.23	(1.50)	$t(279) = 2.68, p < .01$
Eud. Well-Being						
Meaning	3.30	(1.44)	*	2.80	(1.33)	$F(3,277) = 5.46, p < .001$
Elevating Experience	3.74	(0.92)		3.88	(0.98)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .94, \eta^2 = .06$
Self-Connectedness	3.40	(1.44)	**	2.77	(1.39)	
Hed. Well-Being						
Positive Affect	4.27	(1.08)		4.50	(1.08)	$F(3,277) = 7.75, p < .001$
Negative Affect	3.37	(1.41)	***	2.72	(1.40)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .92, \eta^2 = .08$
Carefreeness	3.39	(1.11)	***	4.00	(1.07)	

Note. $N = 281$. For eudaimonic and hedonic well-being t -tests, Bonferroni-adjusted p -values were used for significance, $.05/3 = .0167$

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 6.17

Exploratory Differences in Means for Dependent and Independent Variables by Political Affiliation

	Dem. (N = 157)		Ind. (N = 124)		t -test
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	
SSIS	3.84	(1.73)	4.14	(1.54)	$t(279) = -1.51, p = .13$
Sat. with Soc. Life	3.73	(1.32)	3.95	(1.54)	$t(243.26) = -1.25, p = .21$
Eud. Well-Being					
Meaning	3.11	(1.40)	3.27	(1.47)	$F(3,277) = 2.00, p = .12$
Elevating Experience	3.69	(0.91)	3.88	(0.67)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, \eta^2 = .02$
Self-Connectedness	3.25	(1.44)	3.26	(1.42)	
Hed. Well-Being					
Positive Affect	4.21	(1.04)	4.47	(1.21)	$F(3,277) = 1.89, p = .13$

Negative Affect	3.36	(1.39)		3.04	(1.47)	Wilks' $\Lambda = .98$, $\eta^2 = .02$
Carefreeness	3.39	(1.10)	*	3.71	(1.14)	

Note. $N = 281$. For eudaimonic and hedonic well-being t -tests, Bonferroni-adjusted p -values were used for significance, $.05/3 = .0167$. P -value of Carefreeness was $p = .02$.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Psychological Health Variables

To test the validity of the different concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being examined by Huta and Ryan (2010), various confirmatory factor analyses were implemented with the lavaan package in R using maximum likelihood estimation (Rosseel, 2012). In addition, the Satisfaction with Social Life Scale was also included in the Model to see if the items on this scale contributed to a third factor of psychological health, that being a social factor. Model fit for all CFA Models were assessed with the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic, along with various other fit indices, as outlined by (Kline, 2011). These indices and their respective ranges regarded as adequate fit are: comparative fit index (CFI), $\geq .90$; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), $\leq .05$ preferred, $.05 - .08$ reasonable; and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR), $\leq .10$. The results for all Models and comparisons are in Table 6.19, the covariance matrix for the measures in the analyses are in Table 6.18.

Table 6.18*Covariance Matrix of Observed Psychological Health Variables*

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. SLS1	3.58 (1.55)	2.41																				
2. SLS2	3.74 (1.58)	1.81	2.48																			
3. SLS3	4.05 (1.66)	2.03	2.04	2.75																		
4. SLS4	4.16 (1.60)	1.78	1.77	1.99	2.56																	
5. SLS5	3.72 (1.63)	1.87	1.76	2.06	1.73	2.66																
6. Meaning1	3.21 (1.50)	.24	.32	.17	.32	.28	2.26															
7. Meaning2	3.15 (1.51)	.18	.27	.10	.26	.21	1.83	2.27														
8. Elev1	2.79 (1.36)	.55	.38	.31	.33	.38	.80	.81	1.85													
9. Elev2	4.20 (1.32)	.69	.66	.71	.67	.49	.22	.29	.41	1.73												
10. Elev3	3.84 (1.33)	.71	.72	.75	.67	.60	.52	.67	.60	.66	1.76											
11. Elev4	3.77 (1.28)	.72	.62	.86	.71	.63	.67	.52	.58	.64	.78	1.64										
12. Elev5	3.86 (1.40)	.59	.52	.60	.41	.37	.58	.45	.59	.55	.90	.80	1.96									
13. Con1	3.43 (1.60)	.04	.19	-.06	.16	.05	1.77	1.90	.66	.29	.61	.41	.57	2.55								
14. Con2	3.29 (1.61)	.29	.37	.17	.28	.25	1.82	1.89	.90	.41	.63	.51	.52	1.96	2.60							
15. Con3	3.15 (1.54)	.32	.41	.16	.26	.34	1.86	1.82	.89	.36	.62	.45	.51	1.87	2.03	2.37						
16. Con4	3.21 (1.53)	.30	.41	.24	.27	.25	1.62	1.70	.72	.23	.49	.40	.50	1.86	1.86	1.78	2.35					
17. Con5	3.16 (1.53)	.22	.34	.04	.21	.17	1.76	1.89	.79	.25	.48	.39	.49	1.95	1.94	1.92	1.83	2.35				
18. Pos1	4.62 (1.39)	1.09	1.09	1.15	1.10	.94	.14	.18	.34	1.04	.90	.88	.60	.12	.33	.25	.15	.12	1.92			
19. Pos2	3.96 (1.42)	1.15	1.13	1.15	1.08	1.09	.49	.50	.56	1.01	.88	.95	.67	.29	.56	.55	.42	.38	1.45	2.00		
20. Pos3	4.17 (1.43)	1.05	1.12	1.20	1.17	1.04	.39	.46	.54	.94	.83	.94	.67	.32	.61	.48	.44	.34	1.37	1.54	2.04	
21. Pos4	4.90 (1.44)	.13	.22	.14	.33	.13	1.13	1.09	.22	.22	.32	.35	.43	1.33	1.03	1.02	1.14	1.10	.35	.29	.41	2.06
22. Neg1 (Rev)	4.96 (1.81)	1.14	1.32	1.41	1.39	1.16	-.05	-.01	-.06	.85	.65	.83	.34	-.05	.09	-.03	-.05	-.05	1.76	1.58	1.57	.25
23. Neg2 (Rev)	4.96 (1.66)	1.04	1.17	1.20	1.20	.99	.14	.14	.02	.98	.53	.85	.42	.06	.15	.06	.16	.04	1.59	1.51	1.49	.33
24. Neg3 (Rev)	4.21 (1.80)	.99	1.00	1.16	.99	1.12	.22	.07	.09	.49	.36	.71	.25	.14	.12	.00	.22	.16	1.15	1.30	1.15	.20
25. Neg4 (Rev)	5.46 (1.47)	.65	.72	.79	.81	.62	-.12	-.07	.04	.52	.14	.48	.08	-.03	-.05	-.13	.03	-.06	.95	.84	.86	.30

26. Neg5 (Rev)	4.13 (1.84)	.98	1.07	1.22	1.07	1.14	-.08	-.13	.04	.69	.61	.78	.45	-.16	-.05	-.17	.00	-.12	1.40	1.40	1.29	.04
27. Care1	3.55 (1.49)	1.10	1.15	1.15	1.14	1.06	.38	.51	.59	.67	.92	.89	.60	.40	.42	.38	.49	.48	1.16	1.26	1.31	.36
28. Care2	3.02 (1.43)	1.05	1.09	1.16	1.11	1.11	.31	.23	.34	.44	.50	.74	.34	.09	.21	.19	.35	.22	.94	.99	1.06	.21
29. Care3	3.41 (1.39)	.74	.69	.70	.71	.75	.06	.18	.28	.37	.42	.37	.24	-.08	.33	.23	.19	.06	.84	.79	.92	.09
30. Care4	4.47 (1.51)	.89	.85	1.03	1.02	.80	.26	.26	.25	.86	.82	.89	.50	.14	.32	.18	.22	.18	1.41	1.33	1.28	.41
31. Care5	3.61 (1.39)	.92	.94	.89	.85	.81	.36	.37	.52	.75	.88	.69	.59	.30	.45	.43	.47	.33	1.10	1.21	1.11	.31
32. Care6	3.65 (1.43)	1.10	1.13	1.13	1.06	1.02	.47	.45	.66	.96	.84	.93	.68	.37	.63	.61	.53	.48	1.37	1.45	1.43	.26

Continued:	Mean (SD)	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
22. Neg1 (Rev)	4.96 (1.81)	3.27										
23. Neg2 (Rev)	4.96 (1.66)	2.24	2.76									
24. Neg3 (Rev)	4.21 (1.80)	1.90	1.79	3.23								
25. Neg4 (Rev)	5.46 (1.47)	1.46	1.22	1.60	2.15							
26. Neg5 (Rev)	4.13 (1.84)	2.48	1.96	2.05	1.35	3.37						
27. Care1	3.55 (1.49)	1.48	1.24	1.40	.82	1.44	2.21					
28. Care2	3.02 (1.43)	1.36	1.12	1.34	.88	1.37	1.40	2.03				
29. Care3	3.41 (1.39)	1.16	1.05	.71	.53	1.19	.91	.93	1.93			
30. Care4	4.47 (1.51)	1.62	1.47	1.26	.94	1.64	1.35	1.04	.86	2.29		
31. Care5	3.61 (1.39)	1.25	1.07	.98	.57	1.18	1.18	.89	.71	1.09	1.92	
32. Care6	3.65 (1.43)	1.47	1.35	1.05	.79	1.23	1.40	1.13	.92	1.32	1.29	2.05

Note. $N = 281$. SLS = Satisfaction with Social Life; Elev = Elevating Experience; Con = Self-Connectedness; Pos = Positive Affect; Neg = Negative Affect (Reverse-Coded); Care = Carefreeness.

Hypothesized Model of Well-Being Variables for Confirmatory Factor Analysis



The hypothesized Model is displayed visually in Figure 6.3. This first Model consisted of thirty-two indicators and seven factors. The factors represented the seven psychological health scales used, with the items on said scales representing the indicators. All factors were allowed to covary. The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the seven-factor CFA Model (CFA_A) was statistically significant, $\chi^2(443) = 1046.84, p < .001$. Although this null hypothesis that the Model was a perfect fit was rejected, the remaining fit indices were within acceptable range, CFI = .914, RMSEA = .070, 90% CI [.064, .075], SRMR = .079. The goodness-of-fit statistics can be seen in Table 6.19.

For exploratory purposes, additional variations of this Model were also assessed. First, an orthogonal Model was run, where the only differences were that factors were not allowed to covary (CFA_B). The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the orthogonal CFA_B Model was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(464) = 2487.63, p < .001$, but with poor fit, CFI = .711, RMSEA = .125, 90% CI [.120, .129], SRMR = .316. A comparison of the two Models is in Table 6.19. When moving from CFA_A to CFA_B, the $\Delta\chi^2$ test was significant, $\chi^2(21) = 1440.79, p < .001$, and the CFI increased by .203 points. Thus, the original hypothesized Model CFA_A is a better fit, as well as the preferred Model.

Another Model was run, where the only differences were that only factors of the same well-being type – social, eudaimonic, or hedonic – were allowed to covary (CFA_C). The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the orthogonal CFA_C Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(458) = 1416.09, p < .001$, but with mediocre fit, CFI = .863, RMSEA = .086, 90% CI [.081, .091], SRMR = .227. A comparison of the two Models is in Table 6.19. When moving from CFA_A to CFA_C, the $\Delta\chi^2$ test was significant, $\chi^2(15) =$

369.25, $p < .001$, and the CFI increased by .051 points. Again, the original hypothesized Model CFA_A is a better fit, as well as the preferred Model.

Other Models were also assessed to compare the theorized conceptualization that the seven examined well-being scales indeed measured different constructs. First, a second order Model was examined (CFA_D). In this Model, the first-order factors were the same seven factors from CFA_A with the same indicators. Then, there were three second-order factors representing the three types of well-being that were only measured indirectly through the indicators of their first-order factors (See Figure 6.4). The second-order factors were: social well-being (Satisfaction with Social Life); eudaimonic well-being (Meaning, Elevating Experience, and Self-Connectedness), and hedonic well-being (Positive Affect, Negative Affect, and Carefreeness). The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the orthogonal CFA_D Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(455) = 1258.59$, $p < .001$, with mediocre fit, CFI = .885, RMSEA = .079, 90% CI [.074, .085], SRMR = .142. A comparison of this Model with the original Model is in Table 6.19. When moving from CFA_A to CFA_D, the $\Delta\chi^2$ test was significant, $\chi^2(12) = 211.75$, $p < .001$, and the CFI increased by .029 points. Again, the original hypothesized Model CFA_A is a better fit than the second-order Model CFA_D.

Next, a Model with only three latent factors was examined (CFA_E). In this Model, the three factors represented the three types of psychological health – social, eudaimonic, and hedonic well-being. Each factor had the indicators from their respective scales: social well-being (Satisfaction with Social Life); eudaimonic well-being (Meaning, Elevating Experience, and Self-Connectedness), and hedonic well-being (Positive Affect, Negative Affect, and Carefreeness). The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the

orthogonal CFA_E Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(461) = 1650.71, p < .001$, with inadequate fit, CFI = .830, RMSEA = .096, 90% CI [.091, .101], SRMR = .150. A comparison of this Model with the original Model is in Table 6.19. When moving from CFA_A to CFA_E, the $\Delta\chi^2$ test was significant, $\chi^2(18) = 603.87, p < .001$, and the CFI increased by .084 points. Again, the original hypothesized Model CFA_A was a better fit.

Lastly, a Model with only one latent factor was examined (CFA_F) to assess fit of all the indicators on one general psychological health factor. The resulting chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic for the orthogonal CFA_F Model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(464) = 4064.67, p < .001$, with inadequate fit, CFI = .486, RMSEA = .166, 90% CI [.162, .171], SRMR = .182. A comparison of this Model with the original Model is in Table 6.19. When moving from CFA_A to CFA_F, the $\Delta\chi^2$ test was significant, $\chi^2(21) = 303, p < .001$, and the CFI increased by .428 points. Again, the original hypothesized Model CFA_A was a better fit.

In sum, after testing and comparing several hypothetical Models, the best one – and only one with decent fit – was the original CFA_A Model that treated each scale as a separate factor. All factor loadings of the hypothesized Model CFA_A were statistically significant at $p < .001$ and ranged from .30 to 1.61 (See Table 6.20). These findings validate previous work (Huta, 2012; Huta & Ryan, 2010) and the current use of the measures.

Table 6.19*Model Fit Statistics and Comparisons of Psychological Health Scales CFA Models*

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	RMSEA (90% CI)	CFI, TLI	SRMR	BIC
CFA _A : Seven Factors	1046.84*** 443	.070 (.064, .075)	.914 .903	.079	26880.70
CFA _B : Orthogonal	2487.63*** 464	.125 (.120, .129)	.711 .691	.316	28203.09
CFA _C : WB Covary	1416.09*** 458	.086 (.081, .091)	.863 .852	.227	27165.38
CFA _D : Second Order	1258.59*** 455	.079 (.074, .085)	.885 .785	.142	27024.80
CFA _E : Three Factors	1650.71*** 461	.096 (.091, .101)	.830 .817	.150	27383.09
CFA _F : One Factor	4064.67*** 464	.166 (.162, .171)	.486 .450	.182	29780.13
Model Comparison	$\Delta\chi^2(df)$	<i>p</i>	Δ CFI	Conclusion	
CFA _A v. CFA _B	1440.79 (21)	<.001	.203	Prefer CFA _A	
CFA _A v. CFA _C	369.25 (15)	<.001	.051	Prefer CFA _A	
CFA _A v. CFA _D	211.75 (12)	<.001	.029	Prefer CFA _A	
CFA _A v. CFA _E	603.87 (18)	<.001	.084	Prefer CFA _A	
CFA _A v. CFA _F	3017.83 (21)	<.001	.428	Prefer CFA _A	

Note. The conclusion is based on a joint consideration of $\Delta\chi^2$ and ΔCFI . CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 6.20*Standardized Factor Loadings from Seven Factor CFA_A Model*

Scale and Item	Est.		(SE)
F1: Satisfaction with Social Life			
SLS1	1.35	***	(.07)
SLS2	1.34	***	(.08)
SLS3	1.51	***	(.08)
SLS4	1.31	***	(.08)
SLS5	1.34	***	(.08)
F2: Meaning			
Meaning1	1.33	***	(.07)
Meaning2	1.37	***	(.07)
F3: Elevating Experience			
Elev1	.68	***	(.08)
Elev2	.77	***	(.08)
Elev3	.92	***	(.07)
Elev4	.88	***	(.07)
Elev5	.78	***	(.08)
F4: Self-Connectedness			
Con1	1.39	***	(.07)
Con2	1.42	***	(.08)
Con3	1.39	***	(.07)
Con4	1.30	***	(.07)
Con5	1.39	***	(.07)
F5: Positive Affect			
Pos1	1.18	***	(.07)
Pos2	1.23	***	(.07)
Pos3	1.20	***	(.07)
Pos4	.30	***	(.09)
F6: Negative Affect (Reverse-Coded)			
Neg1 (Rev)	1.61	***	(.09)
Neg2 (Rev)	1.38	***	(.08)
Neg3 (Rev)	1.28	***	(.10)
Neg4 (Rev)	.93	***	(.08)
Neg5 (Rev)	1.48	***	(.09)
F7: Carefreeness		***	
Care1	1.18	***	(.08)
Care2	.98	***	(.08)

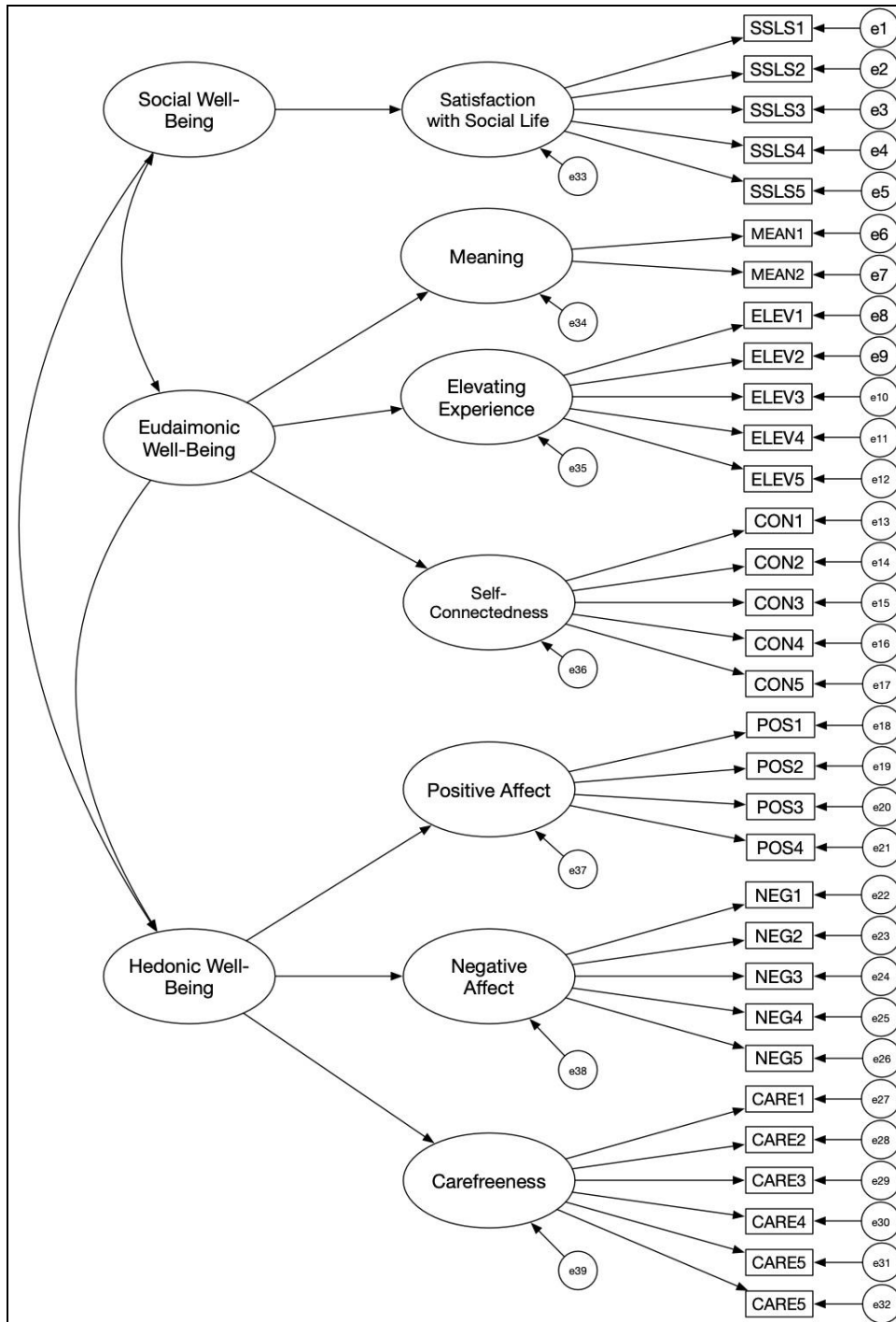
Care3	.77	***	(.08)
Care4	1.13	***	(.08)
Care5	1.00	***	(.07)
Care6	1.21	***	(.07)

Note. $N = 281$

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Figure 6.4

Second-Order Model of Well-Being Variables for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA_D)



Hypothesis Testing

Next, the hypotheses were tested to see how being primed with a **moral reasoning strategy** and **team identification** impacted New England's Patriots fans'

well-being when presented with the article about Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

To test the effects of both primed **moral reasoning condition** (H3a, H5a, H7a) and **team identification** (H4, H6, H8) on **hedonic well-being**, a 4 (**moral reasoning condition**) by 3 (low/moderate/high **team identification**) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used. The dependent three variables representing **hedonic well-being** included the scales that measured **Positive Affect**, **Negative Affect**, and **Carefreeness**.

To test the effects of both primed **moral reasoning condition** (H3b, H5b, H7b) and **team identification** (H4, H6, H8) on **eudaimonic well-being**, a 4 (**moral reasoning condition**) by 3 (low/moderate/high **team identification**) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used. The three dependent variables representing **eudaimonic well-being** included the scales that measured **Meaning**, **Elevating Experience**, and **Self-Connectedness**.

Lastly, to test the effects of both primed **moral reasoning condition** (H3c, H5c, H7c) and **team identification** (H4, H6, H8) on **social well-being**, a 4 (**moral reasoning condition**) by 3 (low/moderate/high **team identification**) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used, where the only dependent variable representing **social well-being** was the **Satisfaction with Social Life Scale (SSLS)**.

Prior to analysis, the data was examined for outliers using the Mahalanobis distances and looking at the Chi squared distribution. The alpha threshold for detecting outliers in this case is .01 (i.e. the 1% most extreme observations) (Leys et al., 2018). As

a result, eight participants detected as outliers were dropped prior to analysis, resulting in a final sample of $N = 274$.

Due to using analyses of variance, the continuous **Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-r)** was converted into a tripartite ordinal variable. Converting **SSIS** into low or high team identification is in line with previous studies.(e.g., Fink et al., 2009; Wann, Bayens, et al., 2004; Wann & Grieve, 2005). When doing so with the revised **SSIS-R**, James, Delia, and Wann (2019) suggest doing so into low, moderate, and high team identification. Thus, the SSIS-R scale representing **team identification** was trichotomized into tertiles: low (0 to 33.33 percentile; $n = 100$), moderate (33.33 to 66.66 percentile; $n = 85$), and high (66.67 to 100 percentile; $n = 89$) **team identification**.

Hedonic Well-Being

The first MANOVA examined whether participant **hedonic well-being** would be influenced by being primed with different **moral reasoning** strategies. Specifically, it tested the predictions that when participants were presented with the article detailing Patriots' kicker Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs:

1. Those primed with the **moral decoupling** – statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated – would report more *positive* **hedonic well-being** (H3a).
2. Those primed with the **moral rationalization** – statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of the player's controversial political beliefs – would report more *positive* **hedonic well-being** (H5a).
3. Those primed with the **moral coupling** – statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly – would report more *negative* **hedonic well-being** (H7a).

Further, the MANOVA also examined whether **team identification** with the Patriots would moderate and strengthen these relationships between primed **moral reasoning** strategy – **moral decoupling** (H4), **moral rationalization** (H6), and **moral coupling** (H8) – and **hedonic well-being**, making them stronger. For this analysis, the three dependent variables representing **hedonic well-being** were **positive affect** ($\alpha = .78$), **negative affect** ($\alpha = .89$), and **carefreeness** ($\alpha = .87$). See Table 6.21 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy. See Table 6.22 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of **team identification**. And, see Table 6.23 for the means and standard deviations for the interaction effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy and **team identification**.

