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# An Analysis of the Relationship between College Football Fans and their Rival Teams

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football fans and their rival teams

By

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An analysis of the relationship between college

football fans and their rival teams


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The current study explored how fan identification and negative rival perception affect the decision to blast or support the rival in indirect competition in college football. 258 participants (M age=24.15, 51.16% female) responded after being targeted via social media, email, and in person. Fans higher in identification had a more negative rival perception, were more likely to blast the rival, and were less likely to support the rival in indirect competition. A negative rival perception increased blasting and decreased rival support. The results contribute to current literature on rivalry and fan identification and aid marketers in marketing segmentation and targeting new segments to increase viewership and attendance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the college football season progresses toward the final week of regular play, often referred to as "hate week" as most traditional rivalries are played at this time (Fornelli, 2014), excitement builds among fans as the long-anticipated rivalry games approach (Bell, 2013). While hatred and negativity between rivals is well-known and documented (Havard, 2014; Leach & Spears, 2009; Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2011), little is known about when and/or why a fan may choose to support a rival in indirect competition, and how a fan's level of identification with their favorite team might affect that support.

Individuals identify with certain groups with which they hold emotional significance and personal value (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals are attracted to groups that they perceive will positively impact their self-esteem (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabino, 2006; Amiot & Hornsey, 2010; Jetten et al., 2015), provide a sense of meaning and belonging (Vignoles et al., 2006), and enhance personal identity clarity (Usborne & Taylor, 2010; Amiot & Aubin, 2013). The underlying motives beneath social identification affect how the individual relates to in-group members and out-group members. Intrinsic motivations foster group unity through the favoring of group members, while extrinsic motivations promote the enhancing of group identification through out-group derogation (Amiot & Sansfaçon, 2011; Amiot & Aubin,

2013). Out-group derogation and prejudice increase when a perceived external threat to identity or status becomes salient, such as in times of competition or conflict (Brewer, 1999; Jackson, 2002). Because of the competitive nature of sport, fan identification (as a form of social identification) easily fosters negative behavior toward out-group members.

The construct of fan identity begins at a young age when one becomes simply aware of a sport or team, and grows to a level of true allegiance as one compares teams, selects a favorite, and develops into a true emotional and mental connection (Lock, Taylor, Funk, and Darcy, 2012). High levels of identification provide many positive benefits, such as a fulfillment of social needs (Havard, 2014; Branscombe & Wann, 1991), cohesiveness with a group of like-minded fans that crosses traditional social boundaries (Foster & Hyatt, 2008), and increases self-esteem (Dhurup, 2012) as one's devotion and connection to the team is displayed (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Campbell, Aiken, & Kent, 2004). However, high fan identification can also lead to negative behaviors; these fans may have strong and fluctuating emotions that are often difficult to control (Dimmock & Grove, 2006), will often derogate fans who support other teams (Branscombe & Wann, 1994), and experience feelings of *Schadenfreude* (pleasure when witnessing another's pain) when other teams, especially rivals, lose (Dalakas & Melancon, 2012; Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003).

Fan identity and rivalry are interconnected, as one's feelings toward a rival develop along with the growth of the relationship with one's favorite team (Havard & Eddy, 2013). These rivalries between institutions evolve over a history of relatively even competition and consistent play (Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010; Havard & Eddy, 2013), and grow into a relationship that goes beyond the game on the field (Kilduff et al.,

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2010). Fans experience heightened satisfaction over defeating a rival and intense sadness after losing to a rival, and view these match-ups as more significant than other games (Havard, 2014). Fans typically feel joy when a rival loses to a third-party, but recent research suggests that there is some indication of fans supporting rivals in order to give the rival game more excitement and prestige (Havard, 2014) or out of loyalty to the athletic conference that the two teams play in (Havard, Wann, & Ryan, 2013b).

When a fan has to make a decision regarding support of a rival in indirect competition, the notion of loyalty comes in to play. Loyalty has two basic components, attitudinal and behavioral; the attitudes drive the behaviors (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Funk & James, 2001). The two attitudinal components that enter into the decision-making process in this context are bias and resistance to change. Bias is exhibited through blasting, or out-group derogation (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), and physically aggressive behavior. For highly identified fans, blasting does not occur automatically (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne, & Braddock, 2007), but is more likely (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Peripheral group members blast out-group members in order to increase their perception as a true, loyal fan (Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 1995). Regarding aggression, highly identified fans are more likely to become aggressive toward rival fans, players, or coaches (Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999) in order to maintain their positive group status (Wann, Culver, Akanda, Daglar, de Divitiis, & Smith, 2005). In the current study, resistance to change appears in the form of an "anti-loyalty" behavior – supporting a rival team. In a social group, group members perceive internal betrayal as a more negative and threatening occurrence than out-group threats (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1994). Because social identity contains many facets (Brewer & Pierce,

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2005; Jetten et al., 2015), the current study aims to determine if one facet could supersede fan identification by promoting rival support.

In sport literature, the research interest in rivalry is relatively recent and has focused primarily on negative feelings toward rivals, both during and outside of competition. While these topics certainly relate to the current study, the primary focus of indirect competition and rivalry appears only as a brief mention in a small number of studies. Because of the varying and complex nature of rivalry and the relative newness of academic interest in rivalry, an understanding of how rivalry affects fans in indirect competition makes a crucial contribution to existing literature, of which current scholars take note. A recent study by Havard (2014) suggested that future research on rivalry should expand to include support (or lack thereof) of rivals in indirect competition. Further, similar studies on rivalry (Havard & Eddy, 2013; Havard et al., 2013b) admit to not accounting for the level of fan identification of participants or not representing lowly identified fans, which will be accounted for in the current study. In regards to social and fan identification, little research has been done on multiple facets of social identity within and pertaining to sport fandom. While blasting and prejudice are well represented in sport research, little research has been conducted on the effects of social identity complexity on team loyalty; due to this lack of literature, the current study aims to explore the degree to which college football fans will support the rivals of their favorite team in indirect competition.

CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Social Identification**

As defined by Tajfel (1982), social identification contains two, and occasionally

three, primary components. The first is cognitive awareness that one is a member of a

group. The second is the evaluation that the group relates to the values that one holds.

The third is the extent to which emotions govern the cognitive awareness and evaluations.

Social identification is based in social identity theory, which states that individuals are

motivated to form and maintain a positive social identity through a group (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979).

**Fan Identification**

Based on social identification, Trail, Fink, and Anderson (2003) define fan

identification as the degree of psychological connection that a fan has to a team. Fans

lower in identification are externally motivated to identify with a team, for socialization

or image-enhancement purposes, while fans higher identification are internally motivated

to identify with a team, for self-esteem enhancement and definition of personal identity

(Lock et al., 2012).

**Rivalry**

Kilduff et al. (2010) define rivalry as "a subjective competitive relationship that an actor has with another actor that entails increased psychological involvement and perceived stakes of competition for the focal actor, independent of the objective characteristics of the situation" (p. 945). The authors go on to describe four factors that contribute to the creation of rivalry: close geographic proximity, a close historic record, a history of competition, and a higher status opponent (perhaps, the authors note, as an attempt to gain higher status for their own team by being associated with the rival team).

**Consumer Loyalty Behavior**

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) defined loyalty behavior as a decision-making behavior expressed over time by a decision-making unit biased to one or more brands out of a group of alternatives through evaluative cognitive processes. This excludes random and/or one-time purchases and purchase intentions that do not lead to purchase behavior.

**Sport Fan Loyalty Behavior**

According to Funk and James (2001), a fan's loyalty to their favorite team has two primary components, attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal loyalty, comprised of persistence, resistance to change, and biased cognition, leads to behavioral loyalty, such as game attendance, cheering for a favorite team despite poor performance, and perceiving a favorite team as better than a rival team despite team performance to the contrary.

**Blasting**

Cialdini and Richardson (1980) define blasting as "the tendency to derogate others, especially others with whom one has a negative unit relationship, in the interests of self-enhancement" (p. 413). While blasting is not an automatic behavior for highly identified fans (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2007), highly identified fans are more likely to blast rivals in order to create or maintain a positive social identity (Branscombe & Wann, 1994).

