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SPORT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Fans' identification with teams: A field study of Israeli soccer fans

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Abstract: The goal of this study was to examine variables related to the identification of fans with their soccer team. Spectator motivations and psychological variables were examined in addition to control variables. The sample consisted of 350 soccer fans of a successful soccer team in the Israeli first division. The survey was conducted immediately before the team's home game with the permission and support of the team's owner, who requested (commissioned?) the study and was involved in the development of the research model. The results of a regression analysis show a strong positive relationship between commitment to the community and team identification. Of the motivation variables, eustress and aesthetics were found to have a positive and significant relationship with fans' identification with the team. Level of happiness was also found to be related to team identification. The findings are discussed in terms of the need for more field studies such as the present study to compare the results with those of other previous studies, which were based on student samples.

Subjects: Sports and Leisure; Social Sciences; Behavioral Sciences; Education

Keywords: team identification; fans' motivation; commitment to the community; self-efficacy; happiness-depression

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Cohen is a professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel. He received his DSc in Management at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. His current research interests include commitment in the workplace and in particular organizational commitment and occupational commitment, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), fans identification with their soccer team, and organizational fairness. His work has been published in *Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Journal of Management, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Human Relations, Cross-cultural Psychology, Applied Psychology: an International Review.* He also published two books: *Multiple commitments in the workplace: an integrative approach* (2003), published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, and *Fairness in the workplace: A global perspective* (2015), published by Palgrave McMillan. In this specific study Professor Cohen's expands his work on individuals' identification to the workplace to other important settings such as fans relationship with their sport teams.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Sports has become a major attraction within the leisure and tourism industries. Hence, studies of the motivation behind participation in sports activities are of increasing interest to sports professionals and members of the tourist industries. This study has focused on sport team identification. An important reason is that fan identification with the team is vitally important to a team's economic success. Because of the increased competition for the hearts and wallets of fans, it is important to understand this issue. This study examined the reasons behind identification among fans of a specific soccer team in Israel. The findings showed that commitment to the community was related to identification with the team. Those who are committed to their community also identify with their sports team. The findings also showed that serval motives were behind the fans identification with their team such as looking for eustress and aesthetics experiences.

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Sports has become a major attraction in the leisure and tourism industries. Hence, studies of the motivation behind sports and leisure activities of sports fans, in particular, are of increasing interest to both sports professionals and people engaged in the tourist and leisure industries, who are interested in sports and leisure planning and marketing development (Recours, Souville, & Griffet, 2004). Sports scientists and marketing professionals have examined a wide range of responses of sports fans, focusing mainly on the antecedents of identification with sports teams (Theodorakis, Dimmock, Wann, & Barlas, 2010). Team identification is defined here as the extent to which fans feel a psychological connection to a team of athletes (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Fans' identification with the team is one of the most important aspects that a sports team has to foster because this identification is vitally important to the team's economic success. Yet, while much is known about the consequences of fan identification, very little is known about its antecedents (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002).

One question that arises as a result of the growing popularity of sports in society is how this fascination with sports develops at the individual level (Kolbe & James, 2000). Although a few studies provided some understanding about the appeal of sports, the more individual factors that lead to fans' identification, such as personality traits, have not been addressed (Donavan, Carlson, & Zimmerman, 2005). From a practical perspective, because of the increased competition for the hearts and wallets of fans, an understanding of this issue has become of critical importance. The study of the variables that influence an individual to form a relationship with a specific team provides an opportunity to learn not only how to encourage the development of new fans but also how to strengthen the relationships with existing fans (Kolbe & James, 2000).

