The exclusiveness of group identity in celebrations of team success

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ABSTRACT

Basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) describes individuals' tendency to publicly affiliate themselves with successful others. Within sport, scholars have provided foundational knowledge pertaining to BIRGing; however, they have not deeply engaged with sport fans to understand the influence of multiple group identities in celebrating team success. Using social identity theory and social identity complexity as theoretical frameworks in the current study, I conduct qualitative research with sport fans to understand how multiple group identities influence fan behaviours in response to team performance. I discover that fans (1) BIRG and blast for an enhanced sense of inclusiveness and distinctiveness, and (2) possess multiple, ordinarily inclusive group identities, which converge into a highly exclusive social identity structure immediately before, during, and after games against rivals. I conclude by discussing the potential theoretical and managerial implications regarding multiple group identities in sport contexts, as well as directions for future research.

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1. Introduction

Basking in reflected glory (BIRGing; Cialdini et al., 1976) is notably prevalent in sport, with sport fans frequently displaying connections to their favourite teams or athletes through consumption of sport merchandise or public affiliation with a particular sport entity; following balance theory (Heider, 1958), such behaviours allow individuals to affiliate themselves with the success of others to enhance their own self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976). The BIRGing phenomenon can be considered foundational to subsequent contributions to the sport consumer behaviour literature, including the conceptualization of team identification, the degree of one's psychological connection to a sport entity (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), scholars have used team identification as a variable to understand individuals' tendency to BIRG or cut off reflected failure (CORF) in various sport settings (e.g., Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Kwon, Trail, & Lee, 2008; Madrigal, 1995; Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Trail et al., 2012; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995).

Despite scholars' attention to and progression in the study of BIRGing in conjunction with social identity theory, scholars have not deeply engaged with sport fans to ascertain the potential influence of *multiple* group identities in such settings. Scholars have suggested that the "multiplicity of identity is a crucial issue for investigators of collective identification to

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address" (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, p. 84). Within sport, scholars have discussed the notion of individuals' multiple group identities (e.g., Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003); however, such considerations are absent from the BIRGing literature. Recognizing the influence of multiple group identities in fans' celebrations of team success may bolster our understanding of the BIRGing phenomenon. Specifically, the concept of social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), the idea that individuals may have overlapping group identities, might be informative in such considerations.

Acknowledging the dearth of research aimed at understanding the influence of multiple group identities in BIRGing, the purpose of this study is to better understand how individuals' multiple group identities are influential in associating themselves with a sport entity based on its accomplishments. Specifically, I conducted qualitative research with sport fans to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: How does perceived ingroup membership influence fans' celebration of team success (i.e., BIRGing, blasting)?

RQ2: How does fans' structuring of multiple group identities influence their celebrations of team success (i.e., BIRGing, blasting)?

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. First, I review social identity theory and social identity complexity; in reviewing these theories, I consider how scholars have utilized them within sport consumer behaviour. Second, I discuss the method for the current study. Third, I present the themes emerging from the current study. Fourth, I discuss the results with implications and future research directions for both academicians and professionals.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social identity theory

Social identity theory scholars have posited that group membership contributes to an individual's overall self-concept as a result of the derived awareness, value, and emotional significance with being a member of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory is guided by three fundamental principles. First, individuals seek to maintain a positive social identity. Second, positive social identity is derived from favourable comparisons between ingroups and outgroups. Thus, an individual's acknowledgement of a group's existence requires at least one other group, distinct from the group to which he/she belongs. The process of self-categorization allows for the emphasis of perceived similarities between the self and ingroup members (i.e., prototypicality, see Ashmore et al., 2004; Hogg, 2001; Tajfel, 1982), and perceived differences between the self and the outgroup members (Tajfel, 1982). Third, when social identity is unfavourable, individuals either strive to make their existing ingroup more positive, or leave the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Within broader conceptualizations of intergroup relations, Tajfel (1982) explained a 'continuum of social interaction' (p. 13), with interpersonal behaviour and intergroup behaviour as its extremes. As one moves further from the interpersonal extreme towards the intergroup extreme of the continuum, interactions between individuals are based on the social groups to which they belong. This normalization of individuals based on group membership illustrates the depersonalization that occurs as a result of intergroup behaviour. Normalized intergroup behaviour is largely driven by: the distinctiveness of the ingroup and relevant outgroup(s); conflict between the ingroup and relevant outgroup(s); and relative ease in which an individual is able to move from one group to another (Tajfel, 1974).