**Rival Support**

For the purpose of this study, rival support is defined as a willingness to support a rival team in competition, either externally (through openly cheering or declaring support) or internally (privately hoping that the rival will succeed). Bias toward one's own team and against a rival team increases during direct competition because of the direct threat, but direct threat is lower during indirect competition (Delia, 2014). Because of this lack, or lessening, of direct threat, it can be assumed that sport fans may choose to identify with a more inclusive social identity, such as home town or state, in order to justify supporting a rival team.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Social Identification.**

Social identity theory (SIT) states that individuals are motivated to form a positive

social identity within a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel (1981) defines social

identity as the "part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his or her

knowledge of membership to a social group (or groups) together with the value and the

emotional significance attached to it" (p. 255). According to SIT, social identity stems

from the internalization of group membership and the awareness of the difference

between one's in-group and an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Tajfel

(1982), group (social) identification contains two, and occasionally three, primary

components: cognitive awareness that one is a member of a group, the evaluation that the

group relates to the values that one holds, the extent to which emotion governs the

cognitive awareness and evaluations. Jackson's (2002) findings maintained these three

components, and found each component present in ascribed groups, chosen groups, and

face-to-face groups.

Several researchers attempt to answer the question of why and how individuals

are attracted to certain social groups. Vignoles et al. (2006) state that an element of

identity that contributes more to self-esteem is regarded as more central to an individual's

sense of identity. In addition to self-esteem, other central motives for identity include

"meaning, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, and belonging" (p. 324). According to Crocker and Wolfe (2001), an individual's self-esteem depends on his or her success or failure within various domains, called contingencies of self-worth. Individuals vary on the contingencies upon which they center their self-esteem. Amiot and Hornsey (2010) developed a similar concept, which they called collective contingencies of self-esteem. The authors found that when faced with a threat to identity from an out-group member, individuals high in need of collective self-esteem experienced higher levels of in-group bias than those low in need for collective self-esteem. When contingencies of self-worth are applied on a group level and in a competitive setting, individuals who depend more on collective self-esteem for personal self-esteem respond more drastically to threats to the identity on which their self-esteem depends.

Amiot and Sansfaçon (2011) applied self-determination theory (SDT) to social groups in order to determine how the origin of motives for social identity affect individuals. As defined by Deci and Ryan (2000), SDT contends that an individual's psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness foster their motivation. Amiot and Sansfaçon (2011) found that identity based on self-determined (intrinsic) motivations tends to produce positive outcomes such as high self-esteem and in-group pride, while identity based on non-self-determined (extrinsic) motivations tended to produce negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and out-group derogation.

In addition to these findings, Usborne and Taylor (2010) found that two additional concepts, self-concept clarity (SCC) and collective identity clarity (CIC) contribute to self-esteem and psychological well-being. Campbell et al (1996) SCC as "the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept (e.g., personal attributes) are clearly

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and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporarily stable" (p. 141). SCC is a facet of both identity and self-concept. Similar to SCC, Usborne and Taylor (2010) developed the concept of CIC, which provides increased self-esteem and psychological well-being. CIC depends upon the existence of a reference group with which one can identify with in order to develop a concept of identity.

Amiot and Aubin (2013) applied all of these concepts (SDT, CIC, and collective contingencies of self-esteem) in one group of studies in order to determine how they work together to explain why individuals are attracted to certain groups. The authors found that social identity derived from self-determined motivations and clarity of collective identity were found to provide more personal identity clarity, higher personal self-esteem, satisfaction, and in-group bias without out-group derogation. However, identity derived from non-self-determined motivation and a dependency on group self-esteem lead to social comparison and competition, lower personal self-esteem, and in-group bias with out-group derogation.

**Social Identity and Self-Esteem**

As the studies above found, self-esteem is an essential component of social identity. However, identifying with a social group only influences self-esteem when the group has been internalized and becomes psychologically important to the individual (Jetten et al., 2015). In addition, how others perceive a group can affect the self-esteem of the group members. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), members of an in-group may attempt to alter the perception of their group by changing the factors used to compare their group to others in order to be perceived more favorably; these strategies are known as social creativity strategies. When group members do not believe that perceptions can

be altered, or do not wish to alter them, they may employ distancing tactics, such as removing oneself from a social group, known as social mobility strategies.

Jackson, Sullivan, Harnish, and Hodge (1996) applied social creativity strategies and social mobility strategies to members of negatively viewed social groups. The authors findings agreed with Tajfel and Turner (1979): participants in a negatively perceived group enhanced the perception of more favorable dimensions than those that caused the negative perception, and participants distanced themselves from the group if group boundaries seemed impermeable. In addition, participants were less likely to engage in social mobility strategies and social creativity strategies when group membership was temporary (permeable) rather than permanent (impermeable), as temporary group membership is not as important to self-concept as permanent group membership.

**Intragroup Relations**

Self-esteem also affects how individuals act toward in-group members and out-group members. Brown, Collins, and Schmidt (1988) found that individuals with high self-esteem directly enhance their esteem by showing group favoritism. Certainly, intergroup prejudice is well-documented in social identification literature. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that intergroup prejudice in the form of in-group preference stems from the mere perception of belonging to an in-group and the existence of an out-group. Brewer (1999) proposed that in-group bias does not hinge on out-group hate but is primarily based on simple favoritism for those more similar to oneself. Favoritism for fellow group members primarily comes from a preference for familiarity and kind treatment from those that are like oneself. In addition, members of the same group

typically have the same goals, which provide solidarity, stronger group identity, and mutual trust. Jackson (2002) applied these concepts in a study, finding in agreement that bias toward the in-group in the form of favoritism for in-group members stemmed from emotional attachment and attraction to the in-group. Further, Voci (2006) found that the relationship between in-group bias and group identification, at its most basic, centers on trust and affective attachment. Again, no relationship exists between group identification and out-group evaluation alone. Preference for the in-group begins subconsciously. In their study on friendships between children, Castelli, de Amicis, and Sherman (2007) found that children preferred to be friends with other members of their in-group that were not also friends with members of the out-group.

On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem indirectly enhance their esteem through out-group derogation and prejudice (Brown et al., 1988). Somewhat counterintuitively, Lambert, Payne, Jacoby, Shaffer, Chasteen, and Khan (2003) found that compared to private situations, being in public can actually increase prejudice attitudes. Participants who indicated that they were concerned about behaving correctly in public became more prejudiced when they were cautioned that others may overhear prejudiced remarks. However, Crandall and Eshleman (2003) proposed a justification-suppression model, wherein individuals who experience feelings of prejudice attempt to suppress their prejudice in order to convince themselves and others that they are not prejudiced. In order to ease the mental effort of suppression, these individuals with justify any prejudiced expressions based on any other factor. In their study based on the justification-suppression model, Costarelli and Gerlowska (2015) found that suppression is based on external motivations, such as negative social responses. When a negative

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response is anticipated, prejudiced individuals will express a more unsure opinion.

According to Schaller, Boyd, Yohannes, and O'Brien (1995), stereotypes, which influence prejudiced attitudes, stem from how individuals structure their environment. Because of the complexity of the environment in which we as individuals live, individuals desire to structure and categorize their environment. This personal need for structure (PNS) is higher for some individuals than for others. Schaller et al. (1995) found that individuals with high PNS are more likely than those who possess low PNS to form incorrect group stereotypes toward out groups due to the use of more simple reasoning strategies. Low PNS individuals utilize more complex strategies, and as such tend to form more correct out group stereotypes.

Typically, in-group bias and out-group prejudice operate independently of each other. However, when two or more groups compete with each other (intragroup competition), out-group hostility can occur, due to the threat to group identity and the lack of mutual trust between groups (Brewer, 1999). Jackson (2002) found that when perceived conflict is present, out-groups are evaluated more negatively, with little effect on in-group evaluations. According to Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, and Kenrick (2006), subjects faced with a group threat increased group conformity in order to protect group identity regardless of potential positive or negative perception from others. Voci (2006) added that when a threat is made toward the uniqueness of the in-group from an out-group, in-group bias increases in order to reestablish how the in-group differs from others and to discount claims made by the out-group. Similarly, when a threat is made toward the value of the in-group, in-group bias increases with the aim of enhancing group image. In addition to in-group bias, value threats can also lead to out-group derogation,

stemming from distrust of the out-group. In addition, when the threatening out-group is viewed as low-status as compared to the in-group, negative evaluations and derogation intend to reestablish the status of the out-group.