The goal of this study was to advance the field's understanding of sports fans by advancing and examining correlates of identification with a soccer team. One contribution of this study is that it examines concepts that are commonly explored in this context, such as fans' motives (Wann, 1995), as well as psychological variables that are rarely examined in this context, such as depression-happiness, commitment to the community, and self-efficacy. This examination enabled us to evaluate the relative contribution of fans' motives and psychological variables to explain the phenomenon of identification with the team. Another important contribution of this study is the examination of the correlates of identification among fans of a specific soccer team surveyed at a home game. While many studies examined team identification among high school and university students, this study was based on data from the fans of a specific soccer team in Israel. According to Walliser (2003), too many studies rely on convenience samples of students. Although the student population—luckily— is a prime target of many sponsors and therefore can be easily justified, extending the research to other age and professional groups is beneficial for sponsorship research. Findings from such a sample are significantly more generalizable and provide a stronger contribution (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). The third contribution of this study is that it examined team identification in the Israeli context, while most of the data on this issue were collected in the North American context. An examination of the issue in a different context allowed us to evaluate the generalizability of the findings from the North American setting.

1. Research model and hypotheses

Social identity theory is an influential framework for research exploring sports fans (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009). According to this theory, individuals have both personal and social identities, and their social identities are linked to demographic classifications (e.g. sex or race) or organizational membership (e.g. in religious, educational, and social institutions). Individuals are more likely to identify with an organization (or team) when it represents the attributes they assign to their own self-concepts.

With respect to group association, people tend to gravitate toward social groups having attributes that are aligned with their self-concept. People in groups make social comparisons in an effort to

enhance their self-esteem; they have favorable attitudes toward their own group (in-group) and categorize other groups (out-groups) as inferior. Thus, Group membership, then, becomes a source of self-esteem that is bolstered by negatively labeling divergent, or "out," groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Certainly, this holds true for sports fans as well. Through exchanges both with out-group members and during in-group events, group members may encounter identity threats that jeopardize their perceived social standing (Brewer, 1993; Dominic & Hogg,1990; Sanderson, 2013). Highly identified fans are more likely to show favoritism toward other fans of their team and criticize fans of the opposing teams. They see "their" team as an extension of themselves. When presented with any negative information regarding the group, the reaction of highly identified group members differs from that of those with a lower level of identification. Highly identified members typically reaffirm their group membership, while those with lower levels of identification tend to distance themselves. Such behaviors are apparent among sports fans (Fink et al., 2009).

2. Fan motives for soccer team identification

Wann (1995) developed the Sports Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), based on the result of an extensive review of the literature. According to Wann, a better understanding of the motives of sports fans will result in more practical steps being taken for increasing and directing this behavior. The 23-item Likert-type scale assesses eight different motives of sports fans: (1) entertainment, the desire to be entertained by sports; (2) eustress, the positive rush or stress release experienced by individuals when they watch sport; (3) self-esteem, the personal enhancement individuals obtain from their sports consumption experiences; (4) escape, the opportunity to use sports consumption as a diversion from everyday life; (5) group affiliation needs, the identification offered by the contact or association with other sports consumers; (6) economic gains, the benefits offered by activities such as wagering; (7) family motives, the desire to spend time with family members; and (8) aesthetics, the appreciation of the beauty and artistic characteristics of sports performances. One goal of this study was to examine the relationship between SFMS and team identification. It was expected that a relationship would be found between the motivation of fans and team identification. In addition to the primary expectation, several specific hypotheses regarding the relationship between each of the motives and team identification are advanced in this article.

The economic motivation for watching sports is based on the desire to gamble on the events (Pegoraro, 2013; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999). The first hypothesis is that individuals whose dominant motivation is economic tend to demonstrate lower levels of team identification. Thus, one whose main interest in soccer is based on wagering will exhibit a shallower attachment to the team, based on the expectation that it is easier to gamble on a team one knows relatively well. When such a person loses money because of betting on his/her team, it will negatively influence that person's team attachment. Thus:

Hypothesis 1a: *Fans' economic motivation is negatively related to team identification.*

Eustress is a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual. Individuals motivated by eustress enjoy the excitement and anxieties that frequently accompany watching sports events (Wann et al., 1999). The expectation here is that individuals whose dominant motivation is eustress will exhibit a higher level of team identification. One whose main interest in soccer stems from the need for a "rush" will find it on the field, at home and away games, as well as on TV, supporting his/her favorite team, with all of the excitement of being in the field or supporting his/her favorite team by watching the team's game. Thus:

Hypothesis 1b: Soccer fans' eustress motivation is positively related to team identification.