2.1.1. Sport rivalry and social identity

Sport consumer behaviour scholars have utilized social identity theory in examining the behaviours of sport fans; an interesting area of application has been the study of rivalries in sport. Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schaffer (2013) defined a sport rivalry as "a fluctuating adversarial relationship existing between two teams, players, or groups of fans, gaining significance through on-field competition, on-field or off-field incidences, proximity, demographic makeup, and/or historical occurrence(s)" (p. 51). Scholars have increasingly argued that in studying consumers' sport-related group identities, rivalries are of critical importance (Havard, 2014; Havard et al., 2013; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010). Indeed, scholars have established that rivalry is often an essential thought among fans in regard to sport teams they support (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

Within an intergroup relations framework, fans of rival sport teams can be considered outgroup members which ingroup members compare themselves to; for example, a New York Yankees fan (ingroup member) might compare him/herself to a (rival) Boston Red Sox fan (outgroup member). Thus, while scholars' examinations of team identification often focus on perceptions of the ingroup, examinations of sport rivalry in tandem with team identification can provide a more robust understanding of not only social identity theory, but more broadly, intergroup relations and the dynamic between groups of opposing fans. For example, in conducting research with students at a large Midwest university, Smith and Schwarz (2003) found that students' perceived similarity with students at a rival university decreased during the week of a football game against the rival university. Levine, Prosser, Evans, and Reicher (2005) conducted experimental studies with Manchester United fans and reported that fans' likelihood to help another individual was contingent on the salience of a particular group identity; when Manchester United team identity was salient, fans were less likely to help a (rival) Liverpool FC fan than

when a more general and inclusive football identity (i.e., all football fans) was manipulated to be salient. Thus, the influence of sport rivalries and ingroup/outgroup relations in social settings is apparent.

Similar to sport rivalry, consumer behaviour scholars have discussed the notion of oppositional loyalty. Oppositional loyalty involves ingroup members "defining themselves not only in terms of who they are, but who they are not" (Ewing, Wagstaff, & Powell, 2013, p. 5). Essentially, oppositional loyalty enhances perceived superiority of the ingroup through increased distinction. Thus, while ingroup identification certainly has positive benefits (i.e., increased self-esteem), these positive benefits often come at the expense of a relative outgroup through derogation (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980) or malicious pleasure (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). One way in which intergroup relations are revealed in sport settings is in fans' celebrations of team success, or BIRGing.

2.1.2. BIRGing and social identity theory

Scholars have suggested vicarious achievement and esteem needs among sport fans manifest by BIRGing (e.g., Mahony & Moorman, 1999; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002). In their seminal studies, Cialdini et al. (1976) found that students' university-affiliated apparel wearing was more evident after varsity football team success than failure, and that students' employment of 'we' (as opposed to 'they') in referring to the team indicated a tendency to BIRG. Students' use of 'we' was speculated by Cialdini et al. to be used as a way for students to associate with the football team's success in an effort to be evaluated positively by others.

Following the work of Cialdini et al. (1976), Cialdini and Richardson (1980) extended the study of BIRGing by introducing the notion of blasting, a means for an individual to convey negative assertions about entities to which he/she wishes not to be associated with (e.g., rival universities). Cialdini and Richardson found that Arizona State University students were more likely to criticize an outgroup member (i.e., University of Arizona student) when their self-esteem was challenged by poor performance on a quiz, suggesting that the blasting phenomenon "may have important implications for the areas of prejudice, discrimination, and other intergroup phenomena" (p. 413).