Similar to Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social creativity and social mobility strategies, Ellemers, Wilke, and van Knippenberg (1993) found that collective mistreatment of a group resulting in a low status of the group leads to group solidarity, increased group identification, and increased efforts to enhance the status. When enhancing status seems unrealistic, group members seek to alter comparisons to out-groups to factors where the group may have an opportunity to compare more advantageously. Conversely, when a member of a low status group is mistreated on an individual level, individuals seek to distance themselves from the group and to enhance their personal status outside of their relationship to the group. However, Jackson (2011) stated that a strongly established group is able to withstand identity threats and failures that might set back or dissolve a less-established group or individual.

However, bias and prejudice can be reduced through intragroup cooperation. Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) found that intragroup friendships between individuals can prevent prejudice from forming, as well as decrease pre-existing prejudice. In addition, intragroup relationships can improve when the distinctiveness of each group is emphasized (Zarate & Garza, 2002).

## Fan Identification

In order to understand a sports fan's feelings toward their rival, it is necessary to understand their identification with their favorite team. Research by Havard (2014) on college football and men's basketball fans discussed that rivalry stems from the concept

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of fan identification, which Trail et al. (2003) define as the degree of psychological connection that a fan has towards a team. Havard (2014) found that fan identification, which helps to "fulfill social needs and diminish the feelings of depression" (p. 249), often begins through social connections with friends and family; proximity and university attendance also positively influence fan identity in college sports. In their study on men's college basketball fans, Branscombe and Wann (1991) reported that team success strongly influences initial development of fan identity, as well. Other factors that the authors found positively influencing identification include "geographic location, presence of a star player, and other family members or friends supporting the team" (p. 124). In their study on professional sport fans, Fisher and Wakefield (1998) explained that sport fans will identify with a team whose fan base promotes a "positive self-image" (p. 34). In the case of fans of an unsuccessful team, the authors added that identification becomes more about being identified with others in the fan base, instead of solely identifying with the team; however, a fan who is highly identified with their team will remain highly identified, regardless of the team's success in competition. Havard et. al., (2013) also found that distinction from a rival strengthens identity within a fan base, noting that fans are motivated to identify a rival in order to set themselves apart as "special and different from those in rival groups" (p. 229). In sum, fan identification is a strong social bond that provides sport fans with distinction and a source of self-esteem, and fulfills social bonding needs.

**Psychological Continuum Model**

A fan's identification with a certain team falls along a scale developed by Funk and James (2001) known as the psychological continuum model (PCM). The PCM

contains four levels: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. Fans at the lowest

level, awareness, have just been introduced to the existence of certain sports or teams.

Awareness most often occurs in early childhood, through parents, friends, or school

activities, and continues into adulthood as adults are made aware of new teams, sports,

and leagues. If one has no interest in sports, one's identification may end at awareness.

However, an increase in awareness often causes a comparison of various teams and

sports, leading to the eventual selection of a favorite. Once a favorite is selected, the level

of attraction has been reached. Attraction to a specific team may be due to a desire for

entertainment, socialization, or the desire to see a successful team or star player take the

field. Lock et al. (2012) describe the two lowest stages of identification as being

externally motivated. Fans at these levels rarely discuss their identification with others

and the team has little influence over the fans' behavior. The fan sees the players and

team "as a faceless and amorphous group of people" (p. 290). As attachment increases

along the PCM, Funk and James (2001) state that this attraction develops into attachment

to a certain team. Fans reach attachment once the favored team has become linked to their

self-identity. At this point, the identity has become consistent and stable. The fourth

level, allegiance, refers to the extent of internal consistency and stability of the fan's

identification with the team. At this stage, the fan will strongly resist change and will

reject any inconsistent information without thought. Lock et al. (2012) describe the final

two stages of identification as being more internally motivated. While the fan will be

more externally vocal about their identification with the team, the degree of internal

identification influences "daily behavior and planning" (p. 290). The fans also prefer

certain individual players over others, as opposed to seeing the team as a singular group.

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**Factors that Influence Fan Identification**

After establishing identity, a fan's level of identification can be affected by various internal and external factors. Pritchard, Stinson, and Patton (2010) identified that affiliation and affinity are two primary factors that influence fans' formation of identity. While affinity with the organization, which stems from a fans' view of similarity between their self-image and the team's image, occurs more often in professional sport, affiliation primarily influences college sport fans. The authors stated that college sport fans often have a multi-faceted relationship with and hold similar values to those of the university. In this relationship, the athletics program acts as the primary communicator of the relationship. When affiliation increased, so does fan identification. Branscombe and Wann (1991) concluded that fans who live further away from their favorite team only see an increase in identity when their team is successful. The authors continued, adding that "fans who support the home team" become and remain highly identified, despite any team failures (p. 123). For very new fans, however, team success is a highly influential factor. For long-term fans, team record has little, if any effect, on level of fan identification (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). However, Branscombe and Wann (1991) clarified that the length of time that a participant had been a fan had little to no effect on the degree of devotion to their team. Research by Lee (1985) theorizes that despite a lack of interest in a specific sport, fan identity also increases if a match is of great significance, such as a game on the national or international level. Individuals with low self-esteem also increase their identification with a team in order to improve their own self-identity (Lee, 1985). Branscombe and Wann (1991) also found that participants living relatively distant from their favorite team causes a decrease in devotion, or even

completely removes their devotion. Again, Lee (1985) furthered this idea by stating that a decrease in identity also occurred when fans of a particular group, such as a university, were not particularly interested in a certain sport that their institution funded. Collectively, fan identification is a fluid and multifaceted relationship, influenced by affiliation with the school (in the case of collegiate sport), team success, match significance, and a need for self-esteem.

**Attributes of Highly Identified Fans**

Highly identified fans typically display their devotion to their team more intensely than lowly identified fans. The most prominent display of high team identification is that of basking in reflected glory, or BIRGing (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). BIRGing is characterized by a fan's desire to be both outwardly and inwardly associated with a team, especially after the team has had a success, in order to increase personal self-esteem. Students studied by Cialdini et al. (1976) tended to increase their BIRGing after experiencing a personal failure. The authors found that "being merely associated with someone else's success and failure had much the same effect as personal success and failure" (p. 374). Wann and Dolan (1994) added that through this process of BIRGing, highly identified fans tend to claim some of the credit for a team victory in order to increase their self esteem, despite having no direct role in the success. Dhurup (2012) furthered this concept, stating that BIRGing lead to purchasing licensed merchandise and promoting a relationship with their winning in order to increase their self-esteem through outward declaration of team association. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) stated that fans with high identification levels are also more likely to frequently display their connection to the team and to attend events; these two

characteristics remain unaffected by team success. Similar to the concept of BIRGing, Campbell et al. (2004) found that some highly identified fans chose to "trumpet their relationship" (p. 153) with their team regardless of failure. Known as basking in spite of reflected failure, or BIRFing, this behavior comes from a desire to remain and be perceived as loyal to one's team. BIRFing also develops feelings of camaraderie amongst fans and a feeling of individuality from out-groups.

Highly identified fans also show emotional and cognitive bias toward their favorite team. In their study on college football fans, Dietz-Uhler and Murrell (1999) reported that lowly identified fans do not evaluate their team at an increasing level of approval over the course of the season, but rather remain steady throughout. On the other hand, highly identified fans were found to "evaluate the team more favorably over the course of the season" and to "evaluate the team more favorably after positive than negative games" (p. 25). Potter and Keene (2012) found that not only do highly identify fans claim to experience emotional bias toward their team, they also physiologically respond to news of their favorite team. In response to news of a coach taking another job, Potter and Keene discovered that "highly identified fans had greater activation in the frown muscle above the eyebrow," (p. 362) as well as increased heart rate. As these results were not as drastic in moderately identified fans, the authors suggested that highly identified fans devote higher levels of cognitive resources to their favorite sport teams than moderately identified fans.

In addition to increasing self-esteem through vicarious success, there are also positive effects to be gained from fan identification in general. Branscombe and Wann (1991) found that high identification levels often result in frequent positive emotions and

fewer feelings of negative emotions, such as depression and isolation. Fans who follow

their team from a distance, however, are less able to gain positive esteem from the

presence of other fans and instead may have increased esteem solely through BIRGing.