In the resulting two-way MANOVA, there was a significant main effect for **team identification** (low **team identification** compared to moderate compared to high) on the **hedonic well-being** outcome variables, ($F(6, 520) = 5.29, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .89$). There was not a significant main effect for primed **moral reasoning** strategy on the outcome variables, $F(9, 632.92) = 1.55, p = .13$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .95$. Thus H3a, H5a, and H7a were rejected: participants' scores on **positive affect**, **negative affect**, and **carefreeness** were *not* influenced by being primed with statements suggesting **moral decoupling** (H3a), **moral rationalization** (H5a), or **moral coupling** (H7a) strategies used to cope with the potential identity threat from reading an article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

In addition, the interaction between trichotomized **team identification** and primed **moral reasoning** strategy on the three hedonic well-being variables was not significant, $F(18, 735.88) = 1.27, p = .20$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .92$, failing to support H4, H6, and

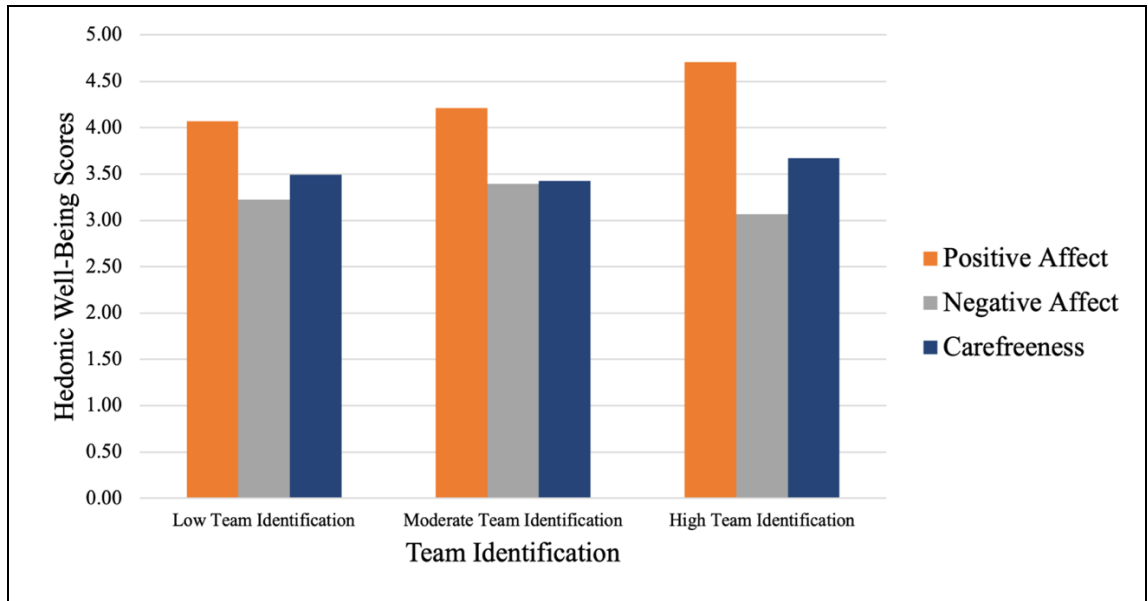
H8 for this type of well-being. Thus, only the individual main effect of **team identification** significantly influenced participants' reported **hedonic well-being** variables following exposure to the Rohrwasser article.

In the event that the relatively small sample size may have resulted in an underpowered MANOVA, follow-up univariate ANOVAs also examined the three **hedonic well-being** variables separately using a Bonferroni adjusted p -value for significant results of $p = .05/3 = .0125$ to account for type-1 error. These analyses revealed significant effects of trichotomized **team identification** on only **positive affect** ($F(2, 262) = 8.93, p < .001; \eta^2 = .06$), and not **negative affect** ($F(2, 262) = 1.06, p = .35; \eta^2 = .01$) or **carefreeness** ($F(2, 262) = 1.21, p = .30; \eta^2 = .01$).

Figure 6.5 plots low, moderate, and highly **team identified** New England Patriot fans to show how they differed in **positive affect**, **negative affect**, and **carefreeness**. Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons revealed that **positive affect** was significantly higher for **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.50, 4.94]) compared to both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [4.00, 4.46], $p < .01$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [3.87, 4.92], $p < .001$) (see: Table 6.22). After reading the article about Rohrwasser, participants with **high team identification** reported significantly higher **positive affect** – current happiness, joy, etc. – than low and moderately identified participants in the sample, regardless of primed **moral reasoning** strategy. However, highly identified fans did not differ from the others in **negative affect** or **carefreeness**.

Figure 6.5

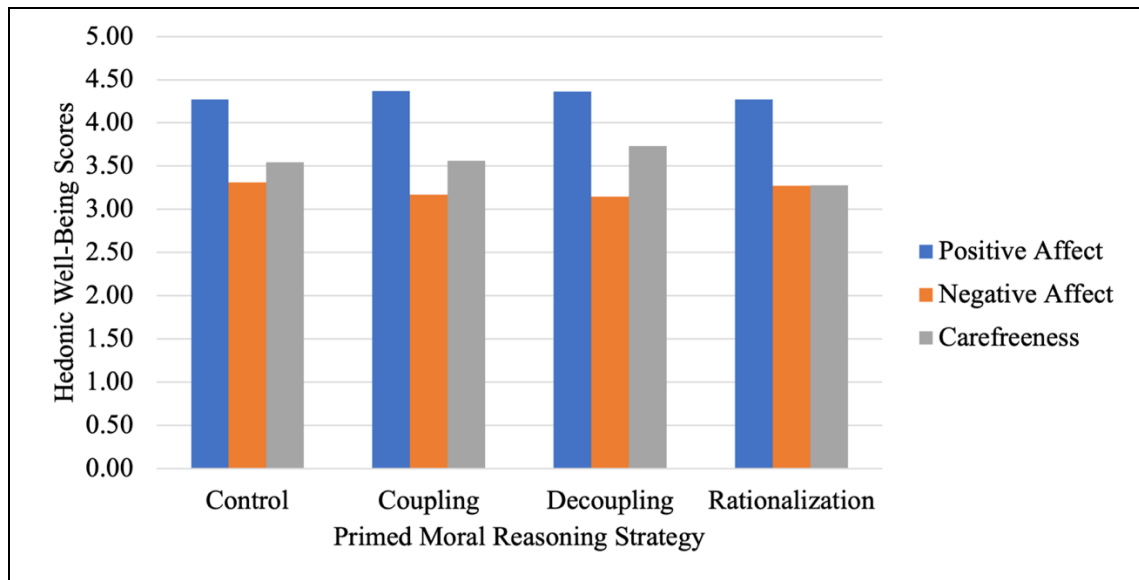
Hedonic Well-Being Scores for Different Levels of Team Identification



As for the effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy, Figure 6.6 plots the four different **moral reasoning** conditions to show how they differed in **positive affect**, **negative affect**, and **carefreeness**. Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons revealed that **carefreeness** was marginally significantly higher for those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy (95% CI [3.50, 4.03]) compared to those primed with the **moral rationalization** strategy (95% CI [3.00, 3.52], $p = .08$) (see: Table 6.21). In other words, those primed with the moral reasoning strategy of **moral decoupling** – statements suggesting Rohrwasser’s political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated – reported marginally higher **carefreeness** (light-hearted, easy-going, detached from troubles, etc.) than participants primed with **moral rationalization** – statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of his controversial political beliefs.

Figure 6.6

Hedonic Well-Being Scores for Each Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy



Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were also examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **hedonic well-being** based on primed **moral reasoning** strategy (interaction effect). Mean differences can be seen in Table 6.23. Results showed that for participants in the **control group** (i.e., no primed moral reasoning strategy), fans with low **team identification** (95% CI [3.42, 4.24]) reported marginally significantly lower **positive affect** than both moderately **identified** fans (95% CI [4.10, 5.06], $p = .06$) and fans with high **team identification** (95% CI [4.08, 4.96], $p = .07$). So, with no primed moral reasoning, after reading the article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, low identifying fans reported moderately lower positive emotions than fans with higher team identification than them.

For participants primed with the **moral rationalization** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.27, 5.13]) reported significantly higher **positive affect** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [3.43, 4.37], $p < .05$). When primed with statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of Rohrwasser's controversial political

beliefs, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher positive emotions than fans with moderate team identification.

For those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy, the only significant difference was that **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.42, 5.36]) reported significantly higher **positive affect** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [3.60, 4.42], $p < .05$). As with the moral rationalization condition, then, when primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should be independently evaluated, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher positive emotions than fans with moderate team identification.

Lastly, for those primed with the **moral coupling** strategy, the only significant difference was that **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.32, 5.21]) reported significantly higher **positive affect** than **low identified** fans (95% CI [3.65, 4.43], $p < .05$). When primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should be jointly evaluated, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher positive emotions than fans with low team identification.

The same post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **negative affect** based on primed moral reasoning strategy, followed by the same test using **carefreeness**. Results showed only one marginally significant mean difference for each of those dependent variables. For participants primed with the **moral rationalization** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [2.19, 3.34]) reported marginally significantly lower **negative affect** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [3.11, 4.37], $p = .07$). Likewise, for participants in the **control group**, **moderately**

identified fans (95% CI [3.47, 4.45]) reported marginally significantly higher **carefreeness** than **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.83, 3.67], $p = .07$).

In sum, while fans high **team identification** had higher **positive affect** generally, **highly identified** fans primed with **moral decoupling** as well as **moral rationalization** were only significantly higher in **positive affect** than **moderately identified** fans, whereas **highly identified** fans primed with **moral coupling** were only significantly higher in **positive affect** than **low identified** fans. Figures 6.7-6.9 show the general trends of the three **hedonic well-being** dependent variables among the **team identification** levels. For **positive affect**, the trendline for those in the **moral decoupling** and **moral rationalization** conditions is more exponential and the trendline for those in the **moral coupling** condition is more linear. In fact, while no significant differences existed in either the **negative affect** or **carefreeness** multiple comparisons, a qualitative examination of the mean scores in Figures 6.8 and 6.9 also suggest that those in both the **moral rationalization** and **moral decoupling** conditions – the moral reasoning strategies with the intention of lessening the identity threat – followed a similar pattern as **positive affect** with regard to the relationship between **team identification** and hedonic well-being scales.

Statistically, participants in the primed **moral reasoning** conditions generally did not significantly differ in hedonic well-being in any consistent way, rejecting Hypotheses 3a, 5a, and 7a. And, level of **team identification** did not moderate that relationship between **condition** and **hedonic well-being**, rejecting support for Hypotheses 4, 6, and 8.

Yet, level of participant **team identification** in both the **moral decoupling** and **moral rationalization** conditions did trend similarly for all three **hedonic well-being**

variables, albeit non-significantly. Further, higher **team identification** was associated with higher **positive affect**, a type of well-being not previous studied with regard to the relationship between team identification and psychological health.

Figure 6.7

Mean Scores of Positive Affect among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

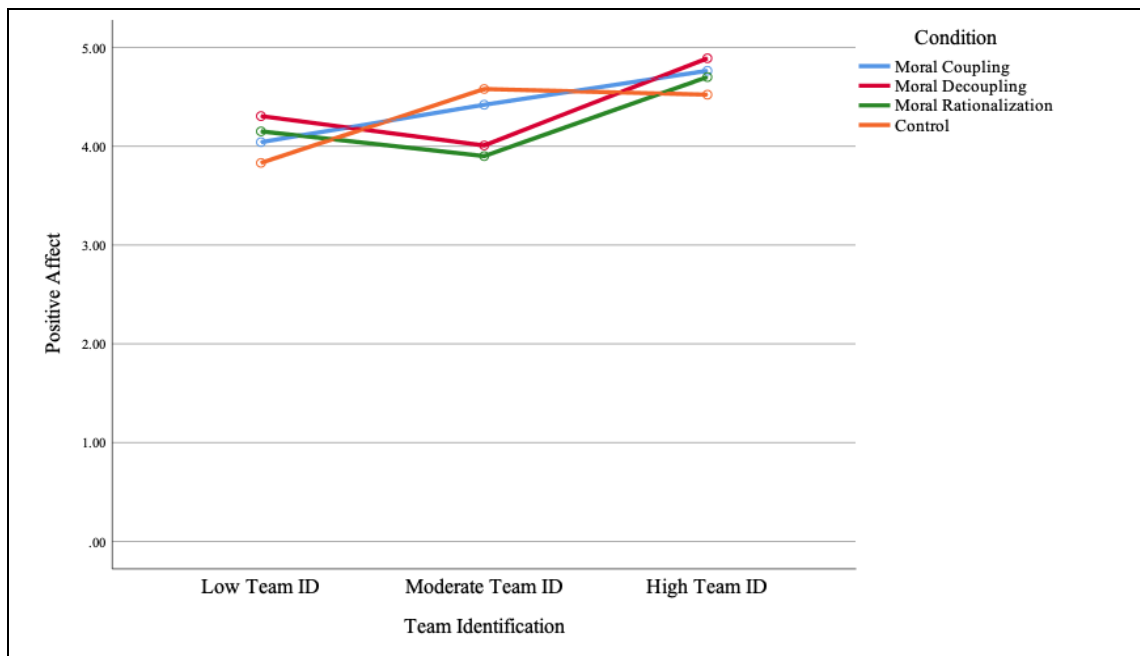


Figure 6.8

Mean Scores of Negative Affect among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

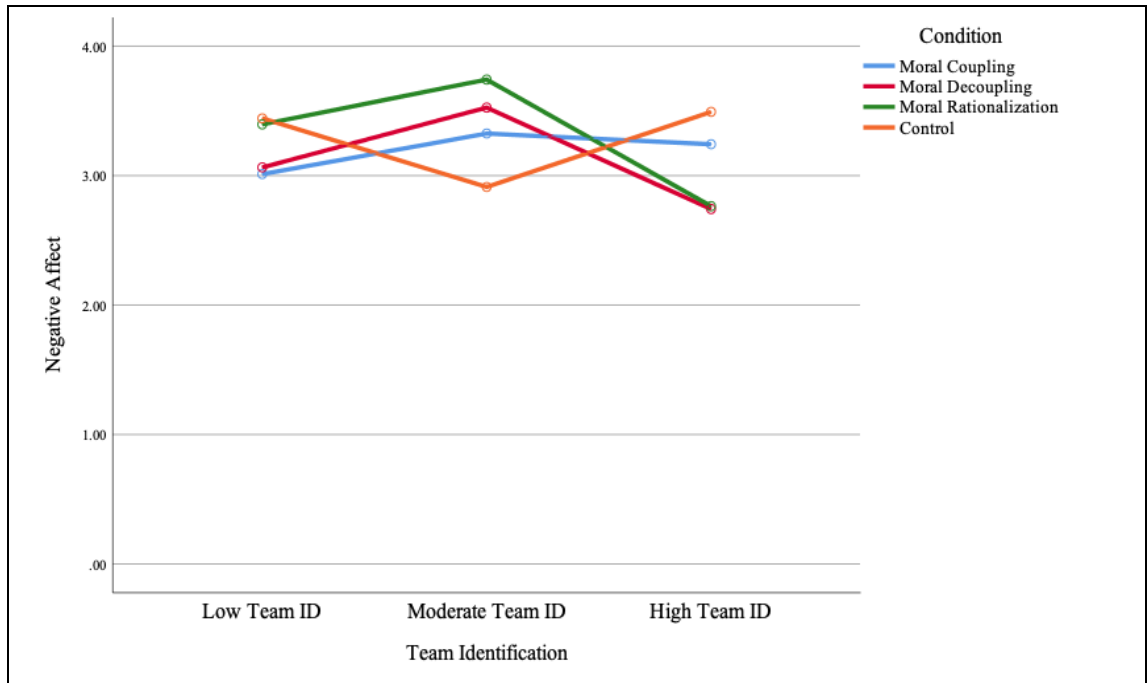
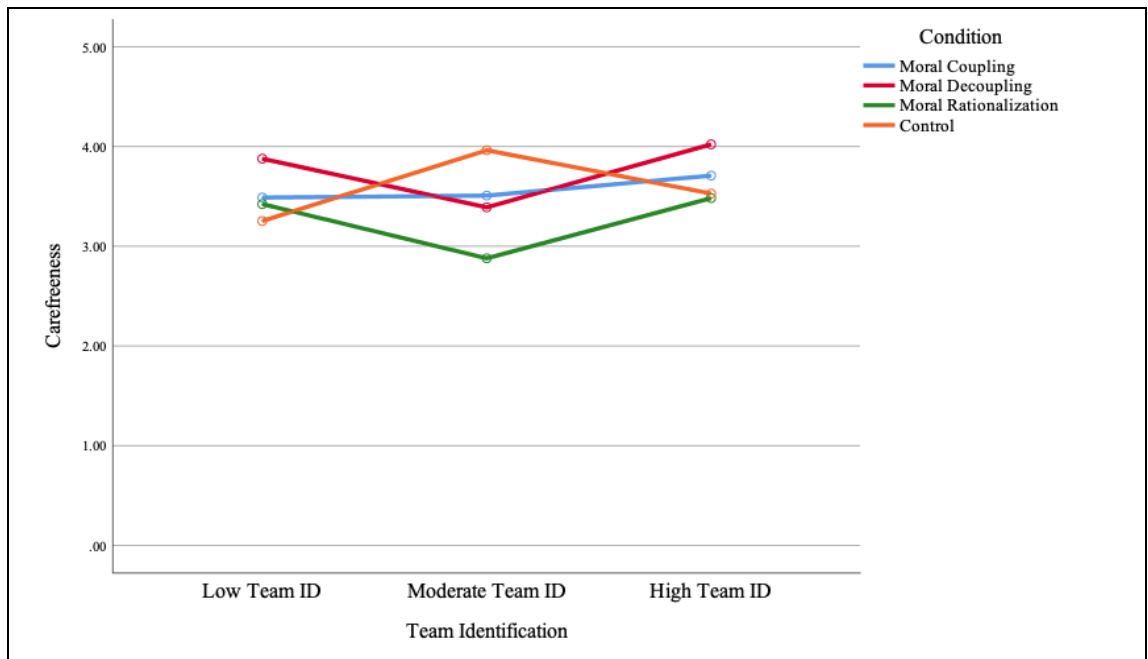


Figure 6.9

Mean Scores of Carefreeness among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy



Eudaimonic Well-Being

The next MANOVA examined whether participant **eudaimonic well-being** would be influenced by being primed with different **moral reasoning** strategies. Specifically, it tested the predictions that when participants were presented with the article detailing Patriots' kicker Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs:

1. Those primed with the **moral decoupling** – statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated – would report more *positive eudaimonic well-being* (H3b).
2. Those primed with the **moral rationalization** – statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of the player's controversial political beliefs – would report more *positive eudaimonic well-being* (H5b).
3. Those primed with the **moral coupling** – statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly – would report more *negative eudaimonic well-being* (H7b).

Further, the MANOVA also examined whether **team identification** with the Patriots would moderate and strengthen these relationships between primed **moral reasoning** strategy – **moral decoupling** (H4), **moral rationalization** (H6), and **moral coupling** (H8) – and **eudaimonic well-being**, making them stronger. For this analysis, the three dependent variables representing **eudaimonic well-being** were **meaning** ($\alpha = .89$), **elevating experience** ($\alpha = .74$), and **self-connectedness** ($\alpha = .95$). See Table 6.21 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy. See Table 6.22 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of **team identification**. And, see Table 6.23 for the means and standard deviations for the interaction effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy and **team identification**.

In the resulting two-way MANOVA, there was a significant main effect for trichotomized **team identification** on the **eudaimonic well-being** outcome variables,

($F(6, 524) = 19.92, p < .001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .66$). There was not a significant main effect for primed **moral reasoning** strategy on the combined outcome variables, $F(9, 635.88) = 0.98, p = .49$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$. Thus H3b, H5b, and H7b are rejected: participants' scores on **meaning**, **elevating experience**, and **self-connectedness** were *not* influenced by being primed with statements suggesting **moral decoupling** (H3b), **moral rationalization** (H5b), or **moral coupling** (H7b) strategies used to cope with the potential identity threat from reading an article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

In addition, the interaction between trichotomized **team identification** and primed **moral reasoning** strategy on the three **eudaimonic well-being** dependent variables was not significant, $F(18, 735.88) = 0.98, p = .49$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$, failing to support H4, H6, and H8 for this type of well-being. Thus, as with the **hedonic well-being** MANOVA, only the individual main effect of **team identification** significantly influenced participants' reported **eudaimonic well-being** variables following exposure to the Rohrwasser article.

In the event that the relatively small sample size may have resulted in an underpowered MANOVA, follow-up univariate ANOVAs also examined the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables separately using a Bonferroni adjusted p -value for significant results of $p = .05/3 = .0125$ to account for type-1 error. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs examined the three **eudaimonic well-being** variables separately, revealing significant effects of trichotomized **team identification** on **meaning** ($F(2, 262) = 53.88, p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .29$) and **self-connectedness** ($F(2, 262) = 66.13, p < .001$; $\eta^2 = .34$), but not **elevating experience** ($F(2, 262) = 4.40, p < .05$; $\eta^2 = .03$).

There were no significant main effects of primed **moral reasoning** strategy on **meaning, elevating experience, or self-connectedness**.

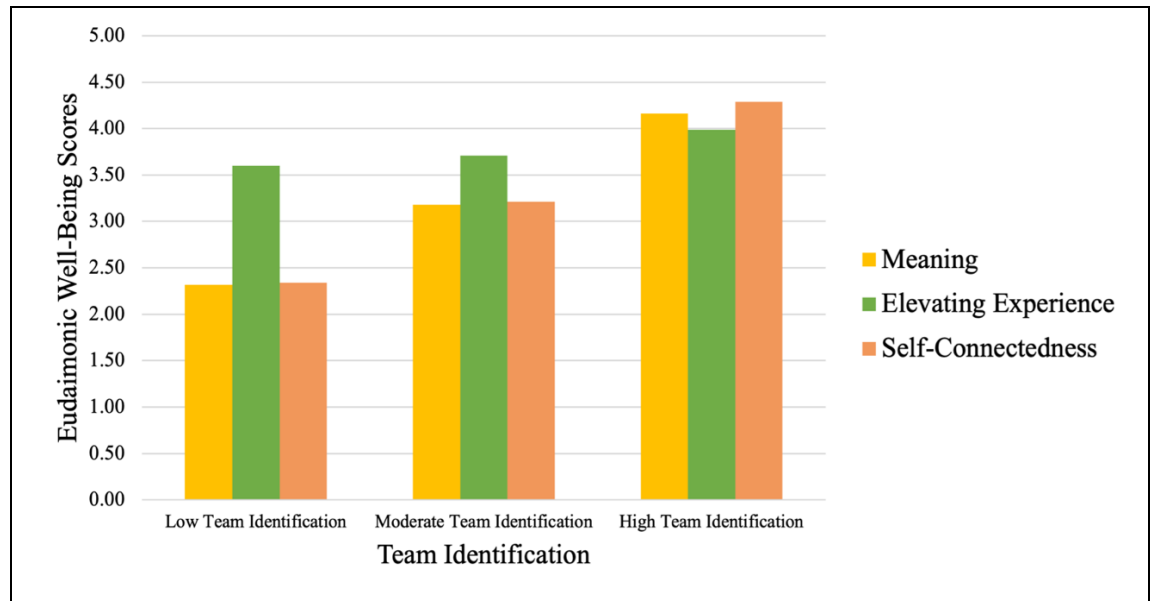
Figure 6.10 plots low, moderate, and highly **team identified** New England Patriot fans to show how they differed in **meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness**. Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons revealed that **meaning** was significantly higher for **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.90, 4.40]) compared to both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.92, 3.44], $p < .001$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.10, 2.57], $p < .001$) (see: Table 6.22). And, **Meaning** was significantly higher for **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.92, 3.44]) compared to **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.10, 2.57], $p < .001$). Participants with high team identification reported significantly higher meaning than lower identified participants in the sample, therefore, regardless of primed moral reasoning strategy. After reading the article about Rohrwasser, participants with **high team identification** reported significantly higher **meaning** – feeling meaningful or valuable – than **low and moderately identified** participants in the sample, regardless of primed **moral reasoning** strategy.

Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons also revealed that **elevating experience**, despite the overall non-significant ANOVA, was significantly higher for **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.80, 4.18]) compared to **low identified** fans (95% CI [3.42, 3.79], $p < .05$) (see: Table 6.22). Thus, after reading the article about Rohrwasser, participants with high **team identification** reported significantly higher **elevating experience** – appreciation, inspiration, etc. – than **low identified** participants in the sample, regardless of primed **moral reasoning** strategy.

For the final **eudaimonic well-being** scale, Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons revealed that **self-connectedness** was significantly higher for **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.03, 4.51]) compared to both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.97, 3.45], $p < .001$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.14, 2.59], $p < .001$) (see: Table 6.22). And, **self-connectedness** was significantly higher for **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.97, 3.45]) compared to **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.14, 2.59], $p < .001$). After reading the article about Rohrwasser, participants with high **team identification** reported significantly higher **self-connectedness** – sense of values, sense of self, etc. – than **lower identified** participants in the sample, regardless of primed **moral reasoning** strategy.