Building on Cialdini and Richardson's (1980) contributions to the literature regarding blasting and intergroup relations, many scholars have considered BIRGing and blasting in the context of social identity theory. Sloan (1989) offered support of social identity theory in examinations of BIRGing when he suggested that if fans "actually feel they are a part of the team, then their freedom to associate or not could no longer be absolute" (p. 194). More recently, scholars have suggested that team identification mediates the relationship between vicarious achievement and BIRGing (Kwon et al., 2008; Trail et al., 2012), and others have found that highly identified fans are more likely to BIRG and less likely to CORF than lower identified fans (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Madrigal, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

A majority of the BIRGing and blasting literature in relation to social identity theory has focused on a single group identity (i.e., team identification). However, Trail et al. (2012) suggested that researchers might consider the influence of other factors (e.g., other group identities) in BIRGing. The authors noted, "Although significant amounts of variance were explained in team identification and both BIRGing and CORFing, considerably more variance was left unexplained, allowing many opportunities to investigate other potential explanatory variables" (p. 353). Considering fans of a university athletics programme, one should be mindful that fans often have multiple points of psychological attachment to such entities (see, e.g., Heere et al., 2011a). Thus, scholars might be well suited to consider the existence and influence of multiple group identities in sport fans' celebrations of team success; social identity complexity is one concept that could help in illuminating the influence of multiple group identities in such behaviours.

2.2. Social identity complexity

Scholars have discussed the idea that individuals are members of multiple groups (e.g., Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Drawing from the structural properties of differentiation and integration in cognitive complexity (see Tetlock, 1983), intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1974, 1982), and optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991; see also Tajfel, 1974), Roccas and Brewer (2002) introduced the concept of social identity complexity. Social identity complexity considers the presence of multiple group identities possessed by individuals and the extent to which overlap between such identities may vary. As Brewer and Pierce (2005) noted, social identity complexity is "a comprehensive theory involving the dynamic interactions between individual differences, social structure, and social cognition as the foundation of a social psychologically informed approach to social identity, tolerance, and prejudice reduction" (p. 436).

Considering the junction of an individual's multiple group identities, social identity becomes increasingly complex as the overlap between one's multiple group identities lessens. Roccas and Brewer (2002) presented four ways in which individuals may structure group identities that do not overlap simplistically: *intersection* (the convergence of multiple group identities into a single, unique group identity); *dominance* (the prioritization of one group identity, wherein all other group identities become subordinates of the dominant identity); *compartmentalization* (wherein multiple group identities are principally mutually exclusive, prioritized based on contextual circumstances); and *merger* (the acceptance of a coexistence of diverse group identities, resulting in a larger and more inclusive conceptualization of the ingroup).

The four types of social identity structuring can be laid along a continuum from least to most complex; specifically, intersection is considered the least complex, followed by dominance, compartmentalization, and finally merger as the most complex ordering structure (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; see Fig. 1 for an illustration of this continuum). Simple social identities
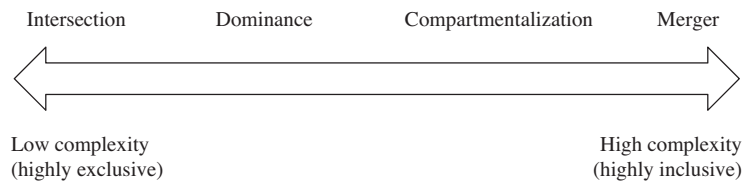
Fig. 1. Social identity complexity continuum.

that are low in complexity often entail an individual blurring his/her group identities, such that individuals who are outgroup members for any group identity become outgroup members on all other dimensions (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Consider the example of a New York Yankees fan characterized by low social identity complexity. He/she would perceive a Boston Red Sox fan as an outgroup member, regardless of whether the two individuals might share other group identities; such would be an example of an intersected or dominant social identity. However, if the same New York Yankees fan was characterized by high social identity complexity, he/she might acknowledge that the Boston Red Sox fan is an outgroup member in regard to *team-related* social identity, but that they both, for example, identify themselves as New Yorkers.

Despite the relatively static conceptualization of social identity complexity types, it is important to note that the complexity of social identity is context-dependent; that is, due to varying situations, the structuring of one's group identities may move along the continuum (i.e., from exclusive to inclusive). Social identity complexity varies based on a variety of factors, including societal influences, personal needs and values, and situational factors such as stress and ingroup threat (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). For example, in a series of experiments and field studies conducted with students and residents in Miller, Brewer, and Arbuckle (2009) found that need for cognition, cognitive elaboration, and experience in a socially diverse environment were positively related to social identity complexity (i.e., more inclusive social identity structures). Scholars have also found that individuals experiencing stress or ingroup threat have a higher need for certainty and a lower tolerance towards outgroups, thus resulting in lower complexity (i.e., high exclusivity of perceived group membership; Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Returning to the current study, the use of social identity complexity as a theoretical framework in sport contexts is limited. However, in examining social identity complexity based on various group identities, Brewer and Pierce (2005) found that individuals who possessed an ingroup identity with a sport entity had lower social identity complexity (i.e., less inclusive) than individuals who did not indicate a sport-related group identity. This is an interesting finding, as Brewer and Pierce noted, "we speculated that sports fanship might constitute an inclusive identity that cross-cuts differences in cultural background or political or religious ideology" (p. 434); that is, although any given sport entity is often thought to encompass a diverse group of fans, the authors found individuals thought of fellow fans homogeneously.