**Rivalry**

Rivalry is a long-standing tradition in sport. Kilduff et al. (2010) define rivalry as

"a subjective competitive relationship that an actor has with another actor that entails

increased psychological involvement and perceived stakes of competition for the focal

actor, independent of the objective characteristics of the situation" (p. 945). The authors

reported that rivalry in college athletics stemmed from a long relationship with the rival

institution, according to survey results from the sports writers of student papers from

ACC, Big 12, Big East, Big 10, Pac-10, and SEC schools. After completing research on

conference and university athletics websites, Kilduff et al. (2010) also found that

similarity between the institutions contributed significantly to rivalry; factors found to be

similar were geographic location and a history of competition, with "historic similarity

and competitiveness" trumping "recent similarity and competitiveness in predicting

rivalry" (p. 958). Finally, the authors found that teams also desire to claim a rivalry with a

more athletically prestigious competitor, in order to attempt to gain a similar level of

status.

In a qualitative study of seventy-six sport rivalries, Tyler and Cobbs (2015)

identified three categories of rivalry antecedents - conflict, peer comparison, and bias.

The formation of the conflict category is based in realistic group conflict theory, which

states that actual conflict can stem from conflicts of interest. In the sport context, the

conflict between fan groups is generated from the actual conflict between the two teams.

In this category, the authors found data indicating high frequency of competition and a close competitive history between the teams to be strong indicators of rivalry, similar to the findings of Kilduff et al. (2010). In addition, historically defining moments and the presence of a star athlete or coach on the rival team contributes to a stronger rivalry. The second category, peer comparison, emerges from the idea that the two groups are similar, yet distinct - again, similar to Kilduff et al. (2010). If two groups are too similar, there will be little to distinguish the two; if the groups are too different, there would be no threat to group identity, thus the rivalry would weaken. The authors state that cultural similarity may be found in the form of team play style or in the culture of the fan base. Similarly, geographic proximity contributes to similar culture, as well as increased fan interaction. In addition, teams that have both a similar culture and a close geographic proximity compete for the same recruits. The final category of rivalry antecedents is biased views toward the opponent and their fans. While cultural similarities do contribute to rivalry, fans will emphasize the differences in culture between the two teams or fan bases, such as an urban school versus a rural school. In addition, fans of a less successful team will consider more successful teams to be stronger rivals, though it is unlikely for the successful team to return this perception. Participants also believed media opinions to be unfairly skewed in the favor of their rival. Among the factors listed above, Tyler and Cobbs (2015) found competition frequency and parity to influence the strength of rivalry more strongly than any other factors.

In college sport, Havard and Eddy (2013) observed that most fans identify the same rivalry for multiple, if not all, sports at their institution. Similar to fan identification, many fans gain a sense of who their rival is, and how they ought to feel about their rival,

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at a young age. Fans studied felt that "balanced competition was important to the development and sustainability of a rivalry" (p. 225). Consistent with results from Kilduff et al. (2010), participants in Havard and Eddy's study (2013) whose university recently changed conference stated that new rivalries would likely come about from geographical location and recent competitive history between the two schools. Participants also identified new rivals among the most successful teams in their new conference; this status by association "suggested that fans saw their favorite teams as equals with these schools, even though a quick review of recent performance history did not support this in most cases" (p. 227).

**Direct Sport Competition**

Some may think of a rivalry as an individual match-up between two teams. While rivalry goes far beyond this, direct competition between two rivals displays the most passionate fans and opinions. Dakalas and Melancon (2012) stated that team identification causes feelings of hatred and Schadenfreude, which Heider (1958) defines as "malicious joy" at the misfortune of another (p. 278), towards rival teams and those associated with rival teams. Leach et al. (2003) agreed with Dakalas and Melancon (2012), adding that the more highly identified a fan is with their in-group (team or sport), the more Schadenfreude they express toward an out-group defeat. These negative feelings and consequences typically get directed at rival teams or groups. Cikara et al. (2011) reported that more aggressive participants in their study on Schadenfreude showed similar activity in the ventral striatum region of their brain (which typically engages when winning or receiving an award) when defeating a rival as they would if they had a personal victory. Consistent with these findings, participants in Havard's (2014) study

stated that they gained a "sense of satisfaction" after directly defeating a rival, and that

defeating a rival was more significant that winning a game against a non-rival (p. 248). In

addition, winning against a rival also gave fans a stronger sense of community among

one another, while some participants preferred "being alone when the favourite team lost

to the rival" (Havard, 2014, p. 249).

**Indirect Sport Competition**

Less commonly considered, though still prevalent, is the idea of continuing a

rivalry during indirect competition. Leach and Spears (2009) stated that participants in

their study on international soccer (in-group members) experienced Schadenfreude

similar to that from direct competition when observing members of the out-group failing

against a third party. Research by Smith, Powell, Combs, and Schurtz (2009)

demonstrated that Schadenfreude occurs naturally when members of an in-group directly

benefit from the failure of the out-group, a common occurrence in sports competitions.

Feeling that the second party deserves to fail seems "to satisfy people's preference for

balance and symmetry" (p. 539). Feather and Sherman (2002) found that participants

were more likely to feel Schadenfreude toward targets that they resented (such as a rival)

and felt that the target deserved the misfortune. Just as with direct competition, Cikara et

al. (2011) again reported that more aggressive participants showed similar activity in the

ventral striatum region of their brain (which typically engages when winning or receiving

an award) when observing their rival be defeated by a third party as they would if they

had a personal victory.

Havard (2014) illustrated that participants generally felt happier when their rivals

lost to a team considered an underdog, as well as games with national notoriety, such as a

bowl game or championship game. Some fans responded that they would be so upset that their rival team was playing a post season game that they would not even watch (Havard, 2014). On the other hand, Havard (2014) found a small number of fans who wanted their rival team to win every game prior to the big rivalry match-up, "to give the game more prestige" (p. 249). Havard et al. (2013) also found that "fans also identify with the conference their favorite team plays in to a certain extent," indicating that rivalry on a conference level could cause fans to support their rival institution in indirect competition (p. 230).

**Perceptions of Sport Rivals**

Outside of competition, a rivalry maintains feelings of mutual hatred. Havard (2014) discovered that many fans described their "rival team and university as 'shady' or 'cheaters'" who lacked in sportsmanship (p. 247). The fans also tended to hold negative feelings toward the academics of their rival institution, stating that anyone who chose to attend "made the 'wrong decision'" (p. 248). This prejudice was stronger toward fans that did not attend the university, who were perceived as "bandwagon" fans, while the fans "generally accepted fans of rival universities if they attended the school" (p. 248).

Based on the previous literature, we arrived at the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Fan identification is positively correlated with negative rival perception.

**Sport Loyalty Behavior**

**Traditional Consumer Loyalty Behavior**

According to Day (1969), consumer loyalty contains both an attitudinal and a behavioral component. As consumers evaluate and select a product, they form an attitude toward the product. As they engage in repeat-purchase patterns, the attitude narrows their perception, increasing the likelihood of purchasing the favored brand and decreasing the detection of competing brands. Here, Day (1969) implies that attitudinal components prompt behavioral loyalty, i.e. repeat-purchase behavior. Dick and Basu (1994) identify loyal consumers to be persistent in their attitudes and biases toward the product, and to resist considering changing to a different product or brand. In studying commitment (loyalty) and change, Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard (1999) found in agreement that the strength of an individual's commitment is exhibited by the extent to which they resist change, identify with and internalize shared core values, and seek out information that is cognitively consistent with the reasoning behind their selection.

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) define consumer loyalty behavior as "(1) the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes" (p. 2). The authors agree with Day (1969), stating that the underlying psychological processes differentiate consumer loyalty from simple repeat purchase behavior. The more a consumer is involved with and identifies with a brand, the more likely it is that they will engage in loyalty behavior (Dick & Basu, 1994).

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**Sport Fan Loyalty Behavior**

Similarly, Funk and James (2001) conceptualize team loyalty as having two primary components, attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal team loyalty is comprised of persistence, resistance to change, and biased cognition; behavioral loyalty involves singular behaviors, such as purchasing a ticket, and situation-specific behaviors lasting over some duration, such as attending regular Friday night matches.