The escape motive of fans means that fans who are dissatisfied or bored with their life may be able to forget their troubles temporarily by rooting for a favorite team (Wann et al., 1999). Escape can also be a motivator, where fans who are bored or dissatisfied with their life use sports fandom to temporarily forget it (Pegoraro, 2013). We assumed that individuals who are dominated by the escape motive tend to demonstrate a higher level of team identification. Identification with the team can serve as a replacement object for those who are not very happy with their lives by providing an alternative reference group with whom they feel they can dissociate from daily troubles and grim reality. As mentioned by Funk, Mahony, and Ridinger (2002), a fan can escape daily life and go to a game to feel vicariously successful. Thus:

Hypothesis 1c: Soccer fans' escape motivation is positively related to team identification.

The aesthetic motive is expressed in the appreciation of the beauty and artistic characteristics of sports performances. Some fans are attracted to the beauty and grace found in athletic performances (Wann et al., 1999). The expectation here is that individuals whose dominant motivation is related to aesthetics will tend to demonstrate a higher level of team identification. Many of those who identify with their team do so because they are looking for and enjoying the aesthetic and artistic aspect of the game. Fink et al. (2002) contended that artistic appreciation increases fans' team identification. According to them, this may indicate that fans are attracted to certain teams/players because of their style of play. Their findings showed a strong relationship between the two. Wann and Schrader (1997) found that a higher mean rating of sports spectating enjoyment was found among highly identified spectators. Thus:

Hypothesis 1d: Soccer fans' aesthetic motivation is positively related to team identification.

Finally, those who are motivated by the desire to spend time with their family members may have lower levels of team identification. While one can go to a game with family members, it is more likely than not that not everyone in the family is a fan. Therefore, an individual who wants to spend time with his or her family and watch soccer at the same time is more likely to stay at home and watch the game on television. People who prefer to spend more time with their family will be reluctant to watch the team live on the field and overall will be less identified with the team than those who prefer to watch their team on the soccer field, regardless of their family members' likings. Thus:

Hypothesis 1e: Soccer fans' family motivation is negatively related to team identification.

3. Self-efficacy

Theodorakis, Wann, and Weaver (2012) advanced self-concept as one of the important determinants of team identification. One's self-concept is defined as an organized collection of beliefs and self-perceptions about oneself (Baron & Berne, 2007). Although individuals have a single overall self-concept, it comprises many individual components of self-schema. Self-efficacy is defined as a belief in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). According to Wann, Royalty, and Roberts (2000), people with an insecure self-concept, for example, people who have low self-efficacy, will be less likely to reveal their fandom because of the fear of ridicule. On the other hand, persons who are confident in themselves and have a positive self-image are more excited about the opportunity to use their association with a team as a part of their impression management.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of self-efficacy are positively related to team identification.

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4. Depression–happiness

The depression and happiness scale was developed as part of the positive psychological framework, which is concerned not only with the alleviation of depression but also with the promotion of happiness (Joseph, Linley, Harwood, Lewis, & McCollam, 2004). In the present study, we examined personal psychological well-being using the depression-happiness scale, arguing that individuals who are happier in their lives will have greater personal resources to invest in team identification than those who are more depressed. Inoue, Funk, Wann, Yoshida, and Nakazawa (2015) found a positive relationship between team identification and social well-being.

Hypothesis 3: A higher level of happiness is positively related to team identification.