2.2.1. Multiple group identities in sport

Although scholars' examinations of group identity in sport consumer behaviour have largely focused on a single identity, some scholars have considered the existence and influence of multiple group identities (e.g., Heere & James, 2007; Trail et al., 2003). In examining city, state, and university identification in relation to team identification, Heere et al. (2011b) found that university identity was significant in explaining the variance in team identification. In a related stream of research, Trail et al. (2003) noted that individuals might have a psychological connection to a variety of objects in sport-related contexts. For example, in studying fans of a college basketball team, Kwon et al. (2005) found that identification with the team alone explained a significant amount of variance in satisfaction and loyalty, and that identification with the players and the sport were not predictive of satisfaction or loyalty. The authors suggested a more parsimonious approach to examining identification might be beneficial for scholars; however, such parsimony downplays the importance of considering the potential influence and overlap of multiple group identities in sport settings. Explicitly, from a social identity complexity perspective, an individual's identification with a team might mingle with his or her identification with other entities (e.g., university, state).

Taken together, scholars' approaches thus far in endeavouring to understand the relation of multiple group identities in sport consumer behaviour have been to view various identities separately. For example, in their conceptual work on team identification and external group identities, Heere and James (2007) treated group identities such as geographic, ethnic, and gender as distinct; interestingly, they also noted, "there is likely to be overlap between different external identities" (p. 326). Thus, following the theoretical premise of social identity complexity, it might be beneficial to engage with sport consumers to obtain a rich understanding of how these multiple group identities are structured, and how such structuring influences fan behaviour.

3. Method

In pursuit of the research questions posed in the current study, I conducted qualitative research with students at a large southeastern university, henceforth referred to as Southeast State (see Table 1 for a description of university pseudonyms

Table 1
University information.

University	Description
Southeast State University	Large public university in the Southeast United States; the focal university in this study.
Rival University A	Large public university in the Southeast United States; non-conference, in-state rival of Southeast State University.
Rival University B	Mid-sized private university in the Southeast United States; conference, in-state rival of Southeast State University
Rival University C	Mid-sized public university in the Southeast United States; conference, out-of-state rival of Southeast State University

used in this article). I conducted the research in October and November 2013, when Southeast State football—a National College Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) team—was undefeated for the season.

As Inglis (1992) noted, qualitative methodologies can be advantageous "in situations where listening to and understanding people's experiences and perspectives will add to the meaning and/or action that may result from such research" (p. 177). Further, the flexibility of qualitative techniques is beneficial when research questions are complex and difficult to answer (McCracken, 1988). Beyond the mere fit of qualitative methods in pursuit of answering complex research questions, the current study is situated in the interpretive research paradigm (Sparkes, 1994). Interpretivists believe knowledge is constructed subjectively and reject the notion of one reality (for multiple realities) and a single truth (for partial truths). Moreover, interpretivists are interested in understanding and interpretation in conducting research and as such, obtaining information from a particular number of individuals is not of concern, but rather to deeply understand those individuals who are interviewed.

Rather than choosing a single qualitative method to conduct the research, I used interviews and focus groups; my use of this multi-method technique was intentional, as the use of multiple qualitative methods in tandem has been suggested by scholars to 'illuminate each other' (Silk & Amis, 2000, p. 275) in such a way that the combination yields contributions greater than any one method could alone (see also McCracken, 1988). In this instance, while interviews allow for in-depth conversation with one individual, the use of focus groups afford the researcher the opportunity to obtain insight from multiple individuals as they share opinions and experiences with each other. Collectively, the use of interviews and focus groups allowed me to engage in conversation with individuals to obtain a deep, rich understanding of individuals' thoughts and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.1. Participants and procedure

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with undergraduate students enrolled in Sport Management courses at Southeast State. Students were recruited to participate in the research in-person (via class announcement) as well as an email notification. Students were told that the research was in regard to publicly affiliating themselves with Southeast State's football team. They were also made aware that their participation was voluntary; however, extra credit was offered to students who chose to participate.