According to Yoshida, Heere, and Gordon (2015), the strongest driver of fan loyalty behavior is the relationship between members of the fan community, their social identification as fans of a specific team. Without fan community, overall satisfaction with the experience had no significant effect on attendance. Existing fans help the development of new fans, especially though groups such as fan communities and family. Once again, the fan must have the desire to progress their loyalty, from a social supporter to a truly loyal supporter (Fillis & Mackay, 2013). Foster and Hyatt (2008) discussed the concept of a fan nation, comprised of fans of a specific team that are located anywhere from the home city of the team to the opposite side of the globe from their team. According to the authors, a fan nation shares tradition, a love for their team, and an "imagined cohesiveness they share with other, anonymous members" (p. 269). This shared image brings fans together into a positive, inclusive global community.

Members of fan nations tend to show significant bias toward one another. Wann and Grieve (2005) reported that regardless of how well fans actually behave at a sporting event, fans evaluate other in-group fans as behaving better than out-group fans. Through this bias, negative behaviors exhibited by in-group fans are seen as "far less negative (and perhaps even justified) than they would if the behavior had been exhibited by a rival out-

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group fan" (p. 538). Fans felt their identity threatened by two factors, game location and result. Regarding game location, home team fans felt a stronger threat to their identity than visiting fans and so reported higher bias toward their own in-group fans. Regarding game result, fans of the winning team had more in-group bias than fans of the losing team. The authors also noted that identity threats only effect those who place a high value on the social identity (highly identified fans). The current study focuses on two types of behaviors that stem from attitudinal loyalty, or lack thereof – blasting (out-group derogation) and aggressive behaviors, and rival support.

**Blasting**

Funk and James (2001) specified that attitudinal loyalty can be exhibited through biased cognition. As discussed in the sections above, social groups and fan group exhibit bias through in-group favoritism and out-group derogation (Brewer, 1999; Voci, 2006; Brown et al., 1988; Schaller et al., 1995). Cialdini and Richardson (1980) refer to this behavior as blasting, which they define as "the tendency to derogate others, especially others with whom one has a negative unit relationship, in the interests of self-enhancement" (p. 413). According to Amiot, Sansfaçon, and Louis (2013), derogatory behaviors toward rivals are based on self-determination theory (humans are autonomous beings and self-determined behaviors increase psychological well-being, while non self-determined behaviors tend to lower psychological well-being) and social identity theory (humans are motivated to form a positive social identity within a group). Based on their findings, derogatory behaviors stemming from self-determination contribute to a positive psychological well-being. Despite being inherently negative and harmful, these negative behaviors can not only come from social pressure but also can be autonomous behaviors

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that individuals act on freely to enter a positive emotional state. Derogatory behaviors also contribute to a positive social identity, as long as they stem from a self-determined motivation; if engaging in these behaviors is not an autonomous decision, inner conflict, lowered psychological well-being, and negative emotion can occur. According to social identity theory, derogatory behavior in a fan group can lead to group cohesion and a sense of belonging and connection to other group members, despite the actions having negative connotations. The group mentality leads to selecting intergroup cohesion over behaving within societal expectations.

According to Bernache-Assollant et al. (2007), while BIRGing has been found to be consistent for all highly identified fans, "blasting" is not an automatic behavior. In addition, "in-group positivity does not inevitably lead to out-group derogation" (p. 386). Branscombe and Wann (1994) added that highly identified in-group members tend to derogate members of out-groups, especially those associate with rival teams, which "might ultimately serve to restore or help in the maintenance of a positive social identity" (p. 654). The authors also found that members of an in-group are more likely to derogate out-group members who seemed to threaten their social identity, and that derogation may be seen by some as a way to keep a positive social identity.

Acknowledging that rivalry has a strong social aspect, Branscombe and Wann (1994) stated that members of an in-group with lower self-esteem derogate members of an out-group more often than members of the in-group with higher self-esteem when they feel that their social identity is being threatened. However, members of an in-group with high self-esteem tend to derogate members of the out-group after winning a competition. Similarly, Noel et al. (1995) found that when being a member of a certain group, such as

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a fan group of a successful team, seems desirable, peripheral members may derogate members of rival groups in order to gain further acceptance into their desired group. These opinions are often not internalized, but the outward expression is not associated with negative emotion; in addition, established members of the in-group express negativity toward members of other groups at a significantly lower rate. For peripheral members, positive evaluation by established group members is held at a higher priority than expressing true opinions, though this was found to be much more common in public than in private. However, "core members" of the in-group "were no more negative in their reported attitudes toward the out-group in public than in private" (p. 135). Thus, periphery members used derogation as a tool for acceptance.

**Aggression**

Not only do fans participate in blasting (verbal aggression) toward fans or members of a rival team, these behaviors can escalate into the physical realm. Dimmock and Grove (2006) stated that "highly identified fans experience extreme fluctuations in emotion during games" and "feel less control over their behavior at games than fans low in identification" (p. 43). Deindividuation is more likely to occur within groups of highly identified fans, which is strongly associated with a lack of behavioral control. As previously noted, highly identified fans are not more aggressive than lowly identified fans based purely on level of identification. However, because a large part of highly identified fans' self-esteem depends on the success of their team, they are more willing to act aggressively if they believe it will help their team. Wann et al (1999) found that highly identified fans were "particularly likely to admit a willingness to injure a player or coach of a rival team anonymously" (p. 601). In addition, not only are highly identified

fans demonstrate aggressive behavior in response to the competition, they are also willing to commit aggressive acts before the competition as a preventative measure.

Wann, Carlson, and Schrader (1999) identified two types of anger exhibited by sport fans, hostile aggression, which consists of violence against others for the purpose of causing harm or injury, and instrumental aggression, which consists of harmful actions for the purpose of results that go beyond causing harm to the individual (such as injuring a rival player to prevent the team from winning). Highly identified fans are more likely to exhibit higher levels of both types of aggression, as compared to lowly or moderately identified fans. In addition, there appears to be no preference for one type of aggression over the other - both are likely. However, Wann et al. (1999a) discovered a difference in the type of aggression used based on the target of the aggression. When referees are the target of fan aggression, hostile aggression is more likely; when directed at the opposing team, both hostile and instrumental aggression are likely. The authors suggested that this may be due to the understanding that referees are supposed to be impartial - when it is believed that they have not been, by making a perceived unfair call, the aggression reaction is stronger. However, fans do not expect other fans to be impartial, nor do they expect rational behavior.

In their study on how team identification level and game outcome effect fan aggression, Wann et al (2005) found that the personal variable (identification) combined with the situational variable (win or loss) effect a fan's willingness to commit an aggressive act. Merely imagining a team loss makes highly identified fans more likely to consider an aggressive act; it can be inferred that witnessing an actual team loss would encourage higher consideration of an aggressive act. In addition, highly identified fans

are more likely to assist their team through illegal means, such as writing a paper for a player, helping a player pass a drug test, or stealing another team's playbook. These negative, if not overtly aggressive, acts help the highly identified fan to maintain a positive identity through their team.

Based on the previous literature, we arrived at the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2. Fan identification is positively correlated with blasting behavior.

Hypothesis 3. Negative rival perception is positively correlated with blasting behavior.

**Rival Support**

Funk and James (2001) identify a second way that sport fans exhibit loyalty, through a resistance to change. In this way, rival support can be perceived as an "anti-loyal" behavior, or a group betrayal. Branscombe and Wann (1994) found that if a highly identified fan perceives another member of the group as being less than genuine, the bias shifts strongly against that fan. For highly identified group members, loyal group members have a high positive evaluation while disloyal group members have a very negative evaluation, even compared to members of other groups. For a highly identified fan, a "fair-weather" fan of the same team is a larger threat to social identity and group cohesion than a fan of a rival team. Highly identified fans do not employ CORFing as a means of preserving their positive social identity, as a disloyal fan might, and instead choose to derogate the CORFing fan as their means of identity preservation. Identification with a chosen sport team is a group identification that is self-selected, not one determined by uncontrollable factors such as age, gender, or location. As such, the

identity "may be more easily threatened or may have greater personal consequences than group memberships that an individual does not choose" (p. 387).