5. Commitment to community

Personal commitment to community is defined as feeling committed to helping other members of one's community or to solving issues within it (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Buchanan, 2012). Commitment to community is based on the concept of social responsibility that emphasizes a sense of responsibility to act on behalf of others in one's community. Kolbe and James (2000) and Wann (2006) advanced socialization as the main mechanism that is related to team identification. According to them, after an individual is introduced to a specific team, the interaction between the individual and significant others provides the cues or feedback from which an individual develops the knowledge, values, and disposition of a team fan to form a commitment to that team. Kolbe and James (2000) contended that the community of team fans can be used to build a loyal fan base. The presence of others who have the same strong feelings about a sports team supports individual fans to continue in their allegiance to the team, even at a subconscious level. When a link can be made between the city and the team, a potentially powerful source of identification is created. When fans link closely with both a city and a team, the synergy of these two foci should lead to strong and positive feelings about the value of the team to the individual (Kolbe & James, 2000; Rhee, Wong, & Kim, 2016; Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). BrianGreenwood, Kanters, and Casper (2006) found that being a native or a resident in the team's geographic location was a strong predictor of team identification.

Hypothesis 4: A higher level of community commitment is positively related to team identification.

6. Control variables

The suggested model includes several control variables, one of which is the purchase of the team's merchandise. A strong positive relationship was found between purchasing a team's merchandise and memorabilia and team identification (Madrigal, 2000; Moyer, Pokrywczynski, & Griffin, 2015). A person's possession of many items that represent a specific team demonstrates stronger psychological attachment to the team and willingness to invest personal economic resources for the sake of the specific team. Purchasing the team's merchandise is also a kind of investment in the team, an investment that increases one's identification with the specific team. Therefore, the expectation is that those who make purchases in the team's store will have a higher level of team identification.

Three demographic variables were also examined as control variables: age, marital status, and education. It is expected that older people will exhibit a lower identification with the team because they have accumulated other commitments during their lives, such as family and children, that compete with the team as a target for emotional relationships.

Soccer in Israel is still considered a lower- and middle-class sport, and it is expected that people with a lower level of education will be more attached to their sports team than those whose education provides them with alternatives to a sports team for developing a strong emotional attachment.

Hypothesis 5: People who purchase the team's merchandise and are younger, non-married, and less educated have a higher level of team identification.

7. Research design

7.1. Procedure and sample

The owner of one of Israeli's first division soccer teams contacted the author, asking him to survey the team's fans. The owner's main interest was to examine the correlates of team identification with two main specific research questions: what is the role of the community in relation to team identification and what is the role of several personality factors mentioned by the owner. In return for including these personality factors in the study, the owner allowed the researcher to use the data for scientific publication.

7.2. Sample and procedure

The survey was performed during one of the team's home games. Students from the local university, hired by the team administrators, distributed to and collected the questionnaires from fans in the stadium who agreed to participate in the study. The fans were asked to fill a questionnaire (using paper and pencil) regarding attitudes and behaviors of soccer fans for an academic study conducted by an Israeli university. The questionnaires were distributed at different gates to control for possible differences between fans sitting in more or less expensive areas. A total of 350 usable questionnaires were collected. The demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows. 92% were males, and their mean age was 28.4 (SD = 14.54); 3.7% had obtained an elementary school education, 42.7% high school education, and 53.6% a higher education; and 66% were not married. 82% reported that they attended almost all home games of the team and 42% reported that they accompanied the team to almost all away games.

7.3. Research variables

Team identification was measured by the nine-item scale developed by Theodorakis et al. (2010). Sample item: *My favorite team has a lot to be proud of*) (Cronbach's α = .73).

The original *SFMS* (Wann, 1995) was also used in the present study. As previously mentioned, this scale includes eight dimensions reflecting the eight motives advanced by Wann. This 23-item Likert-type scale, scored from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, assesses eight different motives of sport fans: (1) entertainment (Cronbach's α = .45), (2) eustress (Cronbach's α = .66), (3) self-esteem (Cronbach's α = .46), (4) escape (Cronbach's α = .81), (5) group affiliation needs (Cronbach's α = .58), (6) economic gains (Cronbach's α = .84), (7) family motives (Cronbach's α = .55), and (8) aesthetics (Cronbach's α = .67). In this research, we adjusted the scale to measure soccer fan motivation instead of sports fan motivation by replacing the word "sports" with "soccer." Following Wann (1995), each of the eight dimensions consisted of three items, except for the family dimension, which consisted of two items. As can be seen in Table 1, the reliability of three dimensions (entertainment; self-esteem; group affiliation needs) was below .60, and it was decided to omit them from the analysis. The family motive, with a reliability of .55, was included because this scale originally consisted of only two items and a correlation of .55 is an acceptable reliability for a two-item scale.