A total of fourteen students participated in the research (eight females and six males). Five students were juniors and nine were seniors. Seven students participated in individual interviews; the remaining seven students participated in two separate focus groups. All participants had been to a Southeast State football game that season, and all considered themselves to be fans of Southeast State's football team. In addition to supporting the Southeast State football programme, students were involved in a variety of university-related activities at Southeast State (e.g., student associations, fraternities, athletics, arts).

Prior to conducting the research, I obtained consent for participation from the participants. As well, I ensured participants were comfortable with conversations being digitally recorded for research purposes. The interviews and focus groups were informal in nature; interviews lasted 20–40 min, depending on the depth of insight participants were comfortable offering, and both focus groups were about one hour in length. Upon conclusion of each session, I briefly summarized the conversation with the participant(s) to ensure communicative validation, a process by which the researcher reviews interview statements and notes with interviewees (Flick, 2009; Kvale, 1995) in an effort to obtain an accurate depiction of the interviewee's sentiments.

3.2. Materials and analysis

In pursuit of the research purpose, I developed a discussion guide in a two-step process. First, I utilized the literature to develop questions to include in the guide (McCracken, 1988); in addition to addressing core questions, probing questions were included in the discussion guide in an effort to obtain a deep understanding of fan behaviours (Inglis, 1992). Second, a colleague skilled in sport fan behaviour research reviewed the discussion guide; the discussion guide was submitted for review to the university's Institutional Review Board, and subsequently received approval. A summary of the discussion guide is included in the Appendix. Although the discussion guide was used to provide structure to the interviews and focus

groups, participants were allowed to deviate from the questions posed in sharing particular experiences, thus resembling a semi-structured approach to interviewing (see McCracken, 1988).

Following the interviews and focus groups, I engaged in peer debriefing, a process by which the interviewer reviews findings with uninvolved colleagues to probe the researcher's thinking, to enhance the trustworthiness of the research and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In preparation for analysis, I transcribed the recorded interviews. Empirical material for analysis consisted of 48 pages of single-spaced transcripts and 230 min of recorded conversation.

I examined interview transcripts at the idiographic (i.e., individual) level as well as universally (i.e., across all individuals interviewed), allowing for a 'part-to-whole' analytical process (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989, p. 141). Specifically, I began by assessing each individual's thoughts about celebrating the success of the Southeast State football team and the potential influence of group identities. Subsequently, I analyzed cases across individuals to identify patterns and themes among all participants. In analysing interviews and identifying themes, I was mindful of the social identity theory, social identity complexity, and psychological connection to sport literatures to maintain a degree of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). As well, because multiple qualitative methods (i.e., interviews and focus groups) were used, in analysing the transcripts I considered the separate methods used to determine whether a specific protocol influenced the findings; no differences in themes were found, but rather, use of multiple qualitative methods appeared to underline the emerging themes.

4. Findings

In the proceeding section, I discuss emerging themes from the interviews and focus groups based on analysis of the interview transcripts and recordings; findings are organized by research question. Verbatim responses from participants are included to add to the thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the emerging themes and contextual circumstances existing within the field examined; participants are represented with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

4.1. Ingroup membership and celebrations of team success (RQ1)

In conducting the interviews, it was apparent fans celebrate the success of the team for a sense of belongingness which enhances their self-esteem and reinforces their sense of self as a fan of the team. Celebrations of team success manifest in two ways: basking in the (reflected) glory of the team, and blasting or derogating fans of rival universities. Collectively, basking and blasting appear to serve as behaviours that allow fans to reinforce their identities as fans of the team. Both basking and blasting are discussed in greater detail in this section.

4.1.1. Basking in reflected glory

In line with scholars' previous findings in examinations of BIRGing and team identification, fans in the current study appear to celebrate the success of the Southeast State football team for a sense of belongingness to reaffirm their perceived ingroup membership with other Southeast State football fans. By engaging in various celebratory behaviours (e.g., wearing university-affiliated apparel, posting messages on social media) following Southeast State football wins, fans are able to accentuate their perceived ingroup membership with other Southeast State football fans.