Figure 6.10

Eudaimonic Well-Being Scores for Different Levels of Team Identification

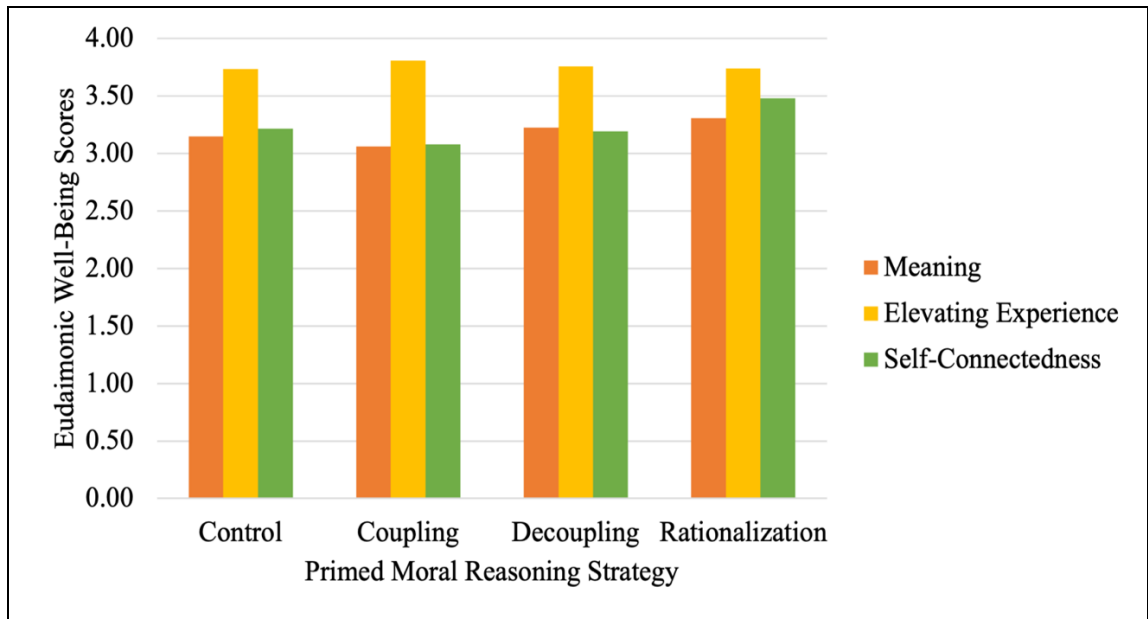


As for the main effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy, Figure 6.11 plots the four different **moral reasoning** conditions to test whether they differed in **meaning**, **elevating experience**, or **self-connectedness**. Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons

revealed no significant differences in **meaning**, **elevating experience**, or **self-connectedness** among primed moral reasoning strategies (see: Table 6.21).

Figure 6.11

Eudaimonic Well-Being Scores for Each Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy



Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were also examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **eudaimonic well-being** based on primed **moral reasoning** strategy (interaction effect). Mean differences can be seen in Table 6.23. Results showed that for participants in the **control group**, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.66, 4.64]) reported significantly higher **meaning** than both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.72, 3.30], $p < .05$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [1.71, 2.64], $p < .001$), and **moderately identified** fans were significantly higher than **low identified** fans ($p < .01$). Thus, with no primed moral reasoning, after reading the article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, highly identifying fans reported significantly higher meaning than fans with lower team identification than them.

For participants primed with the **moral rationalization** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.94, 4.90]) reported significantly higher **meaning** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.45, 3.50], $p < .001$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.00, 2.96], $p < .001$). **Low and moderately identified** fans were not significantly different. When primed with statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher meaning than fans with lower team identification than them.

For those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.50, 4.55]) reported significantly higher **meaning** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.71, 3.64], $p < .01$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.01, 3.03], $p < .001$). Again, low and moderately identified fans were not significantly different. As with the moral rationalization condition, then, when primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher meaning than fans with lower team identification than them.

Lastly, for those primed with the **moral coupling** strategy, **low identified** fans (95% CI [1.74, 2.61]) reported significantly lower **meaning** than both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.77, 3.83], $p < .01$) and **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.52, 4.53], $p < .001$). When primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should jointly evaluated, after reading the article, **low identifying** fans reported significantly lower meaning than fans with higher team identification than them.

The same post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **elevating experience** based on primed **moral reasoning** strategy. The only difference approaching significance was that for those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.76, 4.57]) reported marginally significantly higher **elevating experience** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [3.23, 3.94], $p = .09$). When primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported marginally higher elevating experience than fans with lower team identification than them.

Lastly, post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **self-connectedness** based on primed **moral reasoning** strategy. Results showed a similar trend as the results of **meaning**. Specifically, for participants in the **control group**, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.96, 4.89]) reported significantly higher **self-connectedness** than both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.70, 3.72], $p < .01$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [1.72, 2.60], $p < .001$), and **moderately identified** fans were significantly higher than **low identified** fans ($p < .01$). With no primed moral reasoning, then, after reading the article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, highly identifying fans reported significantly higher self-connectedness than fans with lower team identification than them.

For participants primed with the **moral rationalization** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [4.18, 5.09]) reported significantly higher **self-connectedness**

than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.58, 3.58], $p < .001$) and **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.20, 3.12], $p < .001$). As with **meaning**, **low and moderately identified** fans were not significantly different for this well-being scale. When primed with statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher self-connectedness than fans with lower team identification than them.

For those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.40, 4.40]) reported marginally significantly higher **self-connectedness** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.71, 3.59], $p = .08$) and significantly higher **self-connectedness** than **low identified** fans (95% CI [2.08, 3.06], $p < .001$). Again, **low and moderately identified** fans were not significantly different. As with the moral rationalization condition, then, when primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated, after reading the article, high identifying fans reported higher self-connectedness than fans with lower team identification than them.

For those primed with the **moral coupling** strategy, **low identified** fans (95% CI [1.64, 2.47]) reported significantly lower **self-connectedness** than both **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [2.90, 3.90], $p < .001$) and **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.65, 4.61], $p < .001$). Again, as with **meaning**, **moderately and highly identified** fans were not significantly different. When primed with statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should be jointly evaluated, after reading the article, **low identifying** fans reported significantly lower self-connectedness than fans with higher team identification than them.

Overall, these results show clearly that while the group means between the primed **moral reasoning** conditions did not differ significantly, both **meaning** and **self-connectedness** increase as **team identification** increases. For those in the **moral decoupling** or **moral rationalization** condition, **low** and **moderately identified** fans did not significantly differ in scores on those two **eudaimonic well-being** variables. Alternatively, for those in the **moral coupling** condition, **moderately** and **highly identified** fans did not significantly differ in scores on those two **eudaimonic well-being**. Additionally, for those in the **control** group, fans of all three levels of **team identification** differed significantly in their reported **meaning** and **self-connectedness**.

For **elevating experience**, only one comparison even approached significance: in the **moral decoupling** condition, **highly identified** fans were marginally significantly higher in **elevating experience** than **moderately identified** fans (and not statistically different than fans with low team identification).

Figures 6.12-6.14 show the general trends of the three **eudaimonic well-being** dependent variables among the **team identification** levels. Similarly to Figure 6.7 for **positive affect**, Figure 6.8 for **negative affect**, and Figure 6.9 for **carefreeness**, the trendlines for those in the **moral decoupling** and **moral rationalization** conditions are more exponential. Statistically, participants in the primed **moral reasoning** conditions generally did not significantly differ in **eudaimonic well-being** in any consistent way, rejecting Hypotheses 3b, 5b, and 7b. And, level of **team identification** did not moderate that relationship between **condition** and **eudaimonic well-being**, rejecting support for Hypotheses 4, 6, and 8.

Yet, level of participant **team identification** in both the **moral decoupling** and **moral rationalization** conditions did trend similarly for all three **hedonic well-being** variables, albeit non-significantly, just as they did for the three **hedonic well-being** variables. Qualitatively, these findings suggest that those in both the **moral rationalization** and **moral decoupling** conditions – the two moral reasoning strategies with the intention of lessening the identity threat – followed a similar pattern with regard to the relationship between **team identification** and all six variables measuring aspects of participants’ psychological health. So, had the experimental condition not failed, maybe there would be something here.

Further, higher **team identification** was associated with higher **meaning**, **elevating experience**, and **self-connectedness** – types of well-being not previous studied with regard to the relationship between **team identification** and **psychological health**.

Figure 6.12

Mean Scores of Meaning among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

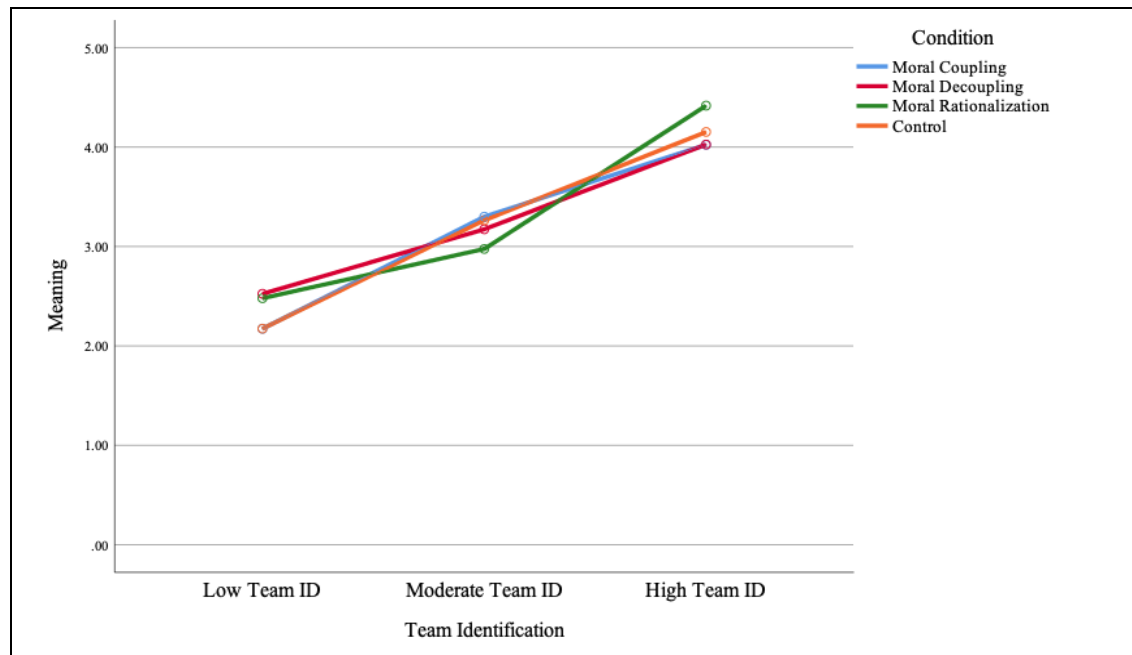


Figure 6.13

Mean Scores of Elevating Experience among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

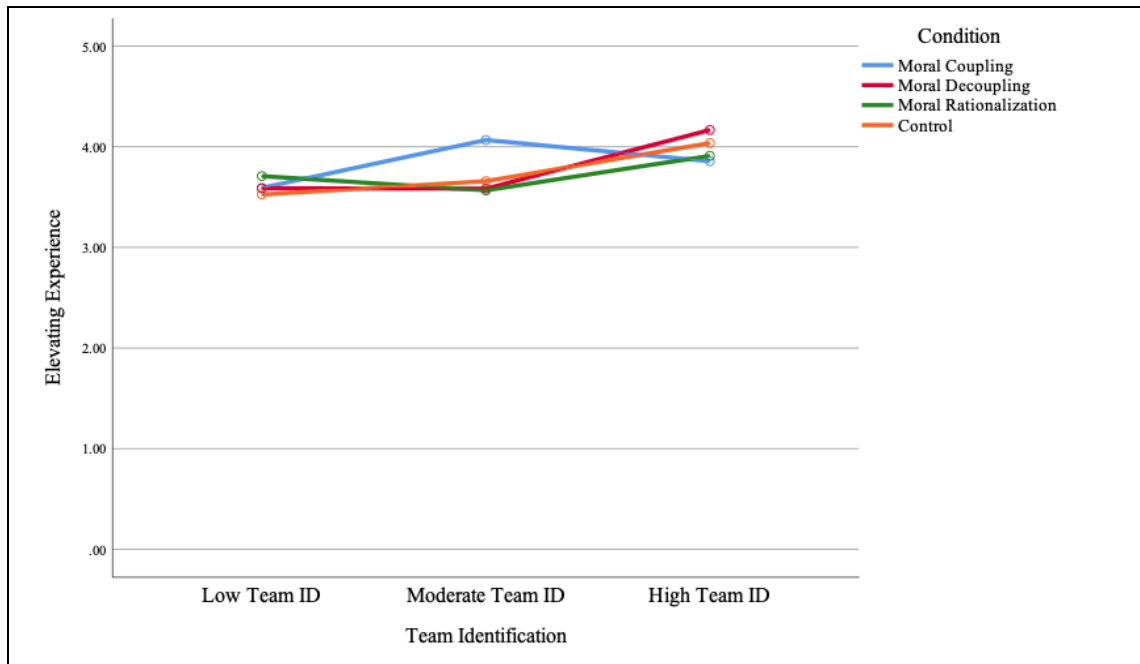
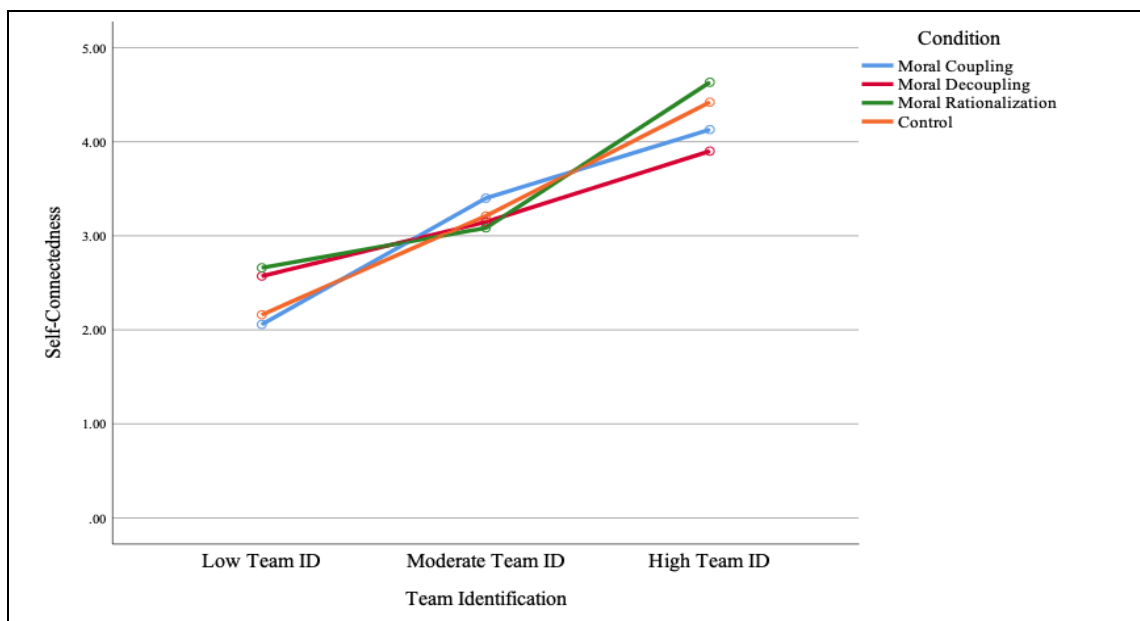


Figure 6.14

Mean Scores of Self-Connectedness among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy



Social Well-Being

Finally, an ANOVA examined whether participant **social well-being** would be influenced by being primed with different **moral reasoning** strategies. Specifically, it tested the predictions that when participants were presented with the article detailing Patriots' kicker Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs:

1. Those primed with the **moral decoupling** – statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should independently evaluated – would report more *positive social well-being* (H3c).
2. Those primed with the **moral rationalization** – statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of the player's controversial political beliefs – would report more *positive social well-being* (H5c).
3. Those primed with the **moral coupling** – statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly – would report more *negative social well-being* (H7c).

Further, the ANOVA also examined whether **team identification** with the Patriots would moderate and strengthen these relationships between primed **moral reasoning** strategy – **moral decoupling** (H4), **moral rationalization** (H6), and **moral coupling** (H8) – and **social well-being**, making them stronger. For this analysis, one dependent variable represented **social well-being: satisfaction with social life** ($\alpha = .93$). See Table 6.21 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy. See Table 6.22 for the means and standard deviations for the main effect of **team identification**. And, see Table 6.23 for the means and standard deviations for the interaction effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy and **team identification**.

In the resulting two-way ANOVA, there was *not* a significant main effect for trichotomized **team identification** on **satisfaction with social life**, ($F(2, 262) = 1.66, p = .19; \eta^2 = .01$). Likewise, there was not a significant main effect for primed **moral**

reasoning strategy on **satisfaction with social life**, $F(3, 262) = 1.01$, $p = .39$; $\eta^2 = .01$.

Thus H3c, H5c, and H7c are rejected: participants' **satisfaction with social life** was *not* influenced by being primed with statements suggesting **moral decoupling** (H3c), **moral rationalization** (H5c), or **moral coupling** (H7c), strategies used to cope with the potential identity threat from reading an article about Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs.

In addition, the interaction between trichotomized team identification and primed **moral reasoning** strategy on **satisfaction with social life** was not significant, $F(6, 262) = 1.77$, $p = .11$; $\eta^2 = .04$, failing to support H4, H6, and H8 for this type of well-being.

Thus, neither **team identification** nor being primed with a **moral reasoning** strategy significantly influenced participants' reported **social well-being** following exposure to the Rohrwasser article.

Figure 6.15 plots low, moderate, and highly **team identified** New England Patriot fans to show how they differed in **satisfaction with social life**. And for the main effect of primed **moral reasoning** strategy, Figure 6.16 plots the four different **moral reasoning** conditions to show how they differed (or didn't at all) in **satisfaction with social life**. Tukey post hoc multiple comparisons revealed no significant differences in **satisfaction with social life** among different levels of **team identification** (see: Table 6.22) nor among primed **moral reasoning** strategies (see: Table 6.21).

Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons were also examined for differences in the relationship between **team identification** and **satisfaction with social life** based on primed **moral reasoning** strategy (interaction effect). Mean differences can be seen in Table 6.23. Results showed only one difference

of note. As with the pairwise comparisons for both **positive affect** and **elevating experience**, for those primed with the **moral decoupling** strategy, **highly identified** fans (95% CI [3.93, 5.14]) reported marginally significantly higher **satisfaction with social life** than **moderately identified** fans (95% CI [3.10, 4.17], $p = .09$).

Overall, these results suggest that for this sample, unlike most of the other variables measuring psychological health, **team identification** generally did not influence **satisfaction with social life**. More in line were the results based on the moral reasoning conditions: **satisfaction with social life** was also not dependent upon being primed with a **moral reasoning** strategy. Similar to the results for both **positive affect** and **elevating experience**, highly identified fans primed with **moral decoupling** were only higher than **moderately identified** fans.

Figure 6.15

Satisfaction with Social Life Scores for Different Levels of Team Identification

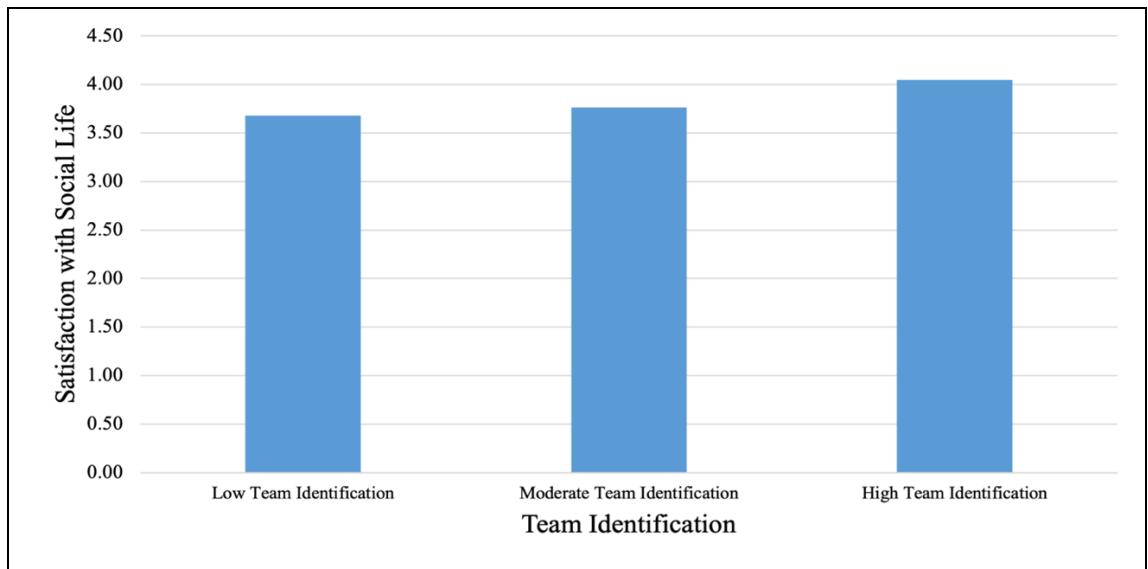


Figure 6.16

Satisfaction with Social Life Scores for Each Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

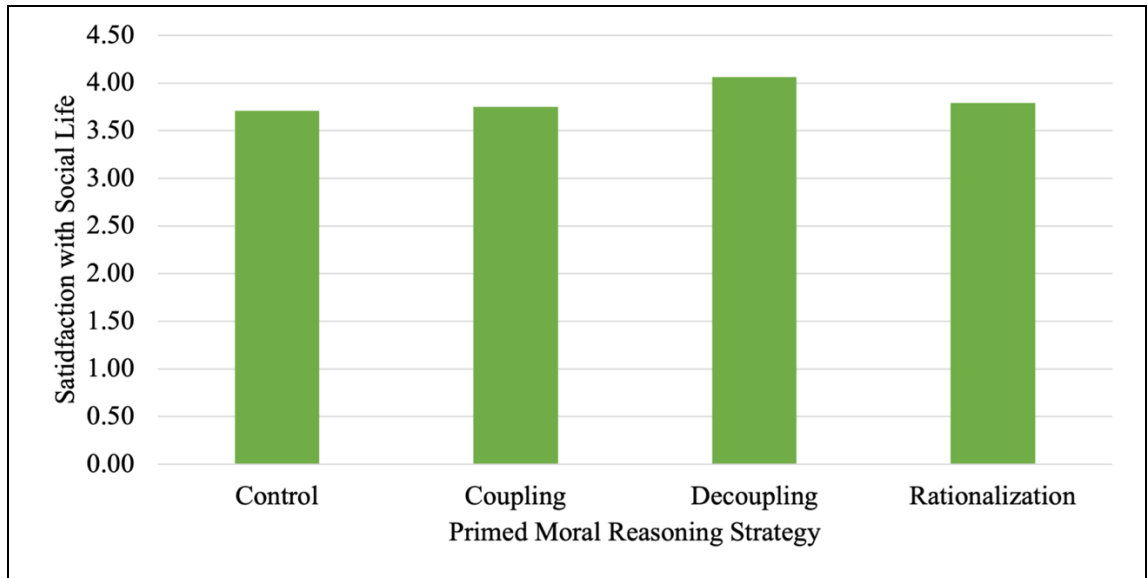


Figure 6.17 shows the general trend of **satisfaction with social life** among the **team identification** levels for each **moral reasoning** condition. As with the other six psychological health mean score graphs, an examination of the mean scores in this figure also suggests that those in both the **moral rationalization** and **moral decoupling** conditions – the moral reasoning strategies with the intention of lessening the identity threat – followed a similar pattern with regard to the relationship between **team identification** and **satisfaction with social life**.

Statistically, participants in the primed **moral reasoning** conditions generally did not significantly differ in **social well-being** in any consistent way, rejecting Hypotheses 3c, 5c, and 7c. And, level of **team identification** did not moderate that relationship between **condition** and **social well-being**, rejecting support for Hypotheses 4, 6, and 8.

Yet, level of participant **team identification** in both the **moral decoupling** and **moral rationalization** conditions did trend similarly for all **well-being** variables, albeit non-significantly.

Alternatively, higher **team identification** was *not* associated with higher **satisfaction with social life**, a type of well-being often found to be associated team identification. This suggests that the article about a player on their favorite team having controversial political beliefs may have reduced this relationship.