Self-efficacy was measured by the eight-item scale developed by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001). (Sample item: *Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well*) (Cronbach's α = .89).

Depression-happiness was measured by the six-item scale developed by Joseph et al. (2004). However, the team's owner requested that one item be omitted from the scale (*I felt that life was meaningless*), and his request was followed. (Sample item: *I felt happy*) (Cronbach's α = .71).

Commitment to the community was measured by the five-item scale developed by Crocetti et al. (2012). However, following the owner's request four items were added to the original scale (*I would rather live in the center of Israel because only there can one succeed*; *I advise my friends to live in my city*; *I am proud to be a member of my community*; *I love to live in this city*) (Cronbach's α = .80).

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities (in parentheses), and inter-correlations among research variables

Research variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Control variables															
1. Age	28.4	14.5													
2. Marital status	1.66	.47	−.05												
3. Education	.54	.50	.30***	−.30***											
4. Purchase of team's merchandise	1.29	.46	.14*	−.16**	.12*										
Fan motives for soccer															
5. Aesthetics	5.02	1.31	.02	.02	.02	−.07	(.67)								
6. Eustress	5.21	1.28	.01	.05	−.01	−.14*	.50***	(.66)							
7. Economic	2.23	1.56	−.14*	.06	−.03	−.18***	.18***	.15*	(.84)						
8. Escape	3.83	1.79	−.17**	.13*	−.14*	−.16**	.39***	.43***	.40***	(.81)					
9. Family	3.92	1.71	−.05	.04	−.03	−.12*	.40***	.44***	.32***	.56***	(.55)				
Psychological variables															
10. Self-efficacy	5.87	.85	−.06	.09	.11	−.04	.31***	.28***	−.17**	.15*	.13*	(.89)			
11. Depression-happiness	6.16	.82	−.07	.04	.07	.02	.12*	.10*	−.45***	−.12*	−.09	.59***	(.71)		
12. Commitment to community	5.69	.93	−.08	.12*	−.07	−.21***	.24***	.20***	−.04	.14*	.09	.29***	.22***	(.80)	
13. Team identification	6.13	.65	−.11*	.09	.02	−.29***	.28***	.32***	.04	.22***	−.12*	.32***	.25***	.51***	(.73)

Notes: Marital status: 1 = married, 2 = not married; Education: 1 = elementary and high school, 2 = academic; Purchase of team's merchandise; 1 = yes, 2 = No. N = 350.

*$p \leq .05$.

**$p \leq .01$.

***$p \leq .001$.

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The control variables were coded as follows. Age was measured and analyzed as a ratio variable. Marital status: 1 = married, 2 = not married; Education: 1 = elementary and high school, 2 = academic; Purchase of team's merchandise; 1 = yes, 2 = No.

8. Findings

Table 1 presents the basic statistics of the research variables and the inter-correlations between them. The results show acceptable reliabilities of the variables. Of the inter-correlations, none exceeds .60, thus reducing the possibility of multi-collinearity. Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis. The analysis was performed in three steps. In the first step, the four control variables were entered into the equation. In the second step, the five motivational variables were entered, and in the third step, the three psychological variables (self-efficacy, depression-happiness, commitment to the community) were entered. This ordering enabled us to see the added contribution of the psychological variables beyond the contribution of the motivational variables that were previously examined in their relationship to fans' identification.