In conversing with Bill regarding his tendency to wear Southeast State football apparel, he explained how doing so allows him to feel he has something in common with others:

> It shows we share a mutual liking of something. As opposed to just wearing a plain black shirt, I don't think anyone is going to make a comment about that. I think it goes back to the whole identity thing—you can identify with other people that you don't know.

For Bill, the mere *sense* of belonging to a group encourages him to affiliate himself with Southeast State football. He does not need to (personally) know others who also associate themselves with Southeast State football, as the *idea* of sharing common interests with others is enough to enhance his sense of self as a fan. This finding is in line with the idea of imaginary-intimate relationships realized through sport consumption (e.g., Anderson & Stone, 1981).

Jane—whose hometown is located near Rival University B, and is the first in her family to attend college—indicated wearing university-related apparel following Southeast State football wins provides her with a sense of pride:

> I think it makes me feel, I don't know, kind of belonging, like, hey I go to Southeast State. But like, I think I feel really proud. Especially when I'm in different places, I wear more Southeast State gear than I do when I'm here. My parents only did high school, so it's like hey, I went on to finish high school and then not just regular community college but actually like went through the whole process and got in and had to travel up here and live by myself.

As Jane explains, BIRGing means much more than just celebrating the successes of the football programme; in these instances, it is a celebration of personal accomplishments. When thinking about why she affiliates herself with Southeast State football, it appears Jane's tendency to wear university-related apparel serves as a reminder of the obstacles she has overcome; as such, affiliating herself with Southeast State football (e.g., via apparel-wearing) enhances her self-esteem, thereby strengthening her identification with the team.

4.1.2. Blasting

In the current study, it was apparent that fans like to show who they are, but also who they are not, even if this has negative implications for others (e.g., derogation of outgroup members). This indicates a potentially darker side to basking and fandom in general, which scholars have alluded to in research on team identification (fan aggression; e.g., Dimmock & Grove, 2005). Interestingly, in the current study, fans' described blasting friends and family who are supporters of rival universities (i.e., not strangers); although they share group identities with these individuals (e.g., same hometown, gender, social class), these commonalities are pushed aside when engaging in blasting behaviours.

The sense of team fan in/outgroup distinction was one of the most prominent themes emerging from the current study, as fans repeatedly emphasized the importance of BIRGing not just for a sense of affiliation, belongingness, and pride with their university, but almost more so to ensure others know they are *better than* and *not associated with* rival teams. As Anne assuredly explained her feelings about a win over a conference rival, "Just to say that, we did that… It's that rivalry, that competition on the field. You want to show like, we beat you… We weren't supposed to beat you, but we did." Jim echoed Anne's sentiments, stating, "There's definitely a feeling of pride whenever we beat a team like Rival University B or Rival University C. It's like, our team is better than yours."

As Anne and Jim describe, wins over rival universities serve to positively enhance the sense of self they derive from ingroup membership with Southeast State football, by leveraging these key wins over rival university teams to derogate others, which reinforces their identity as Southeast State football fans. In line with the notion of distinctiveness in identity projects and ingroup/outgroup distinction (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the rivalries between Southeast State and Rival University A, Rival University B, and Rival University C are essential components in identification with the team, and indeed are essential in basking itself.

4.2. Multiple group identities (RQ2)

In speaking with fans, it was immediately evident that they identify with multiple groups. Specifically, in addition to deriving a sense of self from being a fan of Southeast State football, fans defined themselves as members of the university and natives of their respective states and/or cities; others also cited their involvement in various groups (e.g., student associations, fraternities, athletics, arts) as sources of group identity.

From a social identity complexity perspective, on a non-game day the amalgamation of fans' group identities is fairly complex. Fans either compartmentalize their group identities by treating each group membership separately (e.g., "I am a Southeast State student", "I am a Southeast State football fan", "I am a native of Rival University B City"), or they merge all of these group identities to perceive some individuals as both "ingroup" and "outgroup" members because of their highly inclusive identity structuring (e.g., "I am a Southeast State student and football fan, but I also have friends and family who are Rival University A football fans"). As such, during the interviews, many fans did not struggle to describe themselves as members of multiple, somewhat conflicting groups (e.g., a Southeast State football fan who also identifies as