However, due to the complex nature of an individual's self-concept and social identity, as discussed above, a different segment of his or her identity could justify the decision to support a rival team. If a fan's favorite team is not directly involved in a competition, their identity in relation to the competition may extend to a broader concept. According to Brewer and Pierce (2005), an individual's social identity consists of multiple overlapping groups, such as nationality, religious affiliation, political party, and sport fan base. While sport fans identify other members of their fan base as being relatively homogenous, sport fans also perceive more overlap between their fan base and other social identities. Similarly, Delia (2014) found that fans of sport teams are not only members of fan groups but identify with many other groups, such as hometown, gender, and university student status. Typically, individuals mesh their groups into a complex and inclusive identity, even though many of the groups do not entirely overlap. Brewer (1999) stated that when an individual belongs to many social groups (based on ethnicity, gender, religion, sport, or any other of a number of factors), the individual's dependency upon a single group for identity and self-esteem are greatly reduced. The more complex an individual's social identity, the less likely it is that prejudice will form toward any one group. Jetten et al. (2015) agreed, finding that identifying with many social groups improves mental and physical health (as compared to identifying with few or simply one social groups), and increased self-esteem by providing meaning, purpose, and belonging.

Delia (2014) documented that sport fan social identities become significantly simpler when experiencing a threat, such as attending a game. Levels of bias toward in-

group members increase and amount of blasting toward outgroup members increases. This study seeks to determine the existence of a large fan community consisting of multiple fan bases supporting a singular team in times where direct threat is lower (in this case, indirect competition). Because of this lack, or lessening, of direct threat, it can be assumed that sport fans may choose to identify with a more inclusive social identity, such as home town or state, in order to justify supporting a rival team.

Based on the previous literature, we arrived at the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4. Fan identification is negatively correlated with rival support.

Hypothesis 5. Negative rival perception is negatively correlated with rival support.
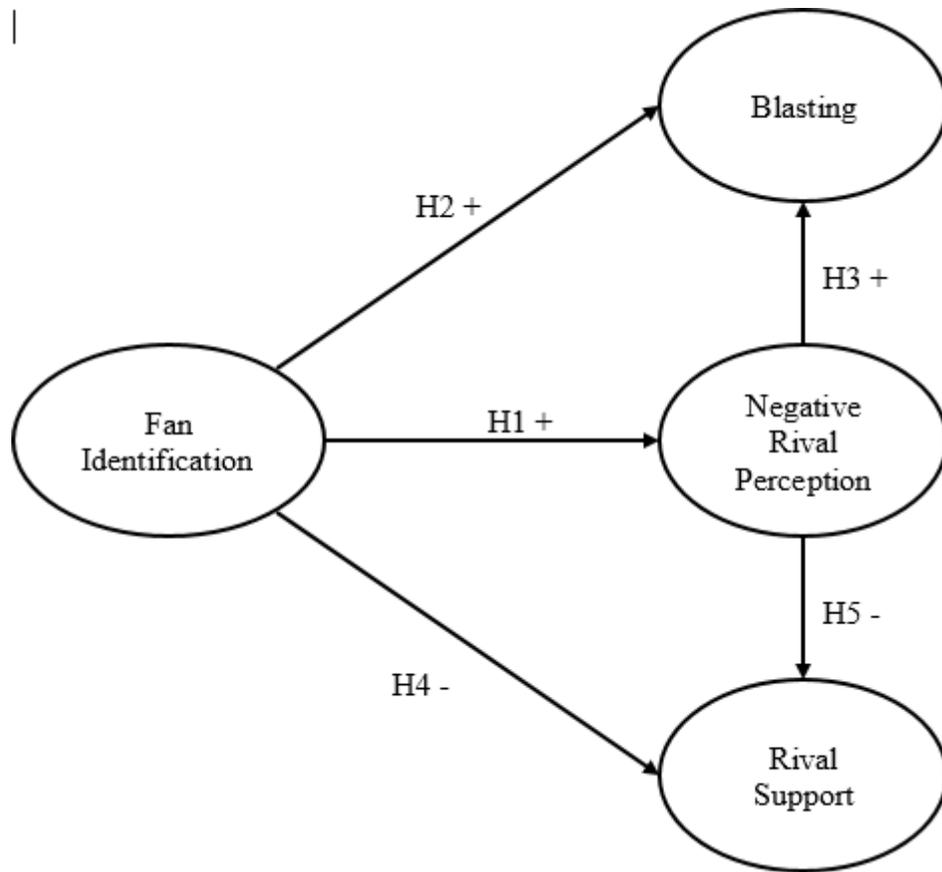
*Figure 1.* Proposed Research Model

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

Data collection involved a four-component survey on fan identification, negative

rival perception, blasting, and rival support in indirect competition. The survey was

distributed to college football fans through social media, email, and in person.

**Survey Procedure and Participants**

Collegiate football fans were targeted for survey participation for three primary

reasons. First, collegiate sport fans are more likely to be directly affiliated with their team

than professional fans (Pritchard, Stinson, & Patton, 2010). Second, many schools

identify different primary rivals for different sports; for example, a University of North

Carolina fan may identify Duke as their basketball rival and the University of Virginia as

their football rival. By studying football fans only, responses will be more consistent.

Third, football is the most popular college sport ("Distribution of college sports followed

in the U.S.," 2014), which allows for the most varied sample.

The survey was administered after the end of the 2015 college football season to

control for fluctuation of fan attitudes toward their team or rival that could vary during

the season. A total of 258 participants (132 female; 120 male; 6 not reporting) responded

after being contacted online through social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter. In

addition, participants were targeted through email – a number of emails were sent to

various universities in the United States and forwarded to their Kinesiology students.

Finally, a section of undergraduate Kinesiology students were administered a paper survey. Participant ages range from 18 to 73, with a mean age of 24.15; in addition, 68.7% of participants were alumni or current students of their favorite university, and 73.4% of participants were current or former residents of the same state as their favorite university.

## Instrumentation

For the current study, a 26-item questionnaire was used, measuring fan identification, negative rival perception, blasting, and rival support. The scales for fan identification, negative rival perception, and blasting were developed previously by other researchers, each of which had been found to demonstrate internal and external validity. Our committee developed the scale for rival support over the course of two pilot studies. Modifications were made on the original three items, with a fourth being added, until we were satisfied with the validity of the resulting scale.

### Fan Identification

Fan identification was measured using a scale originally developed by Dimmock and Grove (2006), based on three dimensions of participants' identification with their favorite college football team: cognitive/affective, personal evaluative, and perceived-other evaluative. The scale had a total of nine items ($\alpha$=.798). Sample items include, "Attributes that define fans of my favorite team apply to me also," "I am proud to be a fan of my favorite team," and "Most people consider my favorite team to be better than rival teams." The full list of items can be found in Appendix A in Table A1. Participants

indicated responses on a 7-point Likert Scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 7 being "Strongly Agree."

**Negative Rival Perception**

Negative rival perception was measured with the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (SRFPS), developed by Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schafer (2013a). Scale items measure participants' attitudes concerning the rival institution's academic prestige, fan sportsmanship, and sense of satisfaction in the event of victory over the rival. The scale had a total of nine items ($\alpha=.847$). Sample items include "I feel people who attended school at my favorite team's rival missed out on a good education," "Fans of my favorite team's rival demonstrate poor sportsmanship at games," and "I feel a sense of accomplishments when my favorite team beats their rival." The full list of items can be found in Appendix A in Table A2. Participants indicated responses on a 7-point Likert Scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 7 being "Strongly Agree."

**Blasting**

The blasting scale utilized four items ($\alpha=.920$) developed by Amiot et al. (2013). Sample items include "I am willing to insult players and fans of the rival team in their absence" and "I am willing to affirm the superiority of my favorite team by putting the rival team down." The full list of items can be found in Appendix A in Table A3. Participants indicated responses on a 7-point Likert Scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 7 being "Strongly Agree."

**Rival Support**

The scale for rival support was developed based on research by Delia (2014) concerning the importance of sport fans' overlapping social identities, with a total of four items ($\alpha$=.912). Sample items include "I feel comfortable supporting my rival team in indirect competition" and "Supporting my rival team in indirect competition is the right thing to do." The full list of items can be found in Appendix A in Table A4. Participants indicated responses on a 7-point Likert Scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 7 being "Strongly Agree."