Hypothesis 1a, which postulates that economic motivation is negatively related to team identification, was not supported by the data. No significant relationship was found between the two. Hypothesis 1b, which expects a positive relationship between eustress and team identification, was strongly supported by the data. The findings in Table 2 show a positive relationship between the two in Steps 2 and 3. Hypothesis 1c, which anticipates a positive relationship between the escape motive and team identification, was not supported by the data. No significant relationship was found between the two. Hypothesis 1d, which expected a positive relationship between the aesthetic motivation and team identification, was supported by the data. Step 2 in Table 2 shows a positive relationship

Table 2. Regression results (standardized coefficients) of independent variables on team identification			
Dependent variable	**Team identification**		
Independent variables	**Step 1**	**Step 2**	**Step 3**
Control variables			
1. Age	−.08	−.11	−.07
2. Marital status	.01	−.01	−.04
3. Education	.08	.08	.07
4. Purchase of team's merchandise	−.29***	−.26***	−.18***
Fan motives for soccer			
5. Aesthetics		.15*	.04
6. Eustress		.18**	.12*
7. Economic		−.11	.02
8. Escape		.06	.04
9. Family		.04	.06
Psychological variables			
10. Self-efficacy			.06
11. Depression-happiness			.13*
12. Commitment to community			.39***
R^2	.09	.26	.40
F for R^2	8.06***	8.82***	13.42***
Δ R^2		.17	.14
F for Δ R^2		8.43***	23.77***

Notes: Marital status: 1 = married, 2 = not married; Education: 1 = elementary and high school, 2 = academic; Purchase of team's merchandise; 1 = yes, 2 = No. N = 350.

*$p \leq .05$.

**$p \leq .01$.

***$p \leq .001$.

between the two. Hypothesis 1e that expected a negative relationship between the family motivations was not supported, as indicated by the non-significant relationship between the two.

Hypothesis 2, which expected a positive effect of self-efficacy on team identification, was not supported by the data. No relationship was found between the two, as shown in Table 2. Hypothesis 3, which expected that a higher level of happiness is positively related to team identification, was supported by the data. A positive relationship was found between the two, as shown in Table 2, Step 3. Strong support was found for Hypothesis 4, which expected a positive relationship between commitment to community and team identification. The findings in Table 2 show a strong positive relationship between the two. As for the control variables, the findings show partial support for the effect of these variables on team identification. Only the purchase of team's merchandise was related to team identification, as shown in Table 2. As expected in Hypothesis 5, those who purchase more of the team's merchandise have a higher level of team identification.

9. Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the correlates of fans' sports identification. The setting and circumstances of the study were unusual, thus emphasizing the contribution of the study. The interest of the team's owner in receiving scientific information regarding the team's fans was the main motivation for this study. The variables examined in the study were selected as a result of both a review of the scientific literature and specific requests made by the owner and the team managers. This valuable interaction opened the door to explore the soccer fans of a specific Israeli team immediately before the beginning of a home game, while many of the studies that examined fans' identification were based on student samples. Such studies are limited in terms of generalization to actual fans, mainly because of the young age of the students, and the literature strongly recommends incorporating other samples of sports fans beyond the traditional population of college students (Dalakas & Phillips Melancon, 2012).

A major problem related to sampling college students is that they are more likely to be displaced from the location of their favorite team (Brian Greenwood et al., 2006). To understand better the complex dynamics of fan behavior, other populations, not only college students, should be studied (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). Walliser (2003) lamented this limitation of the large number of studies using student samples in sports marketing research, which was also mentioned in leading marketing journals and in the more specific area of image transfer. As Winer (1999) notes, "Rarely does an author of an experimental study either worry about how to establish external validity for the results or actually perform additional studies that go a long way toward establishing some degree of external validity" (p. 349). As a result, in this study, we endeavored to sample actual attendees at an actual sporting event to add a degree of external validity that has been lacking in other studies. Therefore, one of the contributions of this study is that it is based on data collected from the fans of a specific team. One reason these results are important is that they extend earlier experimental laboratory research by finding these relationships in a field setting using real sponsors, a real event, and actual attendees. As Winer (1999) previously pointed out, "It is incumbent on us to be concerned about the generalizability of research results beyond the lab into other contexts" (p. 349).