Figure 6.17

Mean Scores of Satisfaction with Social Life among Low, Moderate, and High Team Identification by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

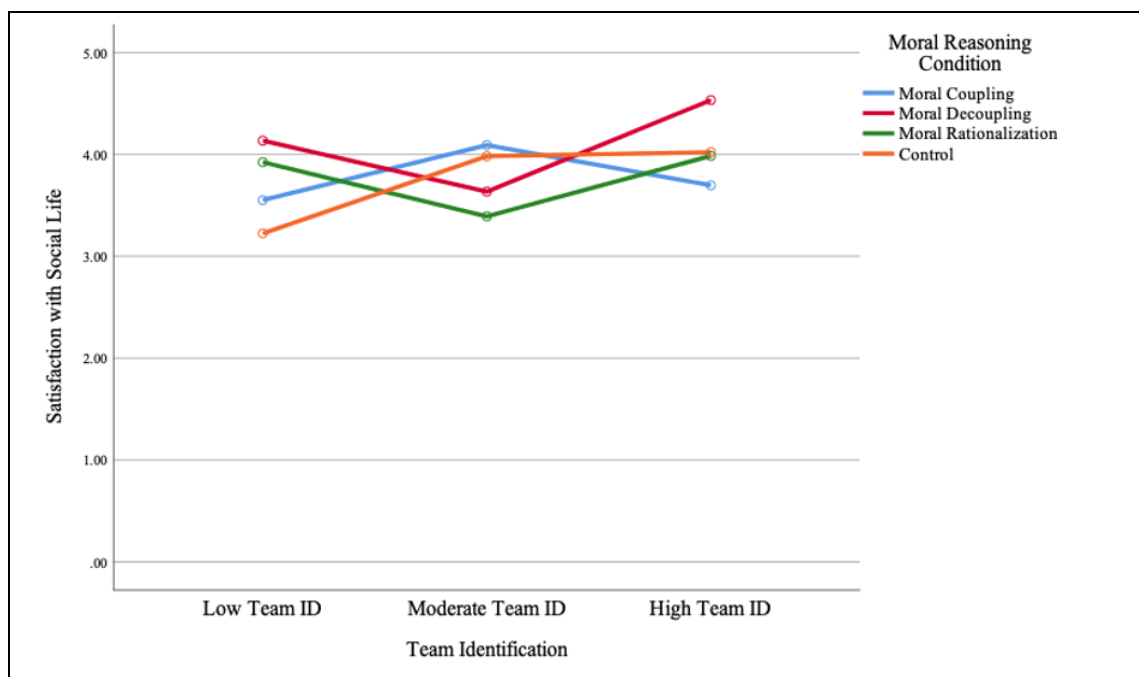


Table 6.21*Means and Standard Deviations for Psychological Health by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy*

	Control		Coupling		Decoupling		Rationalization		ANOVA	MANOVA
	<i>N</i> = 68		<i>N</i> = 71		<i>N</i> = 67		<i>N</i> = 68			
Sat. with Social Life	3.71	(1.57)	3.75	(1.26)	4.06	(1.27)	3.79	(1.45)	$F(3,262) = 1.01, p = .39, \eta^2 = .01$	-
Eud. Well-Being										
Meaning	3.15	(1.41)	3.06	(1.41)	3.22	(1.36)	3.31	(1.46)	$F(3,262) = 0.14, p = .94, \eta^2 = .00$	
Elevating	3.74	(1.04)	3.81	(0.91)	3.76	(0.90)	3.74	(0.83)	$F(3,262) = 0.20, p = .90, \eta^2 = .00$	$F(9,635.88) = 0.98, p = .49,$ Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$
Experience										
Self-Connectedness	3.22	(1.52)	3.08	(1.41)	3.19	(1.17)	3.48	(1.45)	$F(3,262) = 0.78, p = .51, \eta^2 = .01$	
Hed. Well-Being										
Positive Affect	4.27	(1.25)	4.37	(1.09)	4.36	(1.01)	4.27	(1.05)	$F(3,262) = 0.34, p = .80, \eta^2 = .00$	$F(9,632.92) = 1.55, p = .13,$ Wilks' $\Lambda = .95$
Negative Affect	3.31	(1.51)	3.17	(1.37)	3.15	(1.34)	3.27	(1.51)	$F(3,262) = 0.25, p = .86, \eta^2 = .00$	
Carefreeness	3.54	(1.20)	3.56	(1.02)	3.73 ^c	(1.05)	3.28 ^c	(1.13)	$F(3,262) = 2.45, p = .06, \eta^2 = .03$	

Note. *N* = 274. Means within the same row with matching superscripts are statistically significantly different, + = $p < .10$, a = $p < .05$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .001$.

Table 6.22*Means and Standard Deviations for Psychological Health by Level of Team Identification*

	Low		Moderate		High		ANOVA	MANOVA
	<i>N</i> = 100		<i>N</i> = 85		<i>N</i> = 89			
Sat. with Social Life	3.68	(1.35)	3.76	(1.43)	4.05	(1.40)	$F(2,262) = 1.66, p = .19, \eta^2 = .01$	-
Eud. Well-Being								
Meaning	2.32 ^c	(1.20)	3.18 ^c	(1.14)	4.16 ^c	(1.22)	$F(2,262) = 53.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$	
Elevating	3.60 ^a	(0.94)	3.71	(0.89)	3.99 ^a	(0.88)	$F(2,262) = 4.40, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$	$F(6,520) = 19.92, p < .001,$ Wilks' $\Lambda = .66$
Experience								
Self-Connectedness	2.34 ^c	(1.22)	3.21 ^c	(1.11)	4.29 ^c	(1.07)	$F(2,262) = 66.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$	
Hed. Well-Being								
Positive Affect	4.07 ^c	(1.20)	4.21 ^b	(1.03)	4.71 ^{c,b}	(0.93)	$F(2,262) = 8.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$	$F(6,520) = 5.29, p < .001,$ Wilks' $\Lambda = .89$
Negative Affect	3.23	(1.51)	3.39	(1.34)	3.07	(1.42)	$F(2,262) = 1.06, p = .35, \eta^2 = .01$	
Carefreeness	3.49	(1.16)	3.43	(1.12)	3.67	(1.03)	$F(2,262) = 1.21, p = .30, \eta^2 = .01$	

Note. *N* = 274. Means within the same row with matching superscripts are statistically significantly different, + = $p < .10$, a = $p < .05$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .001$. The Sports Spectator Identification Scale was equally separated into low, moderate, and high fandom based on means of respondents' SSIS.

Table 6.23*Means and Standard Deviations for Psychological Health by Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy and Level of Team Identification*

	Control						Moral Rationalization					
	Low		Moderate		High		Low		Moderate		High	
	<i>N</i> = 26		<i>N</i> = 19		<i>N</i> = 23		<i>N</i> = 24		<i>N</i> = 20		<i>N</i> = 24	
Satisfaction with Social Life	3.22	(1.28)	3.98	(1.77)	4.02	(1.62)	3.92	(1.50)	3.39	(1.48)	3.99	(1.37)
Eud. Well-Being												
Meaning	2.17 ^{b,c}	(1.23)	3.26 ^{b,a}	(1.32)	4.15 ^{c,a}	(0.86)	2.48 ^c	(1.17)	2.98 ^{c'}	(1.33)	4.42 ^{c,c'}	(1.15)
Elevating Experience	3.53	(1.03)	3.66	(1.30)	4.04	(0.75)	3.71	(0.96)	3.57	(0.82)	3.91	(0.67)
Self-Connectedness	2.16 ^{b,c}	(1.23)	3.21 ^{b,b'}	(1.39)	4.42 ^{b,c}	(0.93)	2.66 ^c	(1.30)	3.08 ^{c'}	(1.09)	4.63 ^{c,c'}	(1.11)
Hed. Well-Being												
Positive Affect	3.83 ^{+,+'}	(1.21)	4.58 ⁺	(1.33)	4.52 ^{+',}	(1.14)	4.15	(1.23)	3.90 ^a	(0.98)	4.70 ^a	(0.78)
Negative Affect	3.44	(1.60)	2.91	(3.49)	1.44	(1.44)	3.40	(1.51)	3.74 ⁺	(1.52)	2.76 ⁺	(1.42)
Carefreeness	3.25 ⁺	(1.20)	3.96 ⁺	(1.24)	3.53	(1.11)	3.42	(1.26)	2.88	(1.10)	3.48	(0.95)
	Moral Decoupling						Moral Coupling					
	Low		Moderate		High		Low		Moderate		High	
	<i>N</i> = 21		<i>N</i> = 26		<i>N</i> = 20		<i>N</i> = 29		<i>N</i> = 20		<i>N</i> = 22	
Satisfaction with Social Life	4.13	(1.32)	3.63 ⁺	(1.30)	4.53 ⁺	(1.04)	3.55	(1.21)	4.09	(1.13)	3.70	(1.43)
Eud. Well-Being												
Meaning	2.52 ^c	(1.21)	3.17 ^b	(1.07)	4.03 ^{b,c}	(1.48)	2.17 ^{b,c}	(1.20)	3.30 ^b	(0.85)	4.02 ^c	(1.38)
Elevating Experience	3.59	(0.83)	3.58 ⁺	(0.73)	4.17 ⁺	(1.07)	3.59	(0.96)	4.07	(0.62)	3.86	(1.04)
Self-Connectedness	2.57 ^c	(1.11)	3.15 ⁺	(0.98)	3.90 ^{c,+}	(1.13)	2.06 ^{c,c'}	(1.16)	3.40 ^c	(1.07)	4.13 ^{c'}	(1.03)
Hed. Well-Being												
Positive Affect	4.30	(1.02)	4.01 ^a	(0.93)	4.89 ^a	(0.90)	4.04 ^a	(1.32)	4.42	(0.76)	4.76 ^a	(0.90)
Negative Affect	3.06	(1.54)	3.53	(1.24)	2.74	(1.17)	3.01	(1.44)	3.33	(1.07)	3.24	(1.55)
Carefreeness	3.88	(1.00)	3.39	(1.12)	4.02	(0.91)	3.49	(1.12)	3.51	(0.76)	3.71	(1.11)

Note. *N* = 274. Means within the same row and Condition with matching superscripts are statistically significantly different, + = $p < .10$, a = $p < .05$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .001$. The Sports Spectator Identification Scale was separated into low, moderate, and high fandom based on means of respondents' SSIS.

7. DISCUSSION

On April 2, 2021, Georgia signed into law restrictive voting measures that, although legislators claimed were an attempt to limit (baseless) claims of fraud, many viewed as an attempt to directly restrict the voting capabilities of Black citizens. As a result of this legislation, Major League Baseball decided to relocate its 2021 All Star game from Atlanta to outside the state of Georgia, despite the threat of backlash from conservative fans disappointed with the move (Draper et al., 2021). With other states passing or planning to pass similar voting laws, on May 3, 2021, nine U.S. major sports players unions – including the players unions for the NBA, NFL, MLS, United States Women’s National Team, and WNBA – publicly declared their opposition to “any discriminatory legislation or measures that restrict or prevent any eligible voter from having an equal and fair opportunity to cast a ballot” (National Basketball Players Association, 2021, p. 1). With more and more athletes taking a public stand about contemporary social issues, and now their unions and organizations doing so officially, as well, it seems this topic of sports interacting with and players speaking out about politics has only been further amplified since the genesis of this dissertation. As such, understanding how fans feel about such things is even more important, as well.

This dissertation examined how New England Patriots fans’ team identification and political identity, in this case political ideology, influence how or if fans choose to morally reason when presented with a Patriots player’s controversial or objectionable political associations, and if that moral reasoning influences fans’ subsequent social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being. The Patriots player in question was rookie Justin Rohrwasser, who according to the article used in the research materials, had a tattoo of a

far-right militia group, posted contempt for kneeling during the national anthem on social media, and downplayed the severity of COVID-19.

The central questions asked here were: (1) After reading about a new Patriots player's connection to a far-right militia group, would there be differences in how/if fans attempt to cope with this potential identity threat to team identification (vis-à-vis moral reasoning) based on their political ideology? and (2) if fans are primed to use a moral reasoning coping mechanism, does that primed coping strategy affect their psychological health? The first study utilized a cross-sectional survey to address the first question, and the second study employed an experiment to address the second question. Overall, both team identification and political ideology were factors in fans' responses to reading about Rohrwasser's controversial or objectionable political associations.

Study 1 – Survey

The first study sought to determine if, when presented with a news article revealing rookie Patriots' kicker Justin Rohrwasser's militia group tattoo and questionable social media posts/likes, fans': (1) strength of identification with the Patriots would predict whether they used the coping strategies of moral coupling, moral coupling, and moral rationalization, and (2) would the relationship between team identification and those coping strategies be affected by their political ideology?

The Effect of Team Identification

The first set of hypotheses predicted that when presented with the article about Rohrwasser, Patriots fans' team identification would be positively associated with both moral decoupling (H1a) and moral rationalization (H1b) and negatively associated with moral coupling (H1c). The results revealed that team identification was significantly

associated with both moral decoupling (supporting Hypothesis 1a) and moral rationalization (supporting Hypothesis 1b). Holding all else constant, an increase in Patriot fandom predicted an increase in agreement with separating Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs from his ability as a football player. In other words, the more a respondent felt psychologically connected to the Patriots, the more they agreed that Rohrwasser's political beliefs should not influence people's judgments of his football ability. Likewise, holding all else constant, an increase in Patriot fandom predicted an increase in agreement with rationalizing or downplaying of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs. In other words, the more a respondent felt psychologically connected to the Patriots, the more they agreed that Rohrwasser's political beliefs should be downplayed and were not a big deal anyway.

These results support the data previously found regarding identification playing a factor in the degree to which consumers engage in moral reasoning strategies to cope with learning of public figures' transgressions (Haberstroh et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2016; Wang & Kim, 2019). The first implication of this is that reading about a player with controversial political associations or social media posts/likes elicits the fan responses of moral decoupling and/or moral rationalization, based on their strength of team identification, just as viewing images of a video of an athlete committing domestic assault (Lee et al., 2016). Research looking at how/if people use moral reasoning strategies in response to reading or being exposed to images of public figures' or companies' transgressions focused on just that: transgressions, like on-field doping (Lee & Kwak, 2015), a food company using child labor and pesticides (Haberstroh et al., 2017) or a football player's off-field violent episodes (Lee et al., 2016). Transgressions

are usually clear-cut in being immoral acts, and people will have an almost intuitive initial negative response to them (Haidt, 2001). As a result, people may feel the need to then morally reason or rationalize the transgression in order to feel better about their continued support (or rooting) for the transgressor (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). While political attitudes do not appear to be inherently immoral in the same way and transgressions, some researchers in moral psychology argue that morality is concerned with harm, rights, and justice, which would then deem conservative ideology (which is typically opposed to social justice initiatives dealing with those three tenets) immoral (Haidt & Graham, 2007). The findings in this dissertation suggest that for Patriots fans reading about Rohrwasser having political associations like a far-right militia group tattoo and social media posts/likes downplaying COVID-19, their strength of team identification informed whether they morally decoupled or rationalized in a similar trend to the previously stated transgressions. In the present research, the political associations were with a controversial right-wing militia group with ties to White supremacy movements/rallies, which could be perceived as inherently immoral (Haidt & Graham, 2007). These fans seem to want to rationalize if a player on their team had associations with such a group or separate those associations from the player's abilities potentially as a way to root for that player. Thus, they may feel the need to morally reason with supporting a person with immoral political beliefs or associations. Also, it should be noted that this data for the present study was collected in August 2020, prior to the riot at the U.S. Capital building on January 6th of 2021 caused by these types of militia groups (Barry et al., 2021). Even before that event, associations with those groups elicited

responses of moral decoupling and moral rationalization in Study 1 similarly to the responses of other unscrupulous off-field incidents in prior research.

Together, these results suggest that the more a fan feels a part of the team's group identity, the more they engage in moral reasoning strategies when presented with controversial, immoral, or objectionable behavior/information regarding a player on their favorite team. High-identified fans were more likely to cope with reading about the athlete's off-field concerns, just like high-identified fans are more likely to use coping strategies related to on-field team/player performance (Wann, 2006b), like digging one's heels into the perceived stereotypes regarding their team, like Bills fans body slamming tables (Spears et al., 1999) or overstating prior team achievements, wins, etc. (Wann & Dolan, 1994).

Beyond the scope of this study is knowing *why* team identification had that influence on if fans morally decoupled or morally rationalized. One possibility, however, is considering the Team Identification-Social Psychological Well-Being Model (TI-SPHM; Wann, 2006b), where fans can feel threats to the team identity from events like team losses. As a result of their team losing, fans may perceive the loss as having the potential to lower the status of that group identity and thus engage in various coping strategies to alleviate "the psychological distress caused by team-based identity threats" (Wann & James, 2019, p. 188). Perhaps the fans in this survey felt some level of threat to the status of their team identity based on the controversial or objectionable political associations of Rohrwasser and used moral decoupling and moral rationalization to cope with that threat.

Alternatively, when presented with the article about Rohrwasser, Patriots fans' team identification *was* associated with moral coupling, but *positively* (opposite of the hypothesized direction), rejecting Hypothesis 1c. Holding all else constant, an increase in team identification predicted an *increase* in agreement with statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly. In other words, the more a respondent felt psychologically connected to the Patriots, the more they agreed that Rohrwasser's political associations *should* be considered in people's judgments of his football ability. It should be noted, as will be discussed below, that this significant relationship became nonsignificant when the interaction of political ideology and team identification was added.

One would assume that if team identification was positively associated with moral decoupling (i.e., separating on- and off-field concerns), that team identification would be negatively associated with moral coupling, the theoretical opposite (*not* separating on- and off-field concerns), and this was not the case. This directly contradicts the previous studies in which moral coupling and decoupling acted as inverse moral reasoning choices including in response to on- versus off-field athlete transgressions (Lee & Kwak, 2015), severity of the transgression (Wang & Kim, 2019), as well as based on a person's team identification and contempt, anger, and disgust from an athlete's domestic assault (Lee et al., 2016) and the respondent's age generation (Choi & Lee, 2021).

Work on social identity theory and fans' ingroup bias effect (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2002) might suggest this result means that those strongly identifying as part of the team see Rohrwasser as a group member, and as a result, adjust their own attitudes to put that group member in a more positive light. The thinking could be that he is one of the team,

so he should be accepted for all that he is. Further, the timing of the survey was such that Rohrwasser had already received the backlash online and had the tattoo removed by the time people answered the questionnaire (a fact that was noted at the end of the article in the survey). Therefore, maybe that lessened the identity threat associated with the news story. However, that still does not explain team identification being positively associated with moral coupling simultaneously as decoupling and rationalization.

Another possibility is that agreement with moral coupling is less about coping with an identity threat than a belief about the nexus of politics and sports. In such a case, the current political landscape would suggest that those identifying as more liberal would be more likely to agree with jointly considering the player's political beliefs and his on-field ability. And, this actually does bear out when looking at the political affiliation variable in the model – Democrats in the sample reported significantly higher agreement with moral coupling statements than both Independents and Republicans. The real-world conversation is currently centered around whether or not political statements dealing with values like equality and anti-oppression (e.g., Black Lives Matter) should be a part of sports, which are values aligned with the moral foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity that more liberal people rely on (Haidt, 2012). Perhaps Democrats in the sample looked past the one-off example of Rohrwasser and stood by the overarching values of Democrats generally that athletes should be able to express and bring aware to the social justice issues that they wish.

Overall, two-thirds of this first set of results went as expected. The fact that as respondents reported stronger team identification with the Patriots their agreement with statements downplaying or disassociating the controversial political connections

increased makes sense from a social identity perspective suggesting fans will favor players from their favorite team, even when presented with transgressions of those athletes (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2002). This also supports the branch of team identification research dealing with identity threat coping strategies showing that people will morally decouple and/or rationalize – downplay, rationalize, or separate on-field performance from – immoral transgressions made by athletes (Lee et al., 2016; Lee & Kwak, 2015; Wann, 2006a). Yet, team identification also being positively associated with moral coupling (and thus not the inverse of moral decoupling) complicates this, as this contradicts nearly all other studies that explore decoupling and coupling as opposite constructs (Choi & Lee, 2021; Lee et al., 2016; Lee & Kwak, 2015; Wang & Kim, 2019). What these previous studies all have in common, however, is that they explore responses to athlete transgressions of various levels of severity. The results here suggest that a similar pattern emerges with regard to being exposed to an article about a player having controversial political associations, as well. However, the above hypotheses considered political party affiliation but did not consider political ideology, as the next set do.

The Effect of Political Ideology

The second set of hypotheses built on the first set and added political ideology into the mix. Specifically, the predictions were that when presented with the article about Rohrwasser, respondents' political ideology would moderate the relationship between their Patriots fandom and the outcome variables. As political ideology becomes more conservative, the relationships between team identification and moral decoupling (H2a), as well as between team identification and moral rationalization (H2b) would weaken,

and the relationship between team identification and moral coupling will strengthen (H2c).

Generally, the results supported both Hypothesis 2a and 2b: the main effects of team identification and political ideology as well as the interaction of the two were all at least marginally significant predictors of moral decoupling and moral rationalization. The more a respondent felt psychologically connected to the Patriots, the more they agreed that Rohrwasser's political beliefs should not influence people's judgments of his football ability or that his beliefs were not a big deal anyway (H1a and H1b). In addition, holding all else constant, a move towards a more conservative political ideology for respondents predicted an increase in agreement with moral decoupling and moral rationalization. In other words, the more a respondent identified conservatively, the more they agreed that Rohrwasser's political beliefs should not influence people's judgments of his football ability. Likewise, holding all else constant, a move towards a more conservative political ideology for respondents predicted an increase in agreement with the rationalizing or downplaying of Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs. However, these main effects were only significant when the interaction between team identification and political ideology was included in the model.

While the main effects of both team identification and political ideology were positively associated with moral decoupling and moral rationalization, the interaction of the two was also a significant predictor, but in the negative direction. In other words, as Patriots team identification increased, the likelihood of separating Rohrwasser's political beliefs from his football abilities or downplaying those beliefs increased. But, the increase was greater for more liberal respondents, suggesting that more liberal

respondents felt more of a need to use these moral reasoning strategies to cope with Rohrwasser's controversial (and more conservative) beliefs, which supports both Hypothesis 2a and 2b. These results provide further support for the notion that fans' interaction with a sports team can influence how fans receive negative information about the team or players, potentially counterarguing the information (Funk & Pritchard, 2006), belittling the source of the information (Kwak et al., 2010), or as in this case, engaging in moral rationalization or decoupling the objectionable information (Lee et al., 2016).

Based on the interaction results for moral decoupling, a few processes might be happening. First, for those with low team identification, when faced with a player on their team potentially having beliefs they may find controversial or objectionable, respondents reporting a more liberal ideology agreed *less* with moral decoupling than conservatives. Considering that more liberal respondents were *less* likely to agree to separate *conservative* beliefs from a player's on-field performance, this suggests that the notion that athletes should "stick to sports" could appear to be more based on some universally held belief system or moral foundation rather than the specific message, with more conservative-minded people wanting sports and politics separate (Haidt, 2012). Interestingly, these results run counter to those in Bhattacharjee and colleagues (2015) that suggested those identifying as Democrats were more willing to overlook a person's morally objectionable acts when considering their job achievements. In their study, they considered different immoral acts by a high school principal based on various moral foundations and found that Democrats even decoupled more than Republicans for acts related to fairness (including discriminating against minorities) (Bhattacharjee et al., 2015). One difference between that study and this study is that the notion of decoupling

itself is an established debate already in the discussion of sports and politics (stick to sports). Conversations about high school principals do not typically include whether they should discriminate or not. Second, Bhattacharjee and colleagues (2015) employed a fictional, politically-neutral transgressor, whereas this study used a nonfictional conservative player. Thus, knowing that the player was potentially a political ingroup or outgroup member could have informed the decoupling process for respondents more than it did in that study.

Social identity salience appears to be at play, where a person's various identities will be more prominent based on the situation (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Yes, more liberal respondents generally reported lower agreement with moral decoupling overall. However, team identification had a larger effect on decoupling than political ideology, and the interaction of the two decreased decoupling. The most die-hard fans, regardless of political ideology, reported similar levels of decoupling. It was respondents with low team identification that reported the largest differences in agreement with moral decoupling based on political ideology: low-identified very liberal and low-identified very conservative respondents had the biggest gap between their moral decoupling. In terms of group identity salience, the two identities in play here are political ideology and team identification. Looking at the graph in Figure 1, the most conservative respondents' levels of agreement with separating politics and sports were fairly unaffected by fandom. In this case, their political identity appears to have been more salient than their team identity. Perhaps the perception is that the belief in keeping politics out of sports is a strong attribute of the conservative identity for these respondents, and their team identity is less salient in a situation where that belief comes

into play. And, in the case of this study, the player's potential beliefs may have been perceived as more in line with their own group identity's beliefs, so there was less of a perceived threat to their team identity. Instead, it actually could have been perceived as an ingroup member of one group identity crossing over and being seen as an ingroup member of the other identity (i.e., Rohrwasser shares their conservative beliefs and plays for their team).

Alternatively, the most liberal respondents' levels of agreement with separating politics and sports were most affected by team identification. Using the logic in the previous paragraph, perhaps their political identity was less salient, and their team identity was more salient as the perception of their group membership to the team increased. When only considering political ideology, those identifying as more liberal agreed less with the idea that politics should be separate from sports. However, this was complicated by team identification, where the more they perceived themselves as part of the team group identity, the more that influenced their agreement with decoupling. In fact, Figure 6.2 suggests that the most liberal- and team-identifying respondents had the highest agreement with separating the player's politics from his football ability. This suggests that there could have been some threat to group identities happening. For highly team identified liberals, maybe the player's potential political beliefs were perceived as less in line with how they perceived the beliefs of their team to be, whereas this discrepancy was not an issue for those with low team identification. In other words, highly liberal die-hard fans may perceive that their two social groups overlap in attitudes, such that they perceive Patriots fans as having politically liberal attitudes. It would only become an issue if their perceived group identity with the team was strong enough that

having an outgroup member (conservative) seemingly a part of their other ingroup (team) that a threat to their team identity manifested. Like a neighbor's aggressive dog breaking his chain and going on people's properties: a homeowner feels more in danger the closer that dog gets to their property. In other words, because those identifying as liberal may be more likely to take issue with the political beliefs associated with Rohrwasser, being associated with him would be the threat to their own team identity. And, threats to one's social group can increase the salience of that group (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Rothgerber, 1997).

The moral rationalization analysis had similar results to the moral decoupling analysis. This is logical, as the two were highly correlated. One could even argue that the strategy of decoupling actually falls under the umbrella of being a rationalization technique. In other words, saying that politics should not be involved in sports anyway is a similar line of reasoning to saying that those controversial political beliefs are not as bad as some other horrible stuff people do. The distinction between moral decoupling and moral rationalization is a fairly new concept "whereas moral rationalization produces consumer support by reducing judgments of immorality, moral decoupling alters one's view of the association between immoral actions and performance in a given domain" (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013, p. 1168). Rationalization involves lessening or downplaying the issue at hand, whereas decoupling suggests that the issue, while bad, should be considered less within the context. And this difference has borne out in research. For example, decoupling, and not rationalization, was positively associated with performance evaluations of a hockey player who abused his wife (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). Similarly, while participants were almost equally likely to agree with statements of moral

decoupling and rationalizing regarding a player doping, moral decoupling was significantly higher than rationalization in the same study regarding a player committing financial fraud (Lee & Kwak, 2015). Therefore, both decoupling and rationalization make sense here. Decoupling is logical, because of the implication that a player's political beliefs/associations should not matter to their on-field performance. Likewise, rationalization is logical in that the issue at hand is not necessarily a transgression (as the other studies examined), it is political beliefs/associations.

Yet, the fact that rationalization is significant in the same pattern as decoupling has interesting implications for respondents identifying as more conservative. On a simple descriptive statistics level, mean agreement with moral rationalization statements was higher than agreement with moral decoupling. And the need to rationalize potentially suggests there is a need to cope (Lee et al., 2016). And why would one need to cope if they already have agreed that controversial political beliefs should not be considered in terms of football ability anyway? Future research could further examine these questions by potentially using two media stimuli: one of a player and their general political associations or attitudes, the other of a player making a political statement on the field. This could tap into whether on-field and off-field politics cause differing responses in moral reasoning, like in prior studies (e.g., Lee & Kwak, 2015).

Unlike when moral decoupling or moral rationalization were the dependent variables, the addition of political ideology in the regression model for moral coupling (both its main effect and its interaction with team identification) did not support Hypothesis H2c. Specifically, political ideology was not a significant moderator between team identification and agreement with moral coupling statements. Also, holding all else

constant, a respondent's reported political ideology was not associated with respondent agreement with statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly. The main effect for team identification was also not a significant predictor of moral coupling.

Continuing the discussion from above, the lack of significant relationship between team identification, political ideology, and moral coupling adds to the speculation that Rohrwasser's associations with a far-right militia group were either too extreme for even more conservative Patriots fans or not a big deal for even more liberal fans. Yet, the overall means of the two coupling statements – "People need to let their view of Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs affect their assessment of his football ability" and "It is important to take into account Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs when assessing his football ability" – had the two lowest overall means of all the moral reasoning statements. Thus, the moral coupling statements were generally the least-agreed-with statements. Perhaps this makes sense, considering a criterion to be in the study was being at least somewhat a Patriots fan. In other words, the Patriots fans who comprised the sample generally agreed less with the notion of having to hold a player on their team accountable for his beliefs than they did with the notions of rationalizing or decoupling.

Another possibility is that those in the sample felt that having a tattoo (or formerly having one) and some social media history connected to the 3 Percenters was not objectionable enough to warrant the athlete be held accountable for his beliefs within the realm of football. Indeed, moral coupling is typically reserved for when an action is deemed too immoral to not be considered when evaluating a person's job performance (Lee & Kwak, 2015). While knowing exactly how objectionable or immoral people may

find controversial political associations is outside the scope of this study, one way could be to measure people's emotional reactions (like contempt or anger, Lee et al., 2016) from being exposed to a player on their favorite team having controversial political associations or beliefs. This has been done before when looking at how consumer emotion informs the use of moral reasoning strategies in the case of Ray Rice's domestic assault (Lee et al., 2016). From the findings in their study, Lee et al. (2016) suggested that:

...deliberate and intentional moral reasoning strategy is a direct function of emotions experienced from scandal information. When negative moral emotion evoked from scandal information is high, consumers will likely activate MC reasoning, but when negative emotion is low, consumers will likely activate MD and MR reasoning (p. 186).

In other words, if people's reactions to reading about a player controversy are extremely negative, moral coupling would happen – the controversy was too much to overcome. However, if people's reactions to reading about a player controversy are less negative – say, when finding out about a player perhaps having political opinions that differ from their own – moral decoupling or moral rationalization would happen. The results in this study suggest just that. Perhaps learning that a player on one's favorite team has controversial political beliefs did not really elicit strong emotions. At the time, perhaps the majority of people in the sample thought of militia groups as fringe extremists that, if left alone, would not bother anyone. Maybe if this survey was administered after these groups rioted at/in the Capitol, the results would be different. People might react more strongly to Rohrwasser having the logo of a militia group tattooed on his arm. Thus, the findings here point to the notion that “emotional experience is heavily involved in moral behavior” (Teper et al., 2015, p. 9). And, Study 2 taps into some of this experience.

Other Findings

Effect of Age on Moral Reasoning Strategies and Team Identification.

Beyond team identification and political ideology, there were a few other significant relationships in the regression analyses worth discussing. First, holding all else constant, age was negatively associated with agreement with moral coupling statements. The older the respondent was, the less they agreed that Rohrwasser's political connections/beliefs should be jointly considered when talking about his on-field ability. Again, this could be older respondents harkening back to the "good ol' days" and the perception that politics have become too engrained within sports. This does fall in line with previous studies, one of which found that Baby Boomers reported significantly lower levels of moral coupling regarding a sport organization's misconduct compared to Millennials and Gen Z (Choi & Lee, 2021). Further, being younger was associated with approving of the politicization of sports (J. K. Kim et al., 2020). Yet, the opposite significant association with moral decoupling, which was found by Choi and Lee (2021), did not exist (nor was there an association with moral rationalization). Older participants did *not* agree *more* with statements suggesting that his political connections/beliefs should *not* be considered when talking about his on-field ability. Further, age was not correlated with political ideology, which suggests that older participants were not necessarily more conservative.

This suggests that moral coupling and moral decoupling are not necessarily directly opposite constructs. Indeed, the results above shows this to be the case, where they are not even negatively correlated. If considering the idea that emotion experience informs moral behavior (Teper et al., 2015), this could mean that older respondents had

less of a negative reaction to reading about Rohrwasser's controversial tattoo, thus agreeing less with the moral coupling statements. Older people have more life experience. Someone having opposing views may not be that big of a deal to them. In fact, when it comes to morality, Rawwas and Singhapakdi (1998) found that older people agree more with statements measuring relativism, including: "What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another"; "moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person"; and "Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes"(p. 37). When examined with the findings in this study, it is logical that older respondents would then be more likely to perceive Rohrwasser having a tattoo of a right-wing group to be his right that should not impact his career. Again, it would be interesting to question these respondents again in light of the Capitol Hill riots on January 6, 2021.

Age was also significantly correlated with the SSIS-R measuring team identification. As respondents got older, their team identification with the New England Patriots decreased. And it is worth noting that the SSIS-R questions were asked before respondents were exposed to the Rohrwasser article, so reading it did not influence team identification responses. A negative association between age and team identification is in line with some previous research (E. Kim & Gower, 2017, e.g.), but goes against others (Murrell & Dietz, 1992), although most research has found no relationship between age and team identification (e.g., Toder-Alon et al., 2019; Wann et al., 2001). One would think that older fans would have been fans of the Patriots for a longer time, and the longer a person is a fan of a team, the stronger their identification with the team may be (E. Kim

& Gower, 2017). However, a newer study suggests that as people age, their life satisfaction (and other psychological health variables) increases, thus lessening the need to belong to specific groups, including team fandom, which was found to decrease for older respondents in the sample (Gantz & Lewis, 2021). Also, just as female fans often need to negotiate their fandom among all the other responsibilities they have (being a mom, etc.) (Osborne & Coombs, 2013), perhaps older fans (with more responsibilities than younger fans) must do something similar. Yet, this does not explain why age was negatively associated with moral coupling, as well. In other words, why would someone who is older, and thus less worried about needing to be associated with a group, be less likely to engage in a strategy that could induce some identity threat to one of their groups? The answer to this is outside the scope of this study.

One potential explanation for the negative correlation between age and team identification could be the timing of answering the questionnaire. Data collection for this survey took place in August of 2020, a few months into the coronavirus global pandemic (Ghebreyesus, 2020). Perhaps such a catastrophic event caused older individuals to reassess the importance of the Patriots in their lives compared to other social groups. Yet, a study of soccer fans in Japan following the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 revealed age was positively associated with team identification with their hometown sports team. Does this mean Americans respond to global disasters differently than Japanese with regard to social groups? Or, does a global pandemic influence fandom differently than a natural disaster? These questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but could have merit in future studies.

Effect of Gender on Team Identification.

Another contrary (to other studies) result was that women in the sample had significantly higher team identification than men in Study 1. Gender is actually one of the most studied demographic traits regarding sports fandom, and as one would expect, most previous research on the subject finds that men report higher team identification with sports teams than women (Wann & James, 2019). The present results, though, were likely explained by the fact that a significantly higher percentage of women who comprised the sample were from New England. When comparing within only region, men and women in New England did not differ in team identification, nor did men and women outside of New England. This supports similar findings that gender differences in sports fandom are lessening (McGinnis et al., 2003). And, “as more women enter the realm of sport fandom, the perceptions of them as outsiders will diminish. Reductions in the marginalization of female fans should result in a more welcoming environment, paving the way for other women to become fans” (Wann & James, 2019, p. 9). However, others suggest that female fans have always been prominent. The difference is in how they choose to perform their fandom, as societal roles often inform that performance (Osborne & Coombs, 2016). Perhaps the results herein are a sign that the expected societal roles for gendered team identification are beginning to converge, where both men and women display their support for and root for their teams in similar ways to similar degrees.

Effect of Race/Ethnicity on Moral Reasoning and Team Identification.

One of the more puzzling results was that Black/African American respondents reported significantly higher agreement with moral rationalizing, moral decoupling, *and* moral coupling compared to White/Caucasian respondents, holding all else constant in

the analyses. And, Hispanic/Latinx respondents reported significantly lower agreement with moral rationalizing, moral decoupling, *and* moral coupling compared to White/Caucasian respondents.

One possibility is that moral reasoning actually differs by race. In a longitudinal survey of first-year undergraduate students at several colleges and universities across the United States, White/Caucasian students were more likely than students identifying as Black/African American to show gains between the Fall and Spring semesters in the Defining Issues Test, version 2 (DIT2; Rest et al., 1999), which presents participants with moral dilemmas and ideal reasoning responses in order to assess their level of development in moral judgement (Mayhew, 2012). Yet, this does not necessarily explain the greater agreement with all three moral reasoning strategies here, and the present sample was not made of only undergraduates.

Another possibility that seems more likely is that the contradictory results were caused by “straightlining,” where respondents answer the same response for all items in a scale to finish as quickly as possible (Y. Kim et al., 2019). There are some findings to possibly support the idea that the survey itself could influence responses based on race. For example, in an experiment of first-year students, survey fatigue – i.e., reduced response rates in subsequent surveys – affected non-White survey respondents more than White respondents, although only marginally significantly so and only in one of two experiments (Porter et al., 2004). This seems unlikely, as this was a single questionnaire with an average completion time of less than eleven minutes.

An alternative reason for potential straightlining could be that the Black/African American respondents perceived the person administering the questionnaire as White

(spoiler alert: he is) or that responding to questions about a White player on the Patriots was influential. Davis (1997) found that when Black/African American respondents were interviewed by a White interviewer (compared to a Black interviewer), they were more likely to give mutually contradictory favorable ratings on a feeling thermometer to both the Democratic and Republican party, as well as to Ronald Reagan and Jesse Jackson.

The author suggests that this occurs, because:

Symbolic of normal everyday interactions with Whites, African Americans are pressured by White interviewers to conceal their true political beliefs to the extent that they would disassociate themselves from Black issues, and alternatively, appear more docile and accommodating. Part of the evidence of this accommodating behavior among African Americans is the tendency to acquiesce or support mutually contradictory positions (Davis, 1997, p. 320).

Being that the primary subject of the questionnaire was a White football player, and that football (and sports more broadly) is often seen as promoting nationalism and dominant cultural ideologies (Schmidt et al., 2019), maybe a similar type of pressure can be felt by Black/African American respondents. It would be interesting to see if this actually is a pattern, using information about Black players with controversial political beliefs or that have made political statements as stimuli in subsequent studies. Further, a future direction would be to explore how people of different races or ethnicities respond to people engaged in other types of controversies.

In this survey, Black/African American Patriots fans also reported the highest average team identification compared to both White/Caucasian and Hispanic/Latinx fans. A review of the literature finds that not a single study of team identification bothered to see if there were differences in team identification by race or Latino/a ethnicity. This is apparently both the first and only time such findings have been discovered. If we try to tease this out, perhaps it has something to do with the number of Black athletes in the

NFL (58.9% of players in 2019; Lapchick, 2019). Pan and Zeng (2018) found that Black viewers reported higher parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with a Black athlete than with an Asian athlete. And, Asian viewers reported higher parasocial interaction with an Asian athlete than a Black athlete when spectating. Therefore, would seeing players more similar to oneself increase their team identification, via parasocial interaction, thus increasing perceived relationships and closeness with those players and amplifying identification with them? Perhaps future research should look at different sports and see if the difference in team identification by race varies across sports, where racial makeup differs. For example, would team identification be higher for Hispanics/Latinx with regards to a Major League Baseball team (in which 27.4% of players were Black in 2016; Armour & Levitt, 2016)?

Effect of Party Affiliation on Moral Reasoning and Team Identification.

In the regression analyses, when it came to political party affiliation, respondents that identified as Democrats in the sample were significantly more likely to agree with moral *coupling* compared to respondents identifying as either Republicans or Independent/Third Party/Other respondents, holding all else constant whereas political ideology was not significantly related to moral coupling in the same regression. Alternatively, for the regressions in which moral decoupling and moral rationalization were the dependent variables, political party affiliation was not statistically significant, whereas political ideology was significant for both decoupling and rationalization. These results were discussed above within the context of the hypothesis testing section but generally suggest political ideology and political party affiliation operated differently,

even though Democrat respondents were significantly more liberal than Republican respondents in the study.

In addition, Democrats reported significantly higher team identification than Independents in the sample. Yet, as with gender differences, these results are most likely explained by the significantly smaller percentage of Independent/Third Party/Other New Englanders who comprised the sample, as proximity to the team is one of the best predictors of strength of team identification (as discussed below).

Effect of Region on Team Identification.

As expected, those residing in New England reported significantly higher team identification with the New England Patriots than respondents in any other region. Local fans are often regarded as likely to have stronger team identification for the reason that team identification has been found to be associated with community identity, social capital, and connections (for example, number of friends that are also fans or a feeling of connectedness the community as a whole) (Theodorakis et al., 2012; Wann, Waddill, et al., 2011). These types of connections will be stronger for local fans and communities, as the team can be perceived as part of that local community (Heere & James, 2007b). Thus, part of being a New Englander means rooting for the New England Patriots.

Yet, recent findings suggest that the ease of access of sporting events could say otherwise. A study specifically about “displaced fans” – fans of a team that now reside in a different city not associated with their favorite team – found that distance and number of years displaced from a hometown team were not significantly associated with team identification (Collins et al., 2016). Instead, frequency of Internet streaming and social media use for activities involving the team were positively associated with team

identification, as was strength of hometown identity (Collins et al., 2016). As discussed in the literature review, these newer technologies allow for people to stay connected to communities from miles away and keep up-to-date on and discuss their favorite teams (Benigni et al., 2014; Filo et al., 2015; Gantz & Lewis, 2014; Sanderson, 2010). If considering the Collins et al. (2016) results here, these significant results regarding region would suggest that the respondents not residing in New England are not using the Internet or social media as much as they could to keep up on the Patriots.

Implications

The biggest takeaway from this study, Study 1, is that when Patriots fans were presented with an article describing a player on that team having controversial political associations, the strength of their team identification, political ideology, and the interaction of the two influenced the moral reasoning choices they made in response. This suggests that reading about the player could have induced a threat to their identity, which led to the need to cope with that threat by using moral reasoning strategies (Lee et al., 2016; Lee & Kwak, 2015). And that suggests that the level of needing to cope with that identity threat depends on both the salience of their team identification and their other group identity in question (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), in this case political identity. As with previous work dealing with troubling players (Lee et al., 2016), or generally with public personae (Wang & Kim, 2019), the stronger a person's identification with their team, the more likely they were to engage in those coping strategies, namely moral decoupling or rationalization. This is important, because it means people may perceive an ingroup member having political beliefs or associations as a potential problem to the extent that they feel the need to explain away or excuse the person associated with those

beliefs. This also implies that rooting for that athlete could be associated with some level of embarrassment or shame that the fan feels the need to lessen, although emotions were not directly measured in this study.

In addition, the interaction of team identification with political ideology has broader implications. The closer someone's political ideology was to conservatism, the more they agreed with moral decoupling and rationalization (suggesting a need to cope), as long as team identification was low. For strongly identified fans, there was virtually no difference in moral reasoning pertaining to political ideology. This means that strong team identification was more salient than people's political identity, regardless of their ideology, in determining agreement with the moral reasoning strategies. Strongly liberal die-hard fans were just as likely as strongly conservative die-hard fans to engage in the coping mechanism. Would the same hold true in the other direction? Would strongly conservative die-hard fans rationalize to a similar degree with strongly liberal die-hard fans if the player in question had an ANTIFA tattoo? These are important implications as the prevalence of racial justice and activism efforts continue to increase in American sports. On the one hand, some fans may threaten to stop watching or engaging with teams or leagues that support players making those types of political statements (or make those statements themselves). On the other hand, strongly identified fans may, instead, continue to support the leagues, teams, or players, even if they vehemently disagree with the messaging, by simply rationalizing or coping with the perceived identity threat. Thus, if more conservative, Republican, or other fans that disagree that systemic racism is a problem, the rationalizing and exposure to the team and players that

believe the opposite that those fans experience could eventually lead to at least an acceptance or tolerance of what the players believe in and their lived experiences.

These findings are also important for sports leagues themselves. Indeed, these results suggest that fans may feel the need to cope with a player on their favorite team having controversial political associations or beliefs. However, the fact that they are engaging in a coping mechanism means they are actively (or reactively) trying to balance their response to learning that information. They may initially feel a sense of betrayal, dislike, etc., but are using moral reasoning strategies to then rationalize accepting into or keeping that player in their in-group. If that is the case, sports fandom may be strong enough for the majority of people to look past the disagreement they may feel towards players' personal beliefs or political leanings, as long as the player in question is associated with a team that fans' identification with is strong. Teams and leagues may not need to react negatively towards players that actively make political statements, as they have been want to do in the past. Although some leagues seem to have figured this out, as more and more show support for their players' causes regarding racial injustice and racism. In fact, leagues have even begun to respond to regulations that their players perceive as detrimental to Black people. For example, Major League Baseball moved its All-Star game from the state of Georgia after the state instituted voting restrictions that many believe directly target Black voters (Draper et al., 2021).

In addition to sports leagues, these findings have implications for athletes that desire to make political statements or engage in activism. If the end goal is to persuade fans to see things from their perspective, appealing to the die-hard fans may be more fruitful, as they are the ones more likely to morally reason when presented with

potentially controversial information. From a prosocial perspective, for example, athletes donate substantial sums of money to charities all the time. They could utilize their fans to raise even more money. There are even documented accounts of this, such as NFL player J.J. Watt using social media to help raise relief money after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, which became “the largest crowdsourced fundraiser in history” (Kucek, 2020, p. 2). In terms of racial justice and activism, if players can target their fans directly – such as via Twitter as Watt did – they could reach fans that potentially disagree with them. Although the fans might still disagree, there could be some that morally reason to the point of accepting that the player has those ideas.

This notion of stronger identification possibly increasing persuasion could potentially be extended to any public persona. Perhaps level of parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with individuals could influence coping mechanisms similarly to team identification, where a perceived connection with the mediated persona becomes important.

Conclusion

The results of Study 1 suggest that, just as Wann (2006c) suggested, people will engage in coping strategies when they feel their team identification is being threatened to attempt to reestablish that social psychological well-being the team identification affords them. Further, as suggested by Lee and colleagues (2016), sports fans may engage in moral reasoning to alleviate that identity threat, and their strength of team identification will determine how much they morally reason and which types of moral reasoning they engage in. But, this depends on the salience of other group identities (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), such that political ideology may inform how much threat a fan perceives and was

shown to influence how much a fan agrees with moral decoupling and moral rationalization in Study 1. What the survey used in Study 1 cannot address, however, is if engaging in these moral reasoning strategies actually does replenish a person's psychological health that was affected by the perceived identity threat. In addition, it is not known if an actual identity threat was perceived. Study 1 simply suggests that people may cope in some way, not that coping has any sort of desired outcome. Thus, an experiment that attempts to compel a person to morally reason or not would be a way to test if moral reasoning is effective in informing a person's psychological well-being.

Study 2 – Experiment

Study 1 established that after reading about a new Patriots player's connection to a far-right militia group, there were differences in moral reasoning strategies that fans used, suggesting differences in how fans attempted to cope with this potential identity threat based on their team and political identities. What was outside the scope of that survey was if using moral reasoning strategies to cope would alleviate that threat and restore balance to one's psychological health. Study 2 explored this by utilizing experimental design with a new sample, where three groups were given a treatment meant to prime them with one of the moral reasoning strategies – moral coupling, moral decoupling, or moral rationalization – and one group was primed with an unrelated control. Then, after reading the article about Patriots' player Justin Rohrwasser referencing his far-right tattoo, political associations, and social media posts, the participants were then asked about their various types of well-being.

While these participants were a different sample than the survey above, another difference should be noted. This sample consisted of only people that considered

themselves Democrats, Independents, Third Party, or Other as well as moderate to strongly liberal. The intent of this was to position Rohrwasser's political associations in greater opposition to the participants' assumed political beliefs, thus making it more likely that the Patriots fans in the study would feel a threat to their team identity.

The Effect of Primed Moral Reasoning Strategy

Despite the assumption in prior research of dissonance or unpleasant states created when players on favorite teams transgress, this was the first study that attempted to see if the various types of moral reasoning responses – used to alleviate an identity threat to reestablish well-being – actually influenced participants' subsequent well-being in response to learning troubling information about an ingroup member. Overall, the results addressing the hypotheses were disappointing. Specifically, being primed with statements suggesting moral decoupling – statements suggesting Rohrwasser's political beliefs and on-field performance should be independently evaluated – had no significant effect on participant hedonic well-being (H3a), eudaimonic well-being (H3b), or social well-being (H3c). Similarly, being primed with statements suggesting moral rationalization – statements suggesting the rationalizing or downplaying of the player's controversial political beliefs – had no significant effect on participant hedonic well-being (H5a), eudaimonic well-being (H5b), or social well-being (H5c). And, being primed with statements suggesting moral coupling – statements suggesting that political beliefs and on-field performance should be evaluated jointly – also had no significant effect on participant hedonic well-being (H7a), eudaimonic well-being (H7b), or social well-being (H7c). And no conditions had significantly different outcomes from the control group.

In addition, the interaction of team identification with each condition (H4, H6, H8) had no significant effect on participant hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being, or social well-being. Therefore, a person's team identification had no bearing on how being primed with a moral reasoning strategy influenced psychological health.

The rejection of all the above hypotheses would seem to suggest one of three things. First, the initial reaction to these findings would be that it seems the experimental manipulation was not effective. Perhaps the priming in each of the three treatment groups was not strong enough for participants to then engage in that same strategy after reading about Rohrwasser. However, the same method of priming was employed by others with much success, albeit in exploring the outcome of continued support for the player and using a player engaging in an immoral act as the transgression and not political associations (see: Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015). Thus, unless Patriots fans are less prone to experimental manipulation than other football fans, something else is at play.

Secondly, Liberals might just be more open to the mixing of sports and politics in general and therefore did not need to engage in moral reasoning upon reading the news story about Rohrwasser. One previous study did find that being more liberal was associated with approving of the politicization of sports (J. K. Kim et al., 2020). Indeed, one would imagine that using a media stimulus that was of a player Taking-A-Knee instead, there would be minimal mental anguish in this sample given that only those identifying as independents or Democrats were included. Perhaps that built in moral coupling has come to be perceived as a characteristic of the identity of a more liberal person. Therefore, simply being presented with the statements that argue for decoupling

or rationalization could actually be seen as a threat to their identity. The results from the survey in Study 1 seem to be in favor of this interpretation. The more conservative the respondent, the more likely they were to agree with moral decoupling and rationalization statements, whereas Republicans were significantly more likely to couple than Democrats. Moral decoupling and rationalization participants may have coped with rooting for the player (restore well-being) but then felt threatened from having done so (reduce well-being), returning to their starting levels. Moral coupling participants may not have coped with rooting for the player (reduce well-being) but then felt better about having coupled as is perceived to be a part of the liberal identity (restore well-being), returning to their starting levels.

A third possibility is that reading the article was not a strong enough threat to participant identity, such that their well-being, as it is related to the social group in question, was not affected by it. Fans could still feel good about their own political identity while also rooting for a player with a different political identity, regardless of if they use a moral reasoning strategy. This could mean that there is not enough cognitive dissonance stemming from a person's competing group identities to affect their mental health. Perhaps rooting for a player with political associations different from one's own (even vehemently so) is not enough of a threat to political identity to influence well-being.

This has implications for anyone studying the role of politics in the non-political realm, such as entertainment or sports. It suggests there could be a level of acceptance of opposing viewpoints by a spectator or audience member. Or at the very least, there may not be a decrease in well-being. For persuasion, research has shown that a main

impediment to attitude change is counterarguing (Festinger & Maccoby, 1964; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However as discussed in Chapter 3, there is potential for athletes that people root for to act as a cross-cutting exposure, thus increasing benevolence (Mutz, 2006). Plus, fan support for LGBT rights was found to be higher if a player on their favorite team support LGBT rights (Harrison & Michelson, 2017). The results of Study 2 contribute to this discussion in that reading about a player on a team that one roots for with objectionable political associations may not affect their well-being, regardless of team identification or an ideology that would suggest disagreement with the political associations.

In addition, narratives related to sports can also reduce counterarguing and evoke negative emotions. Tallapragada and Cranmer (Tallapragada & Cranmer, 2020) found that parents of middle and high school football players, when presented with a story about a high school football player that suffered a concussion and had detrimental effects from it, identified with the source of the narrative (from either the player or the player's parent's perspective), which was negatively associated with counterarguing. In addition, the narrative conditions evoked greater negative emotions from participants compared to the control condition, and negative emotions were positively associated with intentions to assess the risk and allowing their child to play football in the following season (Tallapragada & Cranmer, 2020). It stands to reason, then, that if the mediated persona is seen as an ingroup member on one's favorite sports team but is not perceived as a strong enough threat to elicit negative emotions via a coping mechanism, that identification could occur, and the player's political opinions or associations could be met with less counterarguing.

This would also be an important finding for athletes and organizations themselves. Professional athletes are some of the most famous and popular people in the world, as well as most influential, as evidenced by the fact that there were eight of them in *Time*'s Most Influential People of 2020 list ("Time 100 Most Influential People 2020," 2020). In terms of team sports, if fans identify with a player's team strongly enough, it could mean that the platform that players have to reach fans is an inviting one for said fans making them more open to influence (Meân, 2014). In other words, players have a huge audience online with which to promote not just their brand and image (Delia et al., 2017), but also social issues and injustice, and they do so (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Galily, 2019). Through this messaging, their clout and favor with fans may be able to reduce counterarguing to their messages of politics or activism. However, the message must still be perceived as benign enough to the fan that it does not elicit strong negative emotions or that a threat to their own political identity is not felt.

As a fourth possibility, maybe the primed moral reasoning strategy did affect the participants, lowering their psychological health, but something else negated the lower level and raised it back to pre-test levels. Perhaps participants coupled, decoupled, or rationalized, but the process of coping with a perceived threat in such a way actually felt like a relief from the group itself. In describing the process behind the concept called Temporarily expanding the boundaries of the self (TEBOTS), Slater et al. (2014), outline the desire people may have to expand their own identities:

A given personal and social identity is inherently confining even when it is relatively comfortable. The personal/social self may be tarnished or it may be gilded, but it remains something of a cage. This experience of limitation, we suggest, is so familiar and so universal that it may escape conscious awareness. Nonetheless, temporary release from the constraint of personal identity is so widely desired and pursued that it may be considered a fundamental human need

or desire. Or, if one prefers, such a drive toward temporary release from personal identity may be considered an extension of classic drives for agency, autonomy, and relatedness—extended because, within the bounds of the personal self, such drives are ultimately to some degree frustrated (Slater et al., 2014, p. 442).

What if this is occurring? Perhaps the nature of answering an anonymous questionnaire online allowed the participants to feel more comfortable and less restrained by their social identities. Thus, feeling positive towards a player on a team they root for allowed them to temporarily escape their political identity and feel free from the shackles described by Slater et al. (2014).

Overall, the most logical reason for the lack of support for the proposed hypotheses is that the article about Justin Rohrwasser was not extreme enough of a threat to the participants' political identity to influence their hedonic, eudemonic, or social well-being, even if they were primed with a moral reasoning strategy. While the implications of this are outlined above, these findings – along with the below findings – also suggest that there is a strong connection between team identification and psychological health, just not social psychological health, the type usually associated with it.

The Overall Effect of Team Identification on Psychological Health

Daniel Wann first developed the TI-SPHM under the assumption that team identification would impact social well-being more than other types of well-being due to sports fandom facilitating social connections with other fans (Wann, 2006b; Wann & James, 2019). Yet, the results of this experiment somewhat refuted that idea. Generally, both the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being scales were associated with team identification, whereas the social well-being scale was not.

Positive Affect, Negative Affect, and Carefreeness.

For all participants in the sample, team identification was associated with positive affect, but not negative affect nor carefreeness. The stronger one's team identification, the more they reported feelings of happiness, joy, pleased, enjoyment, and fun. These are all fairly obvious responses, and while previous studies have found similar connections between sport fandom and emotions (Wann et al., 1994; Wann & Branscombe, 1992; Wann & James, 2019), none have specifically looked at positive emotions in the context of general team identification. Most of the studies that do explore positive emotions (and negative, for that matter) in the context of sports do so vis-à-vis sports spectating (e.g., Wann et al., 1994). Generally, sports spectating can feel suspenseful, which leads to enjoyment (Bryant et al., 1982; Bryant & Raney, 2000). This relationship with suspense can be moderated by team identification. For low identifying fans, reported happiness when reminiscing about an exciting loss was no different than happiness when thinking about a boring win. But, boring wins produced significantly higher happiness for highly identified fans (Jang et al., 2018).

Relatedly, as suggested by the disposition theory of sports spectatorship, people enjoy seeing their team win, as well as seeing a rival team lose, producing positive affect, whereas seeing one's team lose can produce sadness (Sapolsky, 1980; Zillmann et al., 1989). And, more relevant to this dissertation, team identification can also moderate this relationship, with stronger team identification resulting in greater enjoyment when one's team wins: "It appears that fans who view their association with a team as a more important facet of their self-identity tend to experience greater personal joy and seek

greater individual association with the team when it experiences successful outcomes” (Madrigal, 1995, p. 215).

The difference in this study is in looking at positive affect after reading an article about a team member, as opposed to a game. Based on these results, there is no way to infer whether reading the article about Rohrwasser’s political associations alone influenced participant well-being, let alone positive affect. But, these results do suggest that the more someone identifies as a fan of the Patriots, the greater their reported positive affect, which supports the few other studies that assesses general association with a team and positive feelings. For example, there were significant relationships between general team involvement and statements like “When I think of the [Favourite Team], I feel happy” or “delighted” (Dwyer et al., 2015, p. 574).

Interestingly, however, team identification was not associated with negative affect, or reportedly feeling depressed/blue, unhappy, frustrated, angry/hostile, or worried/anxious. Participants with high and low team identification with the Patriots did not differ in these negative feelings. This is notable, because just as sports fans report feeling greater positive emotions following victories, they also report greater negative feelings after losses, like disappointment (Rainey et al., 2009, 2011), anger (Sloan, 1989), and frustration (Wann et al., 1994). And, team identification also amplifies these feelings, i.e., even stronger negative affect for highly identified fans (Sloan, 1989; Wann et al., 1994). What this suggests is that while team identification amplifies positive and negative emotions related to the outcome of a game, it might not do so similarly outside of that environment. At the very least, in an environment when exposed to an article about a

team member's controversial political associations, participants' team identification only affected positive affect and not negative affect.

Similarly to the results of negative affect, team identification was not associated with carefreeness, or reportedly feeling free of concerns, detached from one's troubles, easygoing, lighthearted, or happy-go-lucky. And, these results may actually give some understanding to the discrepancies between positive and negative affect. The items included in the carefreeness scale developed by Huta and Ryan (2010) seem to be closer to the inverse of the negative affect items than the positive affect items are. And, carefreeness ($r = -.74$) is slightly more strongly correlated to negative affect than positive affect is ($r = -.72$). Team identification being associated with positive affect while not associated with negative affect or carefreeness makes more sense in light of these patterns.

To date, there are no studies exploring the relationship between carefreeness and sports, sports fans, or social identity theory. The only study on Google scholar that even mentions carefreeness and group identity together is a thesis that looks at carefreeness as a perceived attribute of a social group and not an outcome of the group (Regas, 2016). This dissertation provides some initial evidence that trait-level carefreeness might not be associated with perceived membership in social groups or, at least, being a fan of a sports team. There could be some level of state-level carefreeness hypothetically. For example, if a team qualifies for the playoffs with several games remaining in the regular season, the fans of that team might be alleviated from some of their worries associated with making the playoffs. That would also make subsequent games less stressful and less suspenseful, meaning less of an impact on positive and negative affect, as well. As has

been done with positive and negative affect, then, future work could look at carefreeness as an outcome from spectating sports.

Taking all three hedonic well-being measures into account, after reading about a Patriots player's controversial political associations, Patriots fans' level of identification with the team informed their positive affect but not negative affect or carefreeness. This suggests that the social process of identifying with a team, in general, could increase feelings of joy, happiness, etc. However, identifying with a team might not decrease negative affect, or feelings of frustration, anger/hostility, etc., and might not increase feelings of carefreeness or lightheartedness. It could be that, in general, the type of psychological health that is associated with team identification is reserved primarily for social psychological health or well-being. However, as will be shown now, many of the non-hedonic types of well-being that were measured in this study did in fact relate to identification with the New England Patriots.

Meaning, Elevating Experience, and Self-Connectedness.

For all participants in the sample, regardless of experimental condition, team identification was associated with all three eudaimonic well-being variables. First, the stronger one's team identification, the more they reported feelings of meaning – feeling meaningful and valuable. This suggests that identifying as a fan of the Patriots can directly contribute to “a sense that one's actions and experiences have personal significance, are valuable, and are important in some broader context” (Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 758). This complements previous research, where team identification was only associated with meaning in life *indirectly* through sense of belonging (Wann et al., 2017). However, Wann and colleagues (2017) used a different measure – the Presence of

Meaning subscale from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, which measures “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence” (Steger et al., 2006, p. 81). Although similar and correlated (Huta & Ryan, 2010), the former measures “the feeling of meaning that can result from certain ways of living, as distinct from meaning as a way of living (i.e., having a purpose, and having a meaning framework for understanding the events of the world)” (Huta, 2013, p. 141). Thus, considering the Wann and colleagues (2017) effect of team identification on social well-being indirectly through sense of belonging, it makes sense that team identification would impact the type of meaning measured in this experiment, where feeling a part of a fanbase can contribute to one’s sense of meaning and value.

One additional interesting note is that there is an established correlation in the literature between the Presence of Meaning subscale and intrinsic religiosity – engaging in religious acts/behaviors for the sake of faith – but not with extrinsic religiosity – using religion as an instrumental means to other ends” (Steger et al., 2006, p. 82). The more personal forms of religious practice were associated with presence of meaning while the more performative forms of religious practice were not. Making the connection to sports fandom, one of the critiques of the Sports Spectator Identification Scale is that some of the questions it asks to measure team identification do not take context into account (Osborne & Coombs, 2013). For example, take:

“How often do you display [your] team’s name or insignia at your work place, where you live, or on your clothing?” At first glance, this may seem like a clear indicator of one’s identification with a sport or team. Our ethnographic research on fans, however, suggests that the frequency with which one displays a team insignia may be confounded by other identities such as race, gender or sexual orientation (Osborne & Coombs, 2013, p. 674).

In other words, fandom can be seen as a performative process. Currently, there is no study that has divided team identification into intrinsic and extrinsic fandom. However, the reasons people become fans of certain team are sometimes similar to the reasons people are a certain faith – namely, the influence of their family (Koch & Wann, 2013; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). If the practice of religion can differentially affect a person whether they are behaving for themselves or others, perhaps the same could be true for sports spectatorship and fandom. On the one hand, the obvious observation would be that sports fandom is mostly performative, often involving clothing, cheering, going to games, reading about the team, etc., and that the SSIS-R would tap into that more extrinsic aspect of doing so. Yet, team identification in the current study was associated specifically with meaning, which may suggest a more intrinsic, personal fandom. Thus, there should be an exploration of how the actual performance of the items on the Sports Spectator Identification Scale-Revised might differ in from the intent to perform these actions.

In addition to the direct effect on meaning, team identification was also associated with elevating experience. The stronger one's team identification, the more they reported feelings of awe, deep appreciation, moral elevation, inspiration, and being part of something greater than themselves. This is the first such relationship explored between team identification and elevating experience. Although, the last item there – being part of something greater than themselves – definitively aligns with some previous findings related to the improvement of collective psychological health that residents of cities experience after their teams win championships, especially in the wake of natural disasters (E. B. Burns, 2014; Erlichman & Harrison, 2019; Inoue et al., 2015). While those studies all suggest an increase in well-being following victories, the results here

suggest that simply identifying as a fan of a team can improve elevating experience. Perhaps simply answering questions about one's team identification actually primed that group identity to then influence well-being.

This notion that team identification may relate directly to elevating experience is important because of the potential for prosocial outcomes. For example, feelings of elevation that stem from entertainment consumption have been found to be associated with motivations to promote moral virtues like “wanting to be a better person” and “wanting to do good things for others” (Oliver et al., 2012, p. 371). Then, if a fan's level of team identification does influence their elevating experience, there is the potential that such elevation can motivate that person's morality. This is the case with the study about Dwyane Wade, in which highly identified fans (with the player) were equally motivated to support Wade's charitable foundation regardless of the type of messaging shown (hedonic or eudaimonic messaging) through the mediating effect of feelings of elevation (Jang et al., 2019). Further, inspiring videos have been found to elicit feelings of being moved, compassion, inspiration, etc., which in turn is related to feelings of self-humanity overlap, shared human goodness, and connection with diverse others (Oliver et al., 2015). Taken together, those findings and the results herein suggest that elevating experience could be a function of identification, as well as mediate the relationship between identification and subsequent motivation to engage in prosocial acts. This could mean that popular athletes do have the potential to motivate fans to participatory action, especially if their messaging elicits feelings of elevation. It is worth exploring if such a phenomenon exists.

As with both meaning and elevating experience, there was a direct effect of team identification on self-connectedness. The stronger one's team identification, the more they reported that rooting for the Patriots made them feel connected with themselves, know who they are, become aware of how they feel and what matters to them, and have a clear sense of their values. Of all of the concepts used in this experiment for studying well-being, self-connectedness is clearly the one most concerned with self-identity and identity achievement (Huta, 2013). It is interesting that self-connectedness is also associated with team identification, as measure of a specific social identity, which has also been found to relate to social connectedness, i.e. how much a person feels closeness and belonging in their social environment (Wann, Waddill, et al., 2011).

The findings here suggest that a person's perceived identity associated with being a fan of a sports team informs their self-identity, as well. In other words, they feel like a part of a sports fan community, as well as a sports fan themselves. This seems quite congruent as people often will begin to act and think in ways that they perceive as being customary for the groups to which they belong (Rees et al., 2015). Yet, this positive relationship of team identification and self-connectedness means team identification goes even deeper and may influence fans' sense of values and what matters to them.

Thus, it would be worth exploring in the future what the causal relationship is between team identification and self-connectedness. The direction that is probably more assumed would be that team identification informs one's subsequent self-connectedness. As a person becomes more connected to a sports team, their identification would move from more hedonic or pleasurable to more central of their own self-image (Doyle et al., 2013). Alternatively, perhaps knowing one's own values or what is important to oneself

causes a person to then seek a specific sport or team to become a fan of. For example, parents often gift their children with clothing and other memorabilia associated with the parents' favorite teams. They also often watch and root for said teams, possibly with their children observing them. Maybe doing so has some input when the child begins to develop and perceive their own identity and what they value via social learning theory (Bandura, 1989). Having been socialized by their parents, they may feel that rooting for or being a fan of the same team their parents happen to root for is what matters to them. Then, self-connectedness would inform the beginning of their team identification.

Differences in Personal Well-Being.

Overall, team identification had a direct effect on all three eudaimonic well-being scales in the experiment (meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness), but only had a direct effect on one of the three hedonic well-being scales (positive affect). This trend seems logical and was suggested in the literature review (although not formally hypothesized). As mentioned, sports spectating has been found to influence more ephemeral things like affect and other hedonic well-being concepts (see: Bryant et al., 1982; Bryant & Raney, 2000; Rainey et al., 2009, 2011; Sloan, 1989; Wann et al., 1994). It makes sense, then, that team identification in and of itself would be more related to more long-term eudaimonic well-being concepts like meaning and self-connectedness, similarly to how movies can elicit negative emotions while also making people feel appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). However, as will be discussed below, there are some interesting connections related to time and team success that may suggest otherwise.

The exploration of the relationship between these well-being concepts studied here and team identification is relatively novel, and these results of Study 2 suggest that team identification does influence fans' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. However, given the possibility of spurious relationships, there should be some caution, as participants were exposed to the article about Rohrwasser and his controversial or objectionable political associations prior to answering the questions about their well-being. Thus, it is important to note that there could be a mediating variable between team identification and the well-being measured here. However, these results ultimately do help further establish the relationship with the much lesser-studied outcomes of personal well-being by showing the possibility that team identification may be associated with more than simply social well-being (Wann & James, 2019).

Satisfaction with Social Life.

Finally, regardless of moral reasoning condition, team identification did not directly affect, nor was it associated with, satisfaction with social life (SSLS). Participants' team identification had no bearing on them reporting that their social life was excellent, satisfying, close to their ideal, or giving them the important things they want, or that they would not change anything about their social life. This lack of relationship is surprising considering the myriad earlier studies finding such a relationship that also used the SSLS (Phua, 2012; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Wann et al., 2015; etc. Wann, Martin, et al., 2008). Not to mention, the model used as a foundation for this experiment – the Team Identification-Psychological Social Well-Being Model (Wann, 2006b) literally has social well-being in the title. “The logic employed here is that because identification with a team and the corresponding

connections are group-level phenomena, the benefits should be social in nature” (Wann & James, 2019, p. 194). Yet, that was not the case here.

In looking for an explanation as to the lack of relationship between team identification and satisfaction with social life, one possible avenue to explore is the difference between temporary and enduring social connections. The wording of the SSLS in this experiment was meant to tap into the state-level, more temporary social well-being (using phrases like “right now” and “currently”). Given the timing of when the questionnaire was administered (September-October 2020), there are multiple reasons satisfaction with social life may not be influenced by Patriots team identification. First, the New England Patriots had their least successful season in over twenty years (Pro Football Reference, 2021a). Second, fans were not allowed to go to live football games (Brogadir, 2020). Third, the global COVID-19 pandemic was still in effect, with the majority of people continuing to limit in-person interactions or self-quarantining (Ghebreyesus, 2020; McClain, 2020). Taken together, these three things could explain the lack of connection between identification and social well-being. Because of the limited exposure to other fans and lack of live viewing options, all fans may have primarily experienced temporary social connections, or more fleeting moments of mutual fandom with other people (Wann, Polk, et al., 2011). Thus, all Patriots fans during the 2020 season could have been considered displaced, the term usually used for fans residing in other cities – who typically only experience temporary social connections (Collins et al., 2016; Wann, Polk, et al., 2011). It could be under normal circumstances, there is a connection between team identification and satisfaction with social life.

However, given the external environment of these participants, perhaps the connection was depressed to the point of being nonexistent.

Another possibility for why participants' team identification had no effect on their satisfaction with social life is that simply the addition of the article about Rohrwasser mediated any sort of connection. If that were the case, the lack of significant association here would actually mean that there is a positive association between team identification and the perception of the severity of the identity threat from the article (i.e., the stronger one's identification, the more their identity was threatened). And, perhaps that effect size cancelled out the benefit that identification is usually expected to provide in the Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model (TI-SPHM, Wann, 2006b). One way to explore this notion would be with a pretest-posttest or a Solomon four-group research design, where participants are either exposed to a similar article as the one in this experiment or not. Then, one could examine if team identification and social well-being differed between the control and exposure groups. Another future direction would be in exploring if differences exist between participants' state- and trait-level social well-being (or any well-being for that matter) regarding team identification. Overall, the result here suggest that more research is still needed to fully understand how identifying with a sports team affects subsequent social well-being.

Other Findings

Well-Being Concepts

One analysis that did show support for previously existing studies was the confirmatory factor analysis that looked at the distinctions among the various hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being scales. The results of the CFA showed that the best

fitting model was a seven-factor solution, where all items loaded onto the corresponding latent well-being variables that were expected (e.g., all positive affect items loaded onto the positive affect latent variable, etc.). This adds to the scale validity that Huta (2013) explored for positive affect, negative affect, carefreeness, meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness. Additionally, this model fit better than a second-order model using three second-order factors of hedonic, eudaimonic, and social well-being. This suggests that while the existing scales have been found to be more associated hedonic, eudemonic, or social well-being (Huta, 2013, 2016), these scales still distinctly measure different aspects of people's psychological health. This means that researchers should be specific in exactly what aspect of social or personal well-being they are looking to examine.

Effect of Age on Team Identification and Well-Being.

There were a few other significant relationships in the models worth discussing. While there were some positive associations between demographic variables and the various well-being concepts, they should be taken with a grain of salt, as well-being was measured after reading the article and, for the treatment groups, being primed for one of the moral reasoning strategies.

First, age was positively weakly correlated to team identification. Participants' identification with the Patriots decreased the older they were. This is actually the opposite relationship found in the survey in Study 1. These contradicting findings weirdly are in line with the existing literature, where some have found positive associations between the SSIS-R and age (Murrell & Dietz, 1992, e.g.) and some negative associations (Gantz & Lewis, 2021; E. Kim & Gower, 2017, e.g.). Again, though, most research has found no

relationship between age and team identification (e.g., Toder-Alon et al., 2019; Wann et al., 2001). The takeaway could be that in some scenarios, age may factor into the strength of people's team identification. For example, the screening process in place for the experiment in Study 2 meant only moderate-to-liberal and Independent/3rd Party/Other people participated in the study. Thus, maybe age and team identification are associated, but only for certain political ideologies or party affiliations.

In addition, age was also positively weakly associated with satisfaction with social life, positive affect, and carefreeness, as well as negatively with negative affect. Older participants reported greater social and hedonic well-being after being exposed to the article about Rohrwasser's controversial or objectionable political associations and various moral reasoning strategies. However, none of the eudaimonic variables were associated with age. These results line up similarly to those of Burns (2020), who found the magnitude of the factor loadings of positive emotions and negative emotions significantly increased "over the lifespan", whereas the psychological well-being indicators (which "[focus] on eudaimonic indicators of personal functioning" (R. A. Burns, 2020, p. 37)) did not show the same trend. Yet, in the same study, they also found no significant association of age with social well-being (R. A. Burns, 2020). In addition, increased age was related to decreases in negative affect, but the oldest age group in the sample (60-mid-80-year-olds) showed gradual decline in positive affect (Charles et al., 2001). Overall, as Burns (2020) reports, there is no clear connection between age and well-being in the existing literature, with many studies contradicting one another. That said, the findings here suggest that for Patriots fans having just been exposed to an article about a Patriots player's controversial or objectionable political associations and moral

reasoning strategies, older fans had higher hedonic and social well-being, but not eudaimonic well-being.

Effect of Gender on Team Identification and Well-Being.

While the survey in Study 1 revealed that women reported higher team identification overall, in this experiment there was no difference in team identification between men and women. As mentioned, this runs counter to much of the existing literature in which men usually report higher team identification than women, yet may be further evidence that gender differences in sports fandom are lessening (McGinnis et al., 2003; Wann & James, 2019).

In terms of well-being, men reported significantly higher satisfaction with social life, positive affect, and carefreeness, as well as lower negative affect. Men reported greater social and hedonic well-being after being exposed to the article about Rohrwasser's controversial or objectionable political associations.

Previous findings suggest similar results for negative affect, with female undergraduates having reported higher negative affect than males (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Yet, in a longitudinal study, male and female respondents reported no difference in their positive or negative affect (Charles et al., 2001). These results further suggest there could be differences by gender for state-level hedonic well-being, but maybe not trait-level. And, others have found mixed results regarding social aspects of adolescent life satisfaction (Goldbeck et al., 2007).

For eudaimonic well-being, there were no differences in level of meaning, elevating experience, or self-connectedness between men and women. Previous research has found contradicting results. In some cases, women reported higher levels of

eudaimonic well-being than men, such as on the Questionnaire of Eudaimonic Well-Being (QEWB, Waterman et al., 2010). In addition, female undergraduates have reported higher meaning than males (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Yet in that same study, women reported significantly lower carefreeness, as well (Huta & Ryan, 2010). The current experiment also muddies the waters, as these well-being measures were reported after exposure to the Rohrwasser article and, in the case of the treatment groups, one of the moral reasoning primes. But, there is some level of consistency in that men reported significantly higher scores in social well-being and all three hedonic well-being scales, with no difference in any of the eudaimonic well-being scales. It could suggest that men are higher in the more pleasurable aspects of psychological health but not the more appreciating or fulfilling aspects. What would also be interesting is if differences exist among different gender identities or even sexual orientations. Unfortunately, this study had too few participants outside male/female and heterosexual to infer anything about these other groups. More research is needed specifically aimed at these types of gender identity and orientation differences.

Effect of Race/Ethnicity on Team Identification and Well-Being.