## Analysis

To analyze the results, statistical analyses were performed in SPSS. Using Cronbach's Alpha to test for reliability, all four scales demonstrated internal consistency, shown in Table B1, along with mean and standard deviation. To test the hypotheses, a linear regression was performed on each model path do determine correlation and variance. Further, Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step mediation test was utilized to determine the mediation effect of rival perception on the relationship between fan identification and blasting, and fan identification and support.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

**Preliminary Statistical Analysis**

Before testing the hypotheses, preliminary analyses were completed to determine

the mean, standard deviation, and reliability of each scale. Using Cronbach's Alpha to

test for reliability, all four scales demonstrated internal consistency, shown in Table B1.

Fan identification had the highest mean (5.138) and lowest standard deviation (.873),

while rival support had the lowest mean (3.019) and blasting had the highest standard

deviation (1.678). All results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach's Alpha*

|  | Mean | Standard Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Fan Identification | 5.138 | .873 | .798 |
| Negative Rival Perception | 4.403 | 1.053 | .847 |
| Blasting | 3.241 | 1.678 | .920 |
| Rival Support | 3.019 | 1.539 | .912 |

## Results of Hypothesis Testing

**H1**

A single regression analysis was performed on fan identification and negative rival perception in order to determine the correlation and the effect on fan identification on negative rival perception. There was a significant correlation of .321 ($p<.001$) between fan identification and negative rival perception. The results of the regression indicated that fan identification accounted for 10.3% of the variance in negative rival perception ($R^2= .103$, $F(1,257)=29.367$, $p<.001$). Based on this analysis, H1 was confirmed.

**H2 and H3**

A single regression analysis was performed on fan identification and blasting in order to determine the correlation and the effect on fan identification on blasting. There was a significant correlation of .261 ($p<.001$) between fan identification and blasting. The results of the regression indicated that fan identification accounted for 6.8% of the variance in blasting ($R^2= .068$, $F(1,257)=18.672$, $p<.001$). Based on this analysis, H2 was confirmed.

To test H3, a single regression analysis was performed on negative rival perception and blasting in order to determine the correlation and the effect on negative rival perception on blasting. There was a significant correlation of .470 ($p<.001$) between negative rival perception and blasting. The results of the regression indicated that negative rival perception accounted for 22.1% of the variance in blasting ($R^2= .221$, $F(1,257)=72.633$, $p<.001$). Based on this analysis, H3 was confirmed.

In addition to single regression, a multiple regression analysis was performed in order to test the mediation effect of negative rival perception between fan identification

and blasting. The results of the regression indicated that both fan identification and negative rival perception accounted for 23.4% of the variance in blasting ($R^2$=.234, $F(2,255)$=39.054, $p$<.001). Because fan identification significantly affected blasting ($\beta$=.123, $p$<.05), as did negative rival perception ($\beta$=.431, $p$<.001), negative rival perception as a partial mediator between fan identification and blasting was confirmed.

**H4 and H5**

A single regression analysis was performed on fan identification and rival support in order to determine the correlation and the effect on fan identification on rival support. There was a significant correlation of -.182 ($p$<.01) between fan identification and rival support. The results of the regression indicated that fan identification accounted for 3.3% of the variance in rival support ($R^2$= .033, $F(1,257)$=8.740, $p$<.01). Based on this analysis, H4 was confirmed.

To test H5, a single regression analysis was performed on negative rival perception and rival support in order to determine the correlation and the effect on negative rival perception on rival support. There was a significant correlation of -.246 ($p$<.001) between negative rival perception and rival support. The results of the regression indicated that negative rival perception accounted for 6% of the variance in rival support ($R^2$= .060, $F(1,257)$=16.466, $p$<.001). Based on this analysis, H5 was confirmed.

In addition to single regression, a multiple regression analysis was performed in order to test the mediation effect of negative rival perception between fan identification and rival support. The results of the regression indicated that both fan identification and negative rival perception accounted for 7.2% of the variance in rival support ($R^2$=.072,

F(2,255)=9.925, p<.001). Because fan identification significantly affected rival support (β=-.115, p<.05), as did negative rival perception (β=-.209, p<.01), negative rival perception as a partial mediator between fan identification and rival support was confirmed.

Table 2

*Hypothesis testing results*

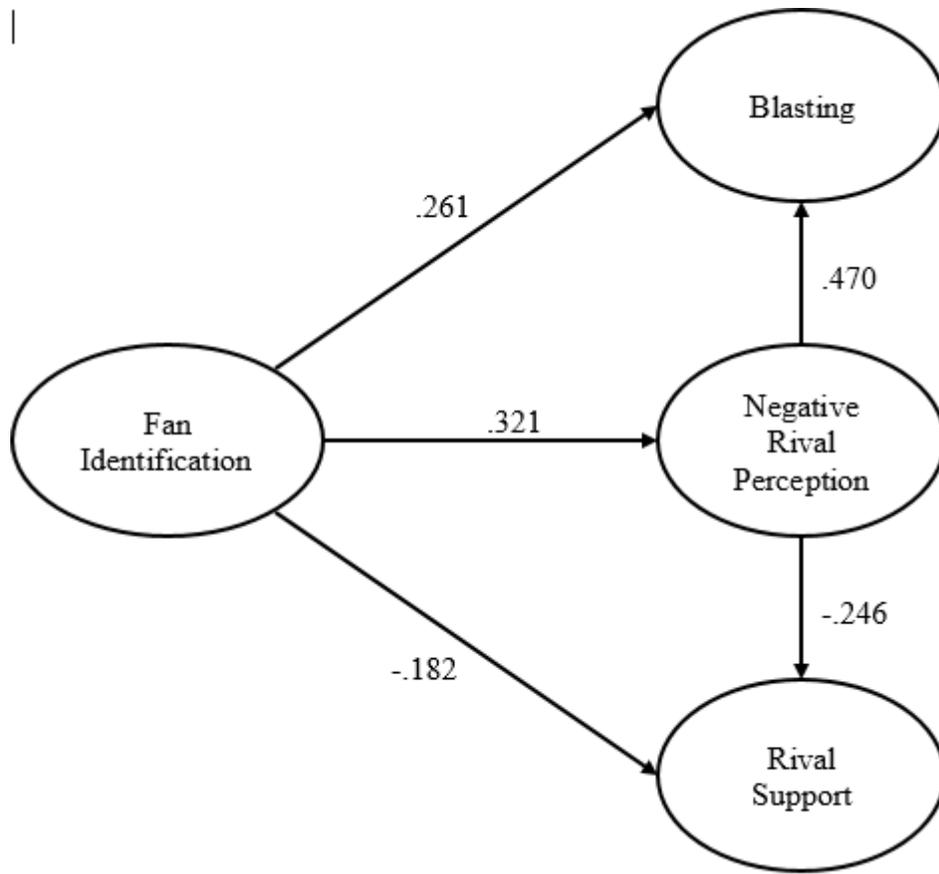| | Correlation | | Regression | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | R | Sig. | $R^2$ | F | Sig. |
| H1 FI → NRP | .321 | p<.001 | .103 | 29.367 | p<.001 |
| H2 FI → Blasting | .261 | p<.001 | .068 | 18.672 | p<.001 |
| H3 NRP → Blasting | .470 | p<.001 | .221 | 72.633 | p<.001 |
| H4 FI → Support | -.182 | p<.01 | .033 | 8.740 | p<.01 |
| H5 NRP → Support | -.246 | p<.001 | .060 | 16.466 | p<.001 |

*Figure 2.*        Research Model

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

**Theoretical Implications**

The current study explored the degree to which college football fans will support the rivals of their favorite team in indirect competition. While blasting, out-group derogation, and prejudice in the name of team loyalty are well represented in sport research, little research has been conducted on the effects of social identity complexity on team loyalty – specifically, the effect of fan identification and negative rival perception on the decision to support or blast the rival team. While all hypotheses were confirmed, some findings were rather surprising.

First, negative rival perception played a relatively larger role in both blasting and rival support than fan identification. The previous literature on social identification and group relationships shows that many group members use negative perceptions of and reactions to out-group members to enhance their identification with their own group (e.g., Brewer, 1999; Jackson, 2002); however, negative rival perception exceed fan identification in its effect on behaviors toward rivals in the current study. Because the fan identification levels of participants in this study were relatively high, this seems to indicate that fan identification has a stronger effect on internal behavior and perceptions than on outward behavior toward out-group members.