The main finding of the study is a strong relationship between commitment to community and team identification. Commitment to the community had the strongest relationship with the dependent variables, and this suggests that perhaps socialization processes that take place in the community play a major role in shaping the relationship with the local sports team. The importance of the community in shaping and affecting team identification was strongly emphasized by Heere and James (2007). According to them, although several sports teams may have developed community programs to enhance team identification, only a few have realized fully the potential to shape fans' connections to their teams. By identifying (the strength of) these teams and integrating this concept into their strategic planning, sports teams could build themselves a fan base that is less likely to abandon them after three straight losses or the departure of a star player. The fact that a sports

team is representative of the community is not a given, and their relationship with the community is one that members of sports teams should continuously work to develop (Heere & James, 2007).

Of the motivation variables that were examined here, two were found to be significantly related to team identification: aesthetics and eustress. The positive effect of the aesthetics and eustress motivations is consistent with Funk et al.'s (2002) findings, who reported a significant positive effect of the aesthetics and excitement motives on the identification of spectators at a women's soccer game. This finding shows that the excitement and artistic aspects of the performance of a specific soccer team can increase identification with the team. In other words, the performance of the team, as well as the stimulation offered by the team's games, contributes to the identification of the fans. It should be noted in this regard that this particular team competed for the championship in the season in which the data were collected and this fact may explain the strong relationship of eustress with the fans' identification. The finding supports Pegoraro's (2013) argument that what affects fandom is either the enjoyment of the aesthetic aspects of the sport or eustress, that is, the anxiety involved in worrying whether your team will win. In short, the findings show that the main reasons why fans of a specific team identify strongly with their team are the quality of the team's performance and the excitement that results from their team competing for a championship or perhaps struggling to survive in their division.

No relationship was found between the family motive and team identification, nor was a relationship between the two reported by Fink et al. (2002). They explained that it is likely that a spectator who indicates family as the reason for attending a sporting event probably has very little interest in the sport per se. Thus, rather than a motive to attend, spending time with family may be a means for some spectators to enjoy the sporting event which, otherwise, is not at all appealing as an entertainment option. Escape and family were also not related to team identification. Research has shown that individuals who are highly motivated in terms of economic gain may not be "fans" of the sport, meaning that they neither identify with the players nor are active in supporting their favorite team (Wiid & Cant, 2015). As for escape, Wild and Cant found that escape was a strong motive for female soccer fans but not for males. The fact that 92% of the sample in this study was male may explain the non-significant relationship of escape in this sample. Naturally, more studies should be performed to validate this conclusion.

The positive relationship between depression-happiness and team identification is an interesting finding that definitely deserves further research. A positive relationship between life happiness and team identification was found in a study of football and basketball fans (Shuv-Ami, 2014). Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) suggested that level of happiness consists of positive emotions and pleasures, involvement, the strength of life satisfaction, and living with meaning. Thus, the sense of greater happiness is subjective and the result of the more positive emotions and the pleasure that is created by greater involvement and having more meaning in life. Happier people will look more for leisure pursuits that will enhance their involvement in activities that increase their pleasure, such as being a devoted fan of a team. The finding here suggests that perhaps team identification acts as a buffer against feelings of depression, alienation, and other negative emotions (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). It may also show that people who are happier in their lives have more personal resources to be more emotionally involved in activities such as sports fandom by demonstrating stronger identification with their team.

Of the control variables, only the purchase of the team merchandise had a strong significant relationship with team identification. Those who purchase more items have a stronger identification with the team. The causality of this relationship is not clear because of the cross-sectional design of this study. It is possible, however, that the relationship between the two is circular. This should be examined in a future study having a longitudinal design.

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This study was not without its limitations. The main limitation is that it was based on a cross-sectional design, where all data were collected from one source. Such a design limits any causal conclusions. However, one should note that in this case the limitation of the study is primarily a result of its main strength. Data were collected from fans of a specific team immediately before a specific home game. In such a design, there is almost no possibility of conducting any longitudinal data collection or of collecting data from more than one source. Yet, the design of the study is more useful for understanding the motives behind fans' identification than a design based on student samples. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that more studies be conducted in which data are collected from specific teams' fans in order to provide data that will allow a better understanding of fans' identification. In this regard, the study reported here provided some interesting directions for future studies.

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