For this experiment, team identification did not differ between White/Caucasian participants and participants of color. As a point of reference, Black/African American respondents in Study 1 reported significantly higher team identification than White/Caucasian respondents. In addition, White/Caucasian participants and participants of color did not differ in any of the well-being variables. After being exposed to the article about Rohrwasser's controversial or objectionable political associations, White and participants of color did not differ in social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being.

Taken together, all these findings may have been contingent on the fact that 92.25% of the experimental sample was White/Caucasian. As with sexual orientation, research that focuses specifically on psychological health between race/ethnicity, with adequate sample sizes, is still needed.

Effect of Region on Team Identification and Well-Being.

As with the survey in Study 1, those residing in New England reported significantly higher team identification than those residing elsewhere, unsurprisingly. A further analysis of this, along with the findings from Study 1 will be discussed below with other implications.

For well-being, participants residing in New England had significantly lower satisfaction with social life compared to participants residing in the other regions. This was also the trend for hedonic well-being, with New England participants reporting lower carefreeness and higher negative affect than participants in the other regions (positive affect did not differ between the two). Alternatively for eudaimonic well-being, New England participants reported higher meaning and self-connectedness than participants in the other regions.

After being exposed to the article about Rohrwasser's controversial or objectionable political associations and various moral reasoning primes, New England participants reported lower social and hedonic (two of three scales) well-being, but higher eudaimonic (two of three scales) well-being compared to participants in other regions. Some of this could be explained by team identification being higher for local fans. Indeed, team identification was positively associated with satisfaction with social life, meaning, elevating, experience, and self-connectedness. But, team identification was only

associated with positive affect and not negative affect or carefreeness, i.e. the inverse of the scales that region had differences in. Generally, participant region and team identification could interact with one another, and that is worth exploring. For example, the Social Well-Being scale (Keyes, 1998) was found to be related to with identification, but only for local teams (Wann & Weaver, 2009).

Effect of Party Affiliation on Team Identification and Well-Being.

Finally, Democrats and Independent in the sample did not differ in their levels of team identification, satisfaction with social life, positive affect, negative affect, carefreeness, meaning, elevating experience, or self-connectedness. It could be that the other screening question (only allowing moderate to liberal participants for Study 2) reduced any potential variance in this. Yet, there was a positive correlation between political ideology and SSLS, positive affect, and carefreeness, and a negative correlation with negative affect. However, these results could simply be confounded by age, which was also correlated to both ideology and those well-being variables. Deeper analysis is outside the scope of this dissertation.

Conclusion

The results of Study 2 suggest that, when Democratic and Independent Patriots fans are primed with a specific moral reasoning strategy meant for coping with an identity threat, then exposed to an article about a Patriots player's objectionable connection to a far-right militia group, their subsequent psychological health is not affected, regardless of what type of moral reasoning priming they had and when controlling for their level of team identification. Instead, only team identification had a direct effect, with greater team identification being associated with all eudaimonic well-

being scales, some hedonic well-being measures, but not social well-being. Thus, it appears that if fans engage in these moral reasoning strategies to lessen an identity threat, doing so is not a detriment to their psychological health that may be associated with another social group to which they perceive themselves to be a part of. In other words, being primed to excuse a player's controversial or objectionable political associations does not affect the well-being of a fan of that player's team.

Overall Discussion, Implications, and Future Directions

From the outset, the general goal of this dissertation was to explore the intricacies of how people are influenced by their sports fandom and political identities. To that end, the results of Study 1 show that when presented with an article about a football player on a team they root for having controversial or objectionable political associations with a far-right militia group, both social identities – team identification and political ideology – come into play. In general, the more conservative the fan's political ideology, the more likely they will be to morally rationalize or separate the political associations from evaluations of the player's on-field abilities, as has been the trend in present-day America. But for the most highly identified fans, their political ideology made no difference; conservative and liberals alike were more inclined to agree with moral rationalization or decoupling. In other words, the stronger the team identification among more liberal fans, the more they felt that Justin Rohrwasser – the player with far-right associations – was a part of their football team social identity and that reading about his associations presented a threat to that identity. As a way to attempt to replenish the detrimental effects to their well-being experienced by that threat, they used a moral reasoning strategy to attempt to cope.

Study 2 extended the concepts from Study 1 by looking to see if partaking in one of those moral reasoning coping mechanisms would actually influence more liberal fans' well-being. The results suggest that being primed with one of these moral reasoning strategies did not affect fans' well-being. And team identification had a direct effect on well-being. Taken together, although highly identified liberal fans felt a greater need to downplay or separate the player's objectionable political associations from his on-field assessment, most likely going against their political beliefs, doing so had no effect on their social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being.

What these results imply is that perhaps in some situations, team identification is not just more salient, but also more important than other identities. Obviously, when discussing a player on a team they root for, a person's team identification will be more prevalent. But, these results suggest that, in general, that identification might even trump the psychological benefits of other identities. Benefitting from team identification is not only more important in that moment, it is the only important thing.

This has implications for several reasons. First, sports fandom is already incredibly deeply ingrained in people's lives, and these results mean that people may form attitudes or moral reasoning based on the teams they root for. For example, the MLB team the Houston Astros were caught cheating after they won the 2018 World Series (Vigdor, 2020). Extrapolating the results herein, the stronger an Astros fan's team identification, the more likely they would be to rationalize or downplay their team cheating. And, they would not feel conflicted for accepting that questionable behavior. The question that remains is, then, would rationalizing an immoral act and not experiencing negative psychological health due to it, then encourage that person to be

more likely to accept cheating in the future, and eventually be more likely to cheat themselves?

Alternatively, the same process of becoming more in line with one's team identity could have prosocial benefits, as well, if the same pattern holds in the opposite direction politically. The most prominent political statements that athletes make or have made throughout the past 100 years are regarding racial inequity and structural racism (Edwards, 2016). If these results suggest that fans use coping mechanisms that make rooting for a player with objectionable political associations more palatable, and doing so does not harm their well-being, it stands to reason that those of the opinion that racism or inequity are not issues in society could potentially have that opinion reconsidered. Hypothetically, in other words, because die-hard fans opposed to a player's statement about structural racism may not be negatively affected psychologically when they rationalize or downplay that player's political associations, they may begin to become more comfortable with those ideas about structural racism. Drawing from the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, 1979), intention to behave differently is driven by a person's own attitudes, and their attitudes are in part influenced by the perception of the attitudes of people important to them (M. K. Chang, 1998). If a fan begins to perceive a player on a team they root for as important, and they do not experience detrimental well-being when exposed to the beliefs of that player, the fan's own attitudes towards the same topic could begin to shift. Thus, some of the more conservative fans theoretically could slowly gain acceptance of the viewpoints of players of color that speak out, if they identify strongly with the team.

For athletes, these results are also quite important. With more and more players speaking out in different ways, these results could be cause for their optimism. If strongly identified fans of the teams they play for start to feel that their political statements are not that big of a deal or do not mind as much seeing those statements in the sport, that mean the players would be potentially faced with less opposition, allowing them to further spread their messages. This means that not only would player's messages be amplified via newer media technologies and perceived closeness with fans, as outlined in the literature review here, but there would be less resistance to said amplification from those opposed to the messages. As more people hear and accept those political messages of oppression and inequity, the closer those ideas come to being a dominant way of thinking, giving way to action.

From a sport management research standpoint, these results support the notion that sports fans perceive themselves as part of a larger community surrounding their favorite teams, and that players on those teams are part of that in-group. The previous work on team identification and moral reasoning coping strategies was primarily concerned with athlete scandals and consumer responses to products associated with those athletes (e.g., Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2016; Lee & Kwak, 2015). These results contribute to that literature in showing that while being primed with different strategies to cope with a player's objectionable political associations may not affect their psychological health, fans do perceive those associations as enough of a threat to engage in moral reasoning strategies in a similar way as has been shown with athlete scandals. Additional research is needed here, as well. First, there should be an exploration of how sports fans respond to other types of political opinions, statements, and

associations, specifically issues like those associated with the Black Lives Matter movement and other social concerns that are frequently talked about by athletes and sports media. There could even be an exploration of responses to issues along a spectrum of U.S. political ideologies to see if more moderate ideas are less threatening to people's political identities. Second, it would be interesting to see just how different the response is between immoral acts, like scandals, and objectionable political associations. One would assume that scandals would be felt as a greater threat. However, there may not be a second social identity at play there given that scandals are likely to be seen similarly across different political ideologies, unlike the statements and actions of Justin Rohrwasser. In other words, with scandals, fans only need to concern themselves with re-elevating the status of one group identity: their team identification.

The findings in Study 1 also contribute more broadly to literature on how and people morally reason to public figures. The results support previous findings that moral decoupling, moral coupling, and moral rationalization are distinct processes for responding to public figures' objectionable political associations (Lee & Kwak, 2015, 2017; etc.). Not only is moral reasoning prevalent in public figures' transgressions as has been studied in the prior research, it also appears to be present for their political associations as is examined in this dissertation. Further, team identification and political ideology were predictors of moral rationalization and decoupling (marginally), but not predictors of moral coupling of the player's political beliefs in the current Study 1. Lee and Kwak (2015) found that consumers were much more likely to morally couple when the athlete's transgression was on-field (using PED's, e.g.) compared to off-field. "When a transgression is related to job performance, individuals seem to find it difficult to

decouple the judgments of performance and immorality or rationalize the wrongdoing” (Lee & Kwak, 2015, p. 109). It would appear the same holds true here, considering the concerns about Rohrwasser’s political associations were unrelated to performance. Future research could look at if there is a difference between a player simply having controversial or objectionable political beliefs and a player making a political statement during, directly before, or directly after a game. A political statement made during a game, for instance, might generate a response from fans similar to an on-field transgression.

It would be interesting, as well, to look at how fan identification with a specific player influences moral reasoning. A previous study found that fans’ identification with Tom Cruise moderated the relationship between severity of his transgression and moral reasoning, with higher identification increasing the likelihood of rationalization and decoupling (but not coupling) (Wang & Kim, 2019). Considering those findings along with the findings in Study 1, the logical connection is that the same relationship would exist for sports fans. Lee and Kwak (2015) included the interaction of sports involvement to see how it moderated participant moral reasoning choice and consumer support for a brand associated with an athlete involved in a scandal. For both purchase intention and attitudes towards brands associated with the transgressor, participants’ level of involvement was a moderator for both decoupling and rationalization (and not coupling). Interestingly, those using moral rationalization – rationalizing the behavior – actually *increased* their purchase intention and brand attitude, as if they were standing more strongly in support of the athlete. As a result, the authors recommend future work looking at how people’s personal attachment to athletes would come into play (Lee & Kwak,

2015), a sentiment echoed by others (Sato et al., 2018). One manifestation of this personal involvement with athletes could take the form of parasocial interaction, a concept typically associated with feeling a one-way connection with a mediated persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Future work should explore whether fan identification with athletes – perhaps through parasocial interaction with mediated personae– can inform fan moral reasoning.

There are also implications for sports teams and organizations, some of which they may already understand considering the recent responses to various events in the United States. In 2020, the NBA incorporated Black Lives Matter prominently on the court (Andrews, 2020), and even the MLB has joined in by moving the All Star game out of Georgia in response to the state's new restrictive voting legislation felt to specifically target voters of color (Draper et al., 2021). Yet, these recent organizational and corporate actions probably speak more to the actual implications of the findings here. In this capitalist society, companies and organizations make the decisions they believe will be most lucrative. Showing support for these types of statements calling for reform of systemic racism that many of their players make and also support suggests there is a monetary benefit that these organizations have identified. In other words, sports organizations seem to think enough sports fans will continue to support their favorite teams even if the players make political statements that some fans may disagree with. This dissertation suggests those organizations are correct, through the activation of moral reasoning strategies to cope with being exposed to those political ideas and the lack of detriment to their subsequent well-being.

For the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being discussion, the confirmatory factor analysis provides further evidence that the two concepts are in fact distinct, and that they are also distinct from social well-being. While positive media psychology focuses on these two types of experiences or functioning (Huta, 2013, 2016; Huta & Ryan, 2010; etc.), some have begun exploring another type: self-transcendence, which incorporates social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and “involves a universalist perspective, a recognition of self-in-other and other-in-self... in which the in-group expands to incorporate those more typically categorized as ‘other’” (Oliver et al., 2018, p. 383). Social well-being is not necessarily included in these discussion of meaningful entertainment experiences. Because sports spectatorship is an entertainment experience that can be enhanced by identification with the team as a group identity (Jeeyoon Kim et al., 2017), it may be the case that consuming sports media may contribute to self-transcendence through perceiving others as part of one’s social group. What is not clear, however, is whether there is a connection between social well-being and self-transcendence. They seem to potentially overlap in terms of connections with others. Perhaps self-transcendence leads to social well-being, or satisfaction with social life as operationalized herein, where feelings of universalism influence a person’s satisfaction with their social life. This could also be expanded to cover other viewing experiences. For example, how does second-screen social media use during live viewing experiences affect audience social well-being? Questions like these should be considered in future work that often only explores hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

Another important finding from the present research for researchers and all others involved in the sports viewing experience was that despite people quarantining and no

one being allowed to go to Patriots games, those in New England, i.e., closer to the team, still reported significantly higher team identification. If there is indeed less of an impact on team identification based on distance from the team due to ease of access to fan information and interaction via internet and social media, as Collins and colleagues (2016) suggested, one would expect that the perfect time to test that theory out would be at a time when interpersonal social interaction itself was most likely at its lowest. But these findings show that residing the region of the country with the team is still one of the most important predictors of a person's level of team identification.

Limitations

The most glaring concern in this dissertation was the seeming failure of the experimental manipulation, the priming of the different moral reasoning strategies. One possibility is that the prime was not strong enough. However, the other studies cited that used this method found the manipulation to be successful, with participants reporting differences between primed moral reasoning strategy conditions for rating the performance of the public figure and plans to continuing purchasing from the person's company (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013), as well as judgments of a player's immorality (Lee & Kwak, 2015), all of which are evaluations of the transgressor. Perhaps being primed with a moral reasoning strategy is not a strong enough manipulation to affect something associated more with the participants themselves, i.e., their own well-being. To further tap into how being presented with a player's controversial or objectionable political associations affects fan well-being, a different strategy could have been to simply perform another survey similar to that of Study 1, with the same independent variables of team identification and political ideology. Then, the moral reasoning variables could be

mediating variables, and the different types of well-being variables be dependent again. While this would not force a moral reasoning strategy, it would have more external validity, assuming that the respondents are naturally choosing whether to engage in a moral reasoning strategy.

While being primed with a moral reasoning strategy may not influence a person's well-being, it is possible that the results would have been different if data collection took place in mid-January 2020, right after the Capitol Hill riots (Barry et al., 2021). A brief case study could actually be drawn from the stimulus used in Lee et al. (2015), who looked at former NFL player Ray Rice assaulting his then-fiancé. Initially, it was reported that Rice and his then-fiancé were arrested after an altercation in an Atlantic City casino. Soon after, a security video of the incident was released, showing Rice drag his fiancé's lifeless body from the elevator. But, at the time, the NFL did not seem to feel strongly about it. Commissioner Roger Goodell issued Ray Rice his punishment of a fine and a two-game suspension (Lee et al., 2016), a shorter suspension than for smoking marijuana, using Adderall, or getting a DUI (McManus, 2014). While this upset some, there was limited backlash for the seemingly lax suspension. But, a few months later, the videotape from inside the elevator was released, showing Ray Rice striking his fiancé with his hand. His fiancé proceeds to fall, hit a rail with her head, and lose consciousness. It was not until the public saw the actual incident that they became overly critical, to the point that Goodell changed Rice's punishment from a two-week suspension to a lifetime ban (Richards Jr. et al., 2017). The current experiment was conducted in October of 2020. At that time, there was limited exposure to right-wing militia groups, resulting in people potentially downplaying fears about the possible threat those groups posed (the

equivalence of the first security camera footage outside the elevator). But, the Capitol Hill riots were the elevator tape for militia groups, explicitly displaying just how bad things could get under the right circumstances. Had this experiment taken place directly after January 6th, 2021, the results could have been very different, and perhaps the moral reasoning conditions would have indeed influenced participants' psychological health.

Another limitation is that in both studies, participant and respondent political identity was measured using just one item – political ideology. This is a limitation, because one's political ideology is not necessarily an indicator of the strength of their political identity. It merely indicates liberalism or conservatism along a spectrum. But, as stated in Mutz (2006), the more partisan someone is, the stronger their political identity and knowledge. As such, the use of political ideology in this way is justified and does indicate the strength of partisanship. Alternatively, one could use a measure that asks questions similar to the SSIS-R, which was revised specifically to be more valid in terms of people's actual fandom towards the specific team in question (James et al., 2019). For political identity, questions such as "How much do your friends perceive you as a [conservative/liberal/etc.]" could work. But, this is more complicated, as one would then need to ask these questions from the perspective of one party or ideology. In other words, the SSIS-R measures strength in identification with a single team, not two rival teams. A similar scale would be measuring someone's perceived closeness to, say conservatism, like the Wilson–Patterson conservatism scale (Wilson & Patterson, 1968). But even the term "conservative" is different for different people (a Republican could perceive themselves as slightly conservative while others see them as strongly conservative) (Jost

et al., 2009). In the end, using the simple measure of ideology served its purpose in this dissertation.

Using Patriots player Justin Rohrwasser as the subject of the media stimulus could also be seen as another limitation for two reasons. First, Rohrwasser was a rookie with the team in 2020. The intention was to use a newer member of the team to elicit responses from respondents and participants that were novel. Had the player been on the team for longer, there would be a greater chance for fans to have learned of his political associations, thus allowing them more time to have an initial response to such associations, as well as reappraise that response. The trade-off, however, was in fans' likely limited identification with Rohrwasser specifically, both individually and as a group member. On an individual level, he was a rookie in 2020. Meaning, unless respondents or participants watched him in college, they were most likely not familiar with him in any way beyond him being drafted by a team they root for. And on the team level, he ended up not playing a single game for the Patriots in 2020, as he was the backup kicker (Pro Football Reference, 2021b). Thus, none of those that answered either questionnaire had seen him play a professional football game, let alone for the New England Patriots. Rohrwasser could have been perceived less as a group member for respondents' and participants' team identification. Perhaps an article about a more familiar, longer-tenured, popular player would have elicited stronger responses. Yet, some of the previous studies on moral reasoning in response to public figure transgressions used fictional personae (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015), so perhaps not.

Secondly, and more importantly, the article could have been about a player with political associations with or who had spoken out about racial injustice and systemic inequality, instead of a player associated with a far-right militia group. Considering racial injustice and systemic inequality as the most prominent issues talked about in the sports realm (Edwards, 2016), having an article about a player speaking out about or in support of those issues could have been better for the external validity of this dissertation. That should not take away, however, from the results found here. The outward response that people have towards players making political statements about racial injustice and systemic issues is well studied (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a summary). People's implicit responses are less known. But, fans have now been given years of time to reappraise their responses to those types of statements, considering Kaepernick first knelt in 2016. The results here show the more reactionary responses of fans to a specific issue that they may have been less exposed to at the time. Measuring reactions to reading about a player with associations with a far-right militia group may have allowed for the examination of more primal responses from these respondents and participants.

In the experiment, another limitation was not having a baseline measure of participant well-being. While the control condition did not prime the participants with a moral reasoning response, they were exposed to the article about Rohrwasser. Thus, all participants were asked to read the article. Alternatively, the control group (or another group entirely) could have answered questions about their team identification with the Patriots and their well-being without reading the article. This would have supplied a baseline level of well-being to compare to that of those in the media stimulus conditions. Doing so would have allowed for more valid inferences on the relationships between

team identification (and demographics) and social, hedonic, and eudaimonic well-being, as well as the effect of the media stimulus on such relationships.

Also, due to an issue in the sampling process, the participants in the experiment were quite old. The mean age was fifty-five years old. Considering that age may influence the intensity of one's team identification (Gantz & Lewis, 2021; E. Kim & Gower, 2017; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; etc.), this could have affected the results differently than a more representative sample.

CONCLUSION

Sports fans are known for their strong reactions, hence the word being short for “fanatics.” While these reactions are usually reserved for good plays, bad calls, and unforgettable moments during the game, fans can also react strongly outside of the arena or stadium. And, based on the existing literature (Frederick et al., 2017, 2018; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019), one thing that fans react to strongly is political statements made by player.

Chapter 2 described how despite athletes making overt political statements dating back to the 1960s (Edwards, 2016), newer media technologies have allowed for the relationship between politics and sports to flourish. With the prevalence and utilization of social media in sports – by fans, players, and sports journalists alike – the perceived distance between fans and athletes has shrunk (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014). Likewise, online communities expose people to new ideas and perspectives, thus broadening the discussions that are had in the mainstream (Sanderson et al., 2016). As a result, athletes have a platform to promote their political viewpoints to millions, and this has started to spill over onto the court (Galily, 2019). However, fans often push back when players make political statements (Frederick et al., 2017, 2018; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2019). One main reason for this is that sports often reinforce existing societal structures, like heteronormativity and hegemony, and the types of statements the players often make – about structural racism and inequality – are direct critiques of those existing structures (Frederick et al., 2017, 2018; Gill Jr., 2016; Stratmoen et al., 2019; etc.). As a result, the critiques may seem like attacks directed at fans.

However, fan reactions can sometimes be different if they are in response to a player for whom they root. Chapter 3 shows that identification with a team can influence how people respond to controversies or transgressions involving athletes. Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), sports fans can feel like part of a team and perceive players and other fans as part of their ingroup. When presented with a transgression of a player in their ingroup, fans may feel that the status of their social group is being attacked and respond in ways that attempt to reestablish the status of that group. One response is engaging in moral reasoning strategies as a way to make rooting for the ingroup member still acceptable (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Lee & Kwak, 2015). Fans may morally decouple – separate their assessment of the player’s abilities from their off-field conduct – or morally rationalize – downplay or rationalize their off-field conduct. Alternatively, if the transgression is too severe, fans might decide to morally couple and feel required to jointly assess the player’s abilities and their off-field conduct (Lee & Kwak, 2015). Study 1 tested to see if fans would respond in similar ways to reading about a New England Patriots player named Justin Rohrwasser who had controversial or objectionable political associations with a far-right militia group. However, in the context of politics, fans also have some level of political identity – i.e., another social group – which could also influence how they respond to the player’s political associations. Indeed, the results suggested that as ideology became more conservative, the relationship between team identification and moral reasoning weakened. For low-identifying fans, more conservative fans were significantly more likely to agree with statements suggesting moral decoupling or rationalization than more liberal fans. But for die-hard fans, conservatives and liberals were equally likely to agree

with statements suggesting moral decoupling or rationalization. Both identification with a team and identification with a political ideology influenced how fans responded to a player they root for having controversial political associations.

As explicated in Chapter 4, one of the other reasons that fans try to cope with identity threats is because identifying with social groups often increases social psychological health or well-being – an identity threat decreases social well-being and engaging in a coping mechanism like moral reasoning helps reestablish that well-being (Wann, 2006b). But, what has not been established is if coping with an identity threat is itself a threat to another social identity of that person. As such, Study 2 tested for this. In addition, there are limited studies on whether team identification affects other types of well-being. Specifically, would identifying with a team influence a person's hedonic well-being, which is associated with short-term gratification, as well as with eudaimonic well-being, associated with long-term satisfaction with life and purpose. Thus, Study 2 explored if being primed with a moral reasoning strategy – moral decoupling, coupling, or rationalization – would affect fans' subsequent social, hedonic, or eudaimonic well-being after reading the same article about the Patriots player with controversial or objectionable political associations. The results of the experiment showed that being primed with different moral reasoning strategies had no effect on fan well-being. However, team identification was positively related to one of three hedonic well-being concepts (positive affect) and all three eudaimonic well-being concepts (meaning, elevating experience, and self-connectedness). And, team identification was not associated with social well-being.

This dissertation originally set out to understand how and why sports fans respond to athletes making political statements with the notion that some may feel that those athletes should “stick to sports.” Although there is still plenty to explore, these results helped answer both questions. For, *how* fans respond, it is obvious: they want politics and sports separate. In this dissertation, that manifested in agreement with moral decoupling or rationalization, i.e., agreeing to either downplaying the political associations or that political associations should not matter within the context of the sport. For the “why” question, it appears the answer lies in their group identities. They respond like this partly to help maintain their own social group status. Deriding an athlete that is a political outgroup member helps with elevating that status. Further, it seems that doing so does not have any bearing on their psychological health.

Overall, the pages above suggest that sports fans do respond in some ways to athletes having political viewpoints with which they disagree, but fans may be more tolerant of those ideas if they root for that player or team. This notion is important moving forward, because the conversation of politics occurring within the context of sports is only going to become more common. These results suggest that if a player is popular enough or the team beloved enough, they may have the unique opportunity to persuade people of different viewpoints to be more accepting of their own viewpoint. While much of politics is divisive and divided, sports are a communal experience that many people share, often together. Perhaps sports have the potential to bring politically opposing people together for a common understanding. And perhaps President Lebron James will read this in 20 years and prove this dissertation.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY 1 SURVEY



Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY RESPONDENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: You are being invited to be in a research study conducted by Stephen Warren, a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The purpose of this study is to investigate sports fans' attitudes and opinions about athletes, as well as political statements in sports. About 200 participants are needed for this study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY: You will be asked to answer a number of questions about your favorite NFL team and a player on that team. You will also be asked to read a short article about one of the players on that team and asked to answer some followup questions about that player.

HOW LONG WILL THE STUDY TAKE? Participation in the survey is expected to take you between 10 and 15 minutes.

WHERE TO GO IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you should contact Stephen Warren at smwarren@umass.edu.

HOW PARTICIPANT PRIVACY IS PROTECTED: I will make every effort to protect your privacy. The survey itself will contain no identifying questions and your data will remain confidential. If this study results in publication, all data will be reported in aggregate and completely anonymously. The data will be destroyed within three years of any publication resulting from this study.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS: There are only very minor risks or discomforts associated with participating in this survey. For instance, some discomfort might come from thinking about views of controversial political beliefs. While this study is not designed to offer personal benefits to the participants, this study will benefit society as a whole by advancing our knowledge of how sports fans are influenced by the salience of politics in sports.

Any online related activity carries the risk of a breach of confidentiality and since this survey takes place online, those risks are present. However, we are minimizing such risks by using a secure survey platform. We will also treat all of the responses to our survey as strictly confidential. We will scrub the data of any identifying information and keep the de-identified responses to this survey on a password-protected computer.

YOUR RIGHTS: You have the right to decide whether or not you participate in this study. There will be no negative consequences if you choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to discontinue participation at any time. There will be no negative consequences as the result of your decision to leave the study.

COMPENSATION: You will be compensated by your panel provider. There is no payment for partially completed surveys. The incentive options used by your panel provider allow you to redeem from a large range of gift cards, points programs, charitable contributions, and items from your panel provider's partner products or services. You will receive this 5-7 days after the survey is completed.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS: If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher(s), **Stephen Warren at smwarren@umass.edu**. Alternatively, you can contact the faculty sponsor, **Professor Erica Scharer at scharer@comm.umass.edu or 413-545-1311**. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the **University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu**.

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT AND INDICATE BELOW IF YOU AGREE.

I have read the information in this consent form, and I agree to be in the study. I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older, and that I currently reside in the United States. I acknowledge that any questions I have regarding this study, including requests for copies of this form for my personal use, can be directed to:

Stephen Warren, Department of Communication, University of Massachusetts - smwarren@umass.edu

☐ I agree, begin the study

☐ I do not agree, I do not wish to participate

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: SSIS-R

Do you identify yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots, even if just a little bit?

☐ Yes

☐ No



Please think about the New England Patriots as you answer the next seven questions.
Please select the appropriate number on the scale next to each question.

How important to you is it that the New England Patriots win?	<input type="radio"/> A Little Important (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately Important (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Important (7)
How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots?	<input type="radio"/> Slightly a Fan (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately a Fan (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Much a Fan (7)
How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the New England Patriots?	<input type="radio"/> Slightly a Fan (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately a Fan (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Much a Fan (7)
During the season, how closely do you follow the New England Patriots via any of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, on television news or a newspaper, or the Internet?	<input type="radio"/> A Little (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Frequently (7)
How important is being a fan of the New England Patriots to you?	<input type="radio"/> A Little Important (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately Important (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Important (7)
How much do you dislike the New England Patriots greatest rivals?	<input type="radio"/> Dislike a Little (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Dislike Moderately (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Dislike Very Much (7)
How often do you display the New England Patriots name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	<input type="radio"/> Occasionally (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Always (7)

End of Block: SSIS-R

Start of Block: News Article

On the next page, there is a news article from NESN.com about Justin Rohrwasser.

Page Break

Jemele Hill Weighs In On Justin Rohrwasser's Iffy Social Media Activity

by Dakota Randall on Sun, Apr 26, 2020 at 10:33 AM

Jemele Hill already has reached a verdict on Justin Rohrwasser.

The New England Patriots on Saturday selected the Marshall kicker in Round 5 of the 2020 NFL Draft. It didn't take long for fans and media to flag some of Rohrwasser's tattoos and social media activity as problematic.

The New York native's social media accounts are littered with posts and "likes" that suggest Rohrwasser supports far-right groups and ideology. He also has a tattoo of the logo for Three Percenters, a far-right militia movement and paramilitary group that primarily advocates for gun ownership rights and limiting the Federal Government's involvement in local affairs. During a conference call with reporters, Rohrwasser said he was an under-informed teenager when he got the tattoo, which he plans to cover. He did not offer an explanation for his social media activity in the years since, nor was he asked to.

For what it's worth, Rohrwasser does not appear to have the tattoo in photos of him during his days at the University of Rhode Island, which he attended from 2015 to 2016. He sat out 2017 before resuming his collegiate career in 2018 as a redshirt junior with Marshall.

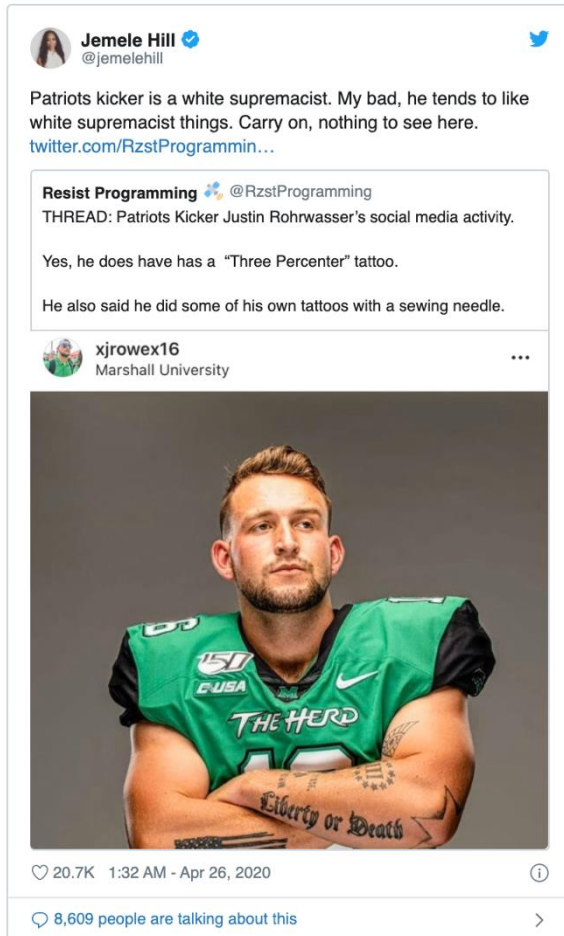
As for the Three Percenters, it is worth noting the group has attempted to separate itself from racist ideology. After its members attended the Aug. 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Va., the organization's "National Council" issued a "stand down order," stating, "We will not align ourselves with any type of racist group." Many Three Percenters supporters communicate the opposite sentiment in social media comment sections, among other places.

The Twitter thread highlighting Rohrwasser's controversial social media activity features posts/likes that imply the new Patriots kicker is a passionate conservative who occasionally aligns himself with far-right groups, such as the Three Percenters. In multiple posts, Rohrwasser has shown support for United States President Donald Trump as well as contempt for those who, during the playing of the national anthem, have knelt in protest of racial and social injustice in America. He has downplayed the severity of COVID-19 and elevated the works of popular Psychologist Jordan Peterson and philosopher Ayn Rand, two individuals some consider to be controversial.

None of the posts in the aforementioned thread show Rohrwasser directly communicating racist or white supremacist ideology. Whether he indirectly does so via his social media activity is subject for debate.

Nevertheless, Hill, who recently criticized Patriots owner Robert Kraft for supporting Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, labeled Rohrwasser as a "white supremacist" in a tweet early Sunday morning.

Take a look:



Make of that what you will.

Since being drafted by the Patriots, Rohrwasser has changed his Twitter account from public to private and scrubbed his Instagram account of multiple posts. Additionally, some people claiming to have attended URI with Rohrwasser have come forth and accused him of exhibiting racist behavior.

Hill hardly is the only person who has criticized Rohrwasser and the Patriots for drafting him. Of course, those who believe they have enough evidence to judge Rohrwasser have every right to do so, as do those who insist on giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Still, it might be beneficial for all parties to give Rohrwasser an opportunity to explain his past — at least more than what he was given Saturday. Whether the notoriously strict Patriots will afford the rookie such an opportunity is anyone's guess.

*Note: After receiving backlash online, Rohrwasser had the "Three Percenters" tattoo removed in July of 2020.

End of Block: News Article

Start of Block: Moral Reasoning



Please think about Justin Rohrwasser as you answer the following questions.
Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs do not change my assessment of his football ability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Judgments of Justin Rohrwasser's ability should remain separate from judgments of his political beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Controversial political beliefs should not affect our view of Justin Rohrwasser's achievements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Justin Rohrwasser's controversial political beliefs are not as bad as some other horrible things that people do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to take into account that Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs do not really do much harm.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Justin Rohrwasser should not be at fault for making a controversial political statement because the pressures of modern politics are so high.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People need to let their view of Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs affect their assessment of his football ability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to take into account Justin Rohrwasser's political beliefs when assessing his football ability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Moral Reasoning

Start of Block: Demographics

This section asks a few questions that are designed to get some basic information about you, the survey respondent.

How old are you?

▼ 18 ... 65+

*** (Options are individual ages 18 through 64, and 65+)*

What was your sex at birth, as shown on your original birth certificate?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female



How do you describe yourself?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ I do not identify as male, female, or transgender.

Do you consider yourself to be:

- ☐ Straight/Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Unknown/Uncertain
- ☐ Other
-

What is your race/ethnicity?

- ☐ White/Caucasian
 - ☐ Black/African American
 - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
 - ☐ Asian/Asian American
 - ☐ Native American
 - ☐ Biracial/Multiracial
 - ☐ Other
 - ☐ Unknown/Uncertain
-

In what region of the U.S. do you live?

- ☐ New England (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island)
 - ☐ Middle Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)
 - ☐ East North Central (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio)
 - ☐ West North Central (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas)
 - ☐ South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, District of Columbia)
 - ☐ East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi)
 - ☐ West South Central (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas)
 - ☐ Mountain (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico)
 - ☐ Pacific (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii)
-

When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?

- ☐ Very Liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Somewhat Liberal
- ☐ Neither Liberal nor Conservative
- ☐ Somewhat Conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Very Conservative

How would you usually describe your political party affiliation?

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Third Party/Other



Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Gun laws should be less strict.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, the federal government should be involved in state and local affairs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When it comes to giving Black people equal rights with whites, our country has not gone far enough.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY 2 EXPERIMENT

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY RESPONDENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: You are being invited to be in a research study conducted by Stephen Warren, a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The purpose of this study is to investigate how sports fans relate to and have relationships with athletes. About 200 participants are needed for this study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY: You will be asked to answer a number of questions about your favorite NFL team and a player on that team. You will also be asked to read a short article about one of the players on that team and asked to answer some followup questions about that player.

HOW LONG WILL THE STUDY TAKE? Participation in the survey is expected to take you between 10 and 25 minutes.

WHERE TO GO IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you should contact Stephen Warren at smwarren@umass.edu.

HOW PARTICIPANT PRIVACY IS PROTECTED: I will make every effort to protect your privacy. The survey itself will contain no identifying questions and your data will remain confidential. If this study results in publication, all data will be reported in aggregate and completely anonymously. The data will be destroyed within three years of any publication resulting from this study.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS: There are only very minor risks or discomforts associated with participating in this survey. For instance, some discomfort might come from thinking about views of controversial political beliefs. While this study is not designed to offer personal benefits to the participants, this study will benefit society as a whole by advancing our knowledge of how sports fans are influenced by the salience of politics in sports.

Any online related activity carries the risk of a breach of confidentiality and since this survey takes place online, those risks are present. However, we are minimizing such risks by using a secure survey platform. We will also treat all of the responses to our survey as strictly confidential. We will scrub the data of any identifying information and keep the de-identified responses to this survey on a password-protected computer.

YOUR RIGHTS: You have the right to decide whether or not you participate in this study. There will be no negative consequences if you choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to discontinue participation at any time. There will be no negative consequences as the result of your decision to leave the study.

COMPENSATION: You will be compensated by your panel provider. There is no payment for partially completed surveys. The incentive options used by your panel provider allow you to redeem from a

large range of gift cards, points programs, charitable contributions, and items from your panel provider's partner products or services. You will receive this 5-7 days after the survey is completed. Beyond compensation, there are no other anticipated direct benefits.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS: If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher(s), **Stephen Warren at smwarren@umass.edu**. Alternatively, you can contact the faculty sponsor, **Professor Erica Scharrer at scharrer@comm.umass.edu or 413-545-1311**. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the **University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545- 3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu**.

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT AND INDICATE BELOW IF YOU AGREE.

I have read the information in this consent form, and I agree to be in the study. I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older, and that I currently reside in the United States. I acknowledge that any questions I have regarding this study, including requests for copies of this form for my personal use, can be directed to:

Stephen Warren, Department of Communication, University of Massachusetts - smwarren@umass.edu

- ☐ I agree, begin the study
- ☐ I do not agree, I do not wish to participate

Skip To: End of Survey If INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY RESPONDENTS INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: You are being i... = I do not agree, I do not wish to participate

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: SSIS-R



gender How do you describe yourself?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ I do not identify as male, female, or transgender.

race What is your race/ethnicity?

- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Asian/Asian American
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Biracial/Multiracial
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Unknown/Uncertain

screen_ssis Do you identify yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots, even if just a little bit?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots, even if just a little bit? = No

Display This Question:

If Do you identify yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots, even if just a little bit? = Yes



Please think about the New England Patriots as you answer the next seven questions.
Please select the appropriate number on the scale next to each question.

How important to you is it that the New England Patriots win?	<input type="radio"/> A Little Important (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately Important (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Important (7)
How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the New England Patriots?	<input type="radio"/> Slightly a Fan (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately a Fan (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Much a Fan (7)
How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the New England Patriots?	<input type="radio"/> Slightly a Fan (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately a Fan (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Much a Fan (7)
During the season, how closely do you follow the New England Patriots via any of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, on television news or a newspaper, or the Internet?	<input type="radio"/> A Little (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Frequently (7)
How important is being a fan of the New England Patriots to you?	<input type="radio"/> A Little Important (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Moderately Important (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Very Important (7)
How much do you dislike the New England Patriots greatest rivals?	<input type="radio"/> Dislike a Little (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Dislike Moderately (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Dislike Very Much (7)
How often do you display the New England Patriots name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?	<input type="radio"/> Occasionally (1)	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes (4)	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 6	<input type="radio"/> Always (7)

End of Block: SSIS-R

Start of Block: Moral Coupling Condition

mc_text Please read the following statements carefully, and reflect upon a situation in which they might apply.

mc_stmnts These days, we often fail to let someone's controversial political beliefs affect our view of their value to society.

People who achieve great things should not be given a free pass if their political beliefs are highly controversial.

It is important to take into account someone's political beliefs when assessing their job performance.

mc_sit Briefly describe a situation in which the statements above might apply.

End of Block: Moral Coupling Condition

Start of Block: Moral Decoupling Condition

md_text Please read the following statements carefully, and reflect upon a situation in which they might apply.

md_stmnts These days, we are often too quick to let someone's controversial political beliefs affect our view of their value to society.

Even if someone makes a controversial political statement, we should not let this color our judgment of their great achievements.

It is inappropriate to take into account someone's political beliefs when assessing their job performance.

md_sit Briefly describe a situation in which the statements above might apply.

End of Block: Moral Decoupling Condition

Start of Block: Moral Rationalization Condition

mr_text Please read the following statements carefully, and reflect upon a situation in which they might apply.

mr_stmnts These days, we often fail to consider that speaking out on political issues is not as bad as some other horrible things that people do.

People should not always be at fault for their controversial political beliefs because situational pressures are often so high.

It is important to take into account that some controversial political statements are okay because they really don't do much harm.

mr_sit Briefly describe a situation in which the statements above might apply.

End of Block: Moral Rationalization Condition

Start of Block: Control Condition

con_text Please read the following statements carefully, and reflect upon a situation in which they might apply.

con_stmnts These days, sports reporters have more access than they used to.

Sports articles that use personal pronouns ("I" or "me") are just as informational as articles that only don't.

These days, sports reporters do a good job of being relatable to their readers.

con_sit Briefly describe a situation in which the statements above might apply.

End of Block: Control Condition

Start of Block: News Article

text On the next page, there is a news article from NESN.com about Justin Rohrwasser.

Page Break

Jemele Hill Weighs In On Justin Rohrwasser's Iffy Social Media Activity

by Dakota Randall on Sun, Apr 26, 2020 at 10:33 AM

Jemele Hill already has reached a verdict on Justin Rohrwasser.

The New England Patriots on Saturday selected the Marshall kicker in Round 5 of the 2020 NFL Draft. It didn't take long for fans and media to flag some of Rohrwasser's tattoos and social media activity as problematic.

The New York native's social media accounts are littered with posts and "likes" that suggest Rohrwasser supports far-right groups and ideology. He also has a tattoo of the logo for Three Percenters, a far-right militia movement and paramilitary group that primarily advocates for gun ownership rights and limiting the Federal Government's involvement in local affairs. During a conference call with reporters, Rohrwasser said he was an under-informed teenager when he got the tattoo, which he plans to cover. He did not offer an explanation for his social media activity in the years since, nor was he asked to.

For what it's worth, Rohrwasser does not appear to have the tattoo in photos of him during his days at the University of Rhode Island, which he attended from 2015 to 2016. He sat out 2017 before resuming his collegiate career in 2018 as a redshirt junior with Marshall.

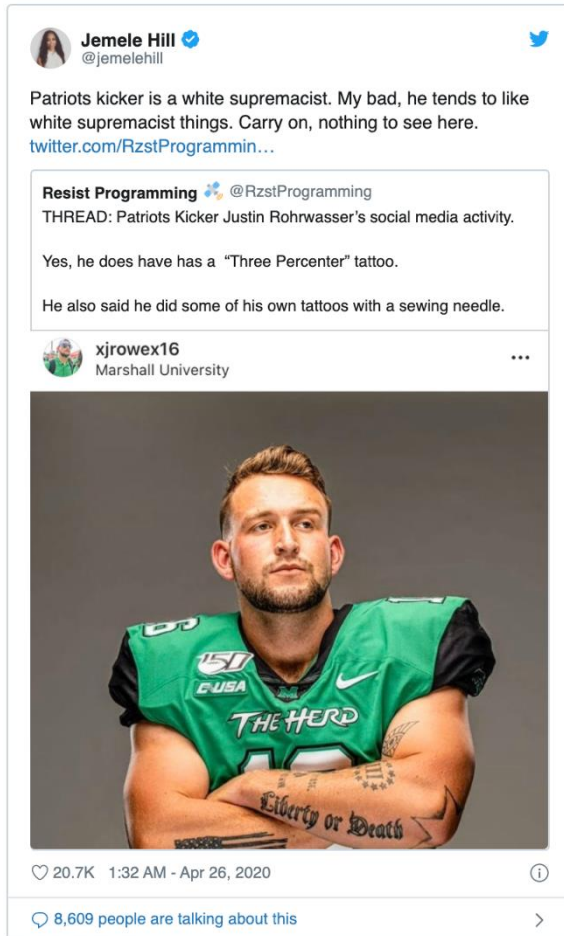
As for the Three Percenters, it is worth noting the group has attempted to separate itself from racist ideology. After its members attended the Aug. 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Va., the organization's "National Council" issued a "stand down order," stating, "We will not align ourselves with any type of racist group." Many Three Percenters supporters communicate the opposite sentiment in social media comment sections, among other places.

The Twitter thread highlighting Rohrwasser's controversial social media activity features posts/likes that imply the new Patriots kicker is a passionate conservative who occasionally aligns himself with far-right groups, such as the Three Percenters. In multiple posts, Rohrwasser has shown support for United States President Donald Trump as well as contempt for those who, during the playing of the national anthem, have knelt in protest of racial and social injustice in America. He has downplayed the severity of COVID-19 and elevated the works of popular Psychologist Jordan Peterson and philosopher Ayn Rand, two individuals some consider to be controversial.

None of the posts in the aforementioned thread show Rohrwasser directly communicating racist or white supremacist ideology. Whether he indirectly does so via his social media activity is subject for debate.

Nevertheless, Hill, who recently criticized Patriots owner Robert Kraft for supporting Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, labeled Rohrwasser as a "white supremacist" in a tweet early Sunday morning.

Take a look:



Make of that what you will.

Since being drafted by the Patriots, Rohrwasser has changed his Twitter account from public to private and scrubbed his Instagram account of multiple posts. Additionally, some people claiming to have attended URI with Rohrwasser have come forth and accused him of exhibiting racist behavior.

Hill hardly is the only person who has criticized Rohrwasser and the Patriots for drafting him. Of course, those who believe they have enough evidence to judge Rohrwasser have every right to do so, as do those who insist on giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Still, it might be beneficial for all parties to give Rohrwasser an opportunity to explain his past — at least more than what he was given Saturday. Whether the notoriously strict Patriots will afford the rookie such an opportunity is anyone's guess.

*Note: After receiving backlash online, Rohrwasser had the "Three Percenters" tattoo removed in July of 2020.

End of Block: News Article

Start of Block: Manipulation Check

man Based specifically on the news article you just read, which of the following do you think most closely describes Justin Rohrwasser's political ideology?

- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Conservative

End of Block: Manipulation Check

Start of Block: Well-Being

Please think about *yourself* and *how you feel right now* as you answer the following questions.
How much do you agree with the following statements?



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In most ways, my social life is currently close to my ideal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The current conditions of my social life are excellent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am currently satisfied with my social life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Right now, I have gotten the important things I want in my social life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would change almost nothing about my current social life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel meaningful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Being a fan of the New England Patriots makes me feel valuable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel in awe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel deeply appreciating.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel morally elevated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel inspired.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel part of something greater than myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel connected with myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me feel that I know who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rooting for the New England Patriots gives me a clear sense of my values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of how I feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rooting for the New England Patriots makes me aware of what matters to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel joyful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel pleased.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Being a fan of the New England Patriots brings me enjoyment/fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel depressed/blue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel unhappy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel frustrated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel angry/hostile.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel worried/anxious.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I am carefree.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I am free of concerns.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I am detached from my troubles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel easygoing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel lighthearted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Currently, I feel happy-go-lucky.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Well-Being

Start of Block: Demographics

text This section asks a few questions that are designed to get some basic information about you, the survey respondent.



age How old are you?

▼ 18 ... 65+

sex What was your sex at birth, as shown on your original birth certificate?

☐ Male

☐ Female

orient Do you consider yourself to be:

- ☐ Straight/Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Unknown/Uncertain
- ☐ Other

region In what region of the U.S. do you live?

- ☐ New England (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island)
- ☐ Middle Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)
- ☐ East North Central (Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio)
- ☐ West North Central (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas)
- ☐ South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, District of Columbia)
- ☐ East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi)
- ☐ West South Central (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas)
- ☐ Mountain (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico)
- ☐ Pacific (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii)

pol_id When it comes to politics, what do you usually think of yourself as?

- ☐ Very Liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Somewhat Liberal
- ☐ Neither Liberal nor Conservative
- ☐ Somewhat Conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Very Conservative

pol_af How would you usually describe your political party affiliation?

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Third Party/Other



pol Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Gun laws should be less strict.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generally, the federal government should be involved in state and local affairs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When it comes to giving Black people equal rights with whites, our country has not gone far enough.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Debrief

DEBRIEFING FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: We previously informed you that the purpose of the study was to investigate how sports fans relate to and have relationships with athletes. The goal of our research is to investigate how being primed with different moral reasoning statements influences a sports fan's psychological health in response to being presented with an athlete's controversial political beliefs. As such, all participants were randomly placed into one of four experimental conditions after answering the questions about being a fan of the Patriots. Three of the four conditions presented different statements about the consideration of athletes' political beliefs within sports. The fourth condition was a control with statements about aspects of sports reporters' writing styles. After the writing response prompt, the rest of the questions in the questionnaire were the same for all participants. Please do not disclose research procedures and/or hypotheses to anyone who might participate in this study in the future as this could affect the results of the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: You may decide that you do not want your data used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study and permanently deleted contact the researcher(s), **Stephen Warren at smwarren@umass.edu** and ask for your data to be deleted. Alternatively, you can contact the faculty sponsor, **Professor Erica Scharrer at scharrer@comm.umass.edu or 413-545-1311**. Whether you agree or do not agree to have your data used for this study, you will still receive your agreed upon compensation from Qualtrics for your participation.

FINAL REPORT: If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please feel free to contact us.

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researcher(s), **Stephen Warren** at smwarren@umass.edu. Alternatively, you can contact the faculty sponsor, **Professor Erica Scharrer** at scharrer@comm.umass.edu or **413-545-1311**. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the **University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO)** at **(413) 545-3428** or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. If you feel you would like assistance please contact **the UMass Center for Counseling and Psychological Health (CCPH)** at **(413) 545-2337 (Mon-Fri from 8-5pm) - on weekends or after 5pm, call (413) 577-5000 and ask for the CCPH clinician on call. You can also contact the Psychological Services Center at 413-545-0041 (Monday-Friday 8am-5pm) or psc@psych.umass.edu.]** In a serious emergency, remember that you can also call 911 for immediate assistance.

*****Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this study!*****

End of Block: Debrief

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