Second, negative rival perception had a much stronger effect on blasting than on rival support. While negative rival perceptions affecting blasting corresponds with previous literature concerning social group relationships, the weaker correlation with rival support implies the existence of independent variables that may have a stronger effect on rival support than those tested in this model. Based on the research of Delia (2014), these independent variables could include hometown identity, state identity, family, and friend groups, especially in the case of close proximity rivals, such as in-state or cross-town rivals.

Third, fan identification was found to have a relatively weak effect on the model overall. Again, this opens up a possibility for many other independent variables that may account for more of the variance in negative rival perception, blasting, and support. This could include the effect of social relationships, for which this study did not account. Social relationships - such as coworkers, friends, or spouses – with rival fans could affect negative rival perception both positively and negatively, such as cheering along with a good friend who is a fan of a rival team, or having feelings of *Schadenfreude* when a disliked rival fan is saddened by a loss. Also, external pressure from peers to behave a certain way could also affect an individual's decision to blast or support a rival, especially if the desire to identify with a certain social group was stronger than fan identification, even if only temporary. In addition, geographic proximity (such as living in the same state or town) to the rival team could also have a strong effect on negative rival perception, support, and blasting.

The relatively weak effect of fan identification on the rest of the model alights with previous research that found fan identification to become more simplified when

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faced with the out-group threat of direct competition and more multifaceted when there is no direct out-group threat (Delia, 2014). In addition, matches in indirect competition often hold less significance for fans; the lessened effect of fan identification on the current model thus aligns with Lee's (1985) conclusion that match significance and fan identification are positively correlated.

## Practical Implications

Understanding factors that could cause or prevent rival support would greatly benefit sport marketers in market segmentation. Identifying individuals who may identify more with their favorite team but have other social identifications that cause them to want to support a rival team in indirect competition could open up a new segment that has yet to be targeted and give insight into how to directly market to those fans. Insight could also be given into targeting fans that would not support the rival in indirect competition but would still watch or attend the match.

Athletic conferences and leagues could perhaps most benefit from the current study. With the rise in popularity of conference- and league-specific broadcasting networks, understanding how to target certain segments of a rival fan base could increase viewership. Similarly, local and statewide networks and broadcasts with rivals in close proximity could similarly target segments of a rival fan base. Fans willing to support a rival could be targeted perhaps by emphasizing state or hometown pride as a motivation for watching or attending the game. On the other hand, fans who are less likely to support their rival could be targeted by emphasizing an off the field rivalry and distinction between the teams, schools, and fan bases.

In addition, merchandise recognizing a rival's significant victory or loss could also be marketed to these two segments. For instance, emphasizing that the state of Alabama is the home of national champions may appeal to a more general audience, including less identified fans of a rival team. Fans who are more highly identified, and thus more prone to *Schadenfreude,* may be willing to purchase merchandise that refers to a particularly embarrassing loss of their rival. Future studies that identify more variables that affect the decision to support or blast the rival in indirect competition would improve upon the segmentation and subsequent targeting of these two segments.

## Limitations

While efforts were taken to avoid common method variance where possible, the current study does have limitations. Most participants were located in the Southeastern United States, and a majority were students (both undergraduate and graduate) from the same university. Due to this, a small portion of rival relationships may be overrepresented, skewing the results to reflect the nuances of those specific rivalries and making the results less generalizable. In addition, the current study focused solely on college football fans; thus, the results may not be generalizable to fans of other sports or of professional leagues. Efforts to include other fan groups in future studies would help to further legitimize these results. Finally, the lack of the use of a confirmatory factor analysis should be considered when interpreting the statistical analysis in the current study.

**Recommendations for Future Studies**

Future studies should explore other independent variables that could have a stronger effect on negative rival perception, rival support, and blasting. Specifically, other social identifications and relationships that have priority over fan identification should be examined. Under what circumstances does the priority shift? Are these relationships and groups positive or negative influences in the individual's life?

In addition, no rivalry is the same as another. Because of this, and the lack of extensive literature on the topic, research should expand to explore how rivalries evolve and how they differ, even within a mutual relationship. What factors cause some rivals to have more respect for one another? More disdain? Also, comparisons between certain demographics could be made, such as male and female, current students and alumni, and between different generations. Answers to these questions could vastly expand the current body of literature.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The current study set out to explore the relationships between fan identification, negative rival perception, blasting, and rival support in college football rivalries in order to bridge gaps in the current literature. The study sought to answer the question, "How does fan identification and negative rival perception affect a fan's decision to blast or support the rival in indirect competition?" While fan identification had a relatively weaker effect on the other variables than previous literature would indicate, negative rival perception had a relatively strong effect on the model, and all hypotheses were confirmed:

1. Fan identification and negative rival perception were positively correlated.

2. Fan identification and blasting were positively correlated.

3. Negative rival perception and blasting were positively correlated.

4. Fan identification and rival support were negatively correlated.

5. Negative rival perception and rival support were negatively correlated.

The results of the current study, and subsequent studies improving and building upon the current research, would be beneficial to sport marketers looking to increase viewership and attendance at matches by targeting new market segments. In sum, the current study reveals that the relationship between fans and their rival team, as well as fan

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identification with a favorite team as a whole, is perhaps more nuanced and fluid than social relationships outside of sport.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY ITEMS

Table A1

*Fan Identification Scale*

| Dimension | Item |
| --- | --- |
| Cognitive/affective | "Attributes that define fans of my favorite team apply to me also" |
| | "My favorite team's successes are my successes" |
| | "I think of my favorite team as part of who I am" |
| Personal evaluative | "My favorite team has a lot to be proud of" |
| | "I am proud to be a fan of my favorite team" |
| | "My favorite team is worth supporting" |
| Perceived-other evaluative | "Others have a positive view of my favorite team" |
| | "Others respect my favorite team" |
| | "Most people consider my favorite team to be better than rival teams" |

Table A2

*Sport Rival Fan Perception Scale*

| Dimension | Item |
| --- | --- |
| Out-group Academic Prestige | "The academic prestige of my favorite team's rival is poor" |
| | "I feel people who attended school at my favorite team's rival missed out on a good education" |
| | "I feel the academics of my favorite team's rival are not very prestigious" |
| Out-group Sportsmanship | "Fans of my favorite team's rival demonstrate poor sportsmanship at games" |
| | "Fans of my favorite team's rival are not well behaved at games" |
| | "Fans of my favorite team's rival do not show respect for others" |
| Sense of Satisfaction | "I feel a sense of belonging when my favorite team beats their rival" |
| | "I feel a sense of accomplishments when my favorite team beats their rival" |
| | "I feel I have bragging rights when my favorite team beats their rival" |

Table A3

*Blasting scale items*

| Item |
| --- |
| "I am willing to insult players and fans of the rival team in their absence" |
| "I am willing to insult players and fans of the rival team in their presence" |
| "I am willing to affirm the superiority of my favorite team by putting the rival team down" |
| "I am willing to make fun of the rival team's players and fans" |

Table A4

*Rival support scale items*

| Item |
| --- |
| "I would be willing to support the rival team in indirect competition" |
| "I feel comfortable supporting my rival team in indirect competition" |
| "Supporting my rival team in indirect competition is important for me" |
| "Supporting my rival team in indirect competition is the right thing to do" |

APPENDIX B

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS RESULTS

Table B1

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach's Alpha*

|  | Mean | Standard Deviation | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fan Identification | 5.138 | .873 | .798 |
| Negative Rival Perception | 4.403 | 1.053 | .847 |
| Blasting | 3.241 | 1.678 | .920 |
| Rival Support | 3.019 | 1.539 | .912 |

Table B2

*Hypothesis testing results*

|  | Correlation | | Regression | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | R | Sig. | $R^2$ | F | Sig. |
| H1 FI → NRP | .321 | p<.001 | .103 | 29.367 | p<.001 |
| H2 FI → Blasting | .261 | p<.001 | .068 | 18.672 | p<.001 |
| H3 NRP → Blasting | .470 | p<.001 | .221 | 72.633 | p<.001 |
| H4 FI → Support | -.182 | p<.01 | .033 | 8.740 | p<.01 |
| H5 NRP → Support | -.246 | p<.001 | .060 | 16.466 | p<.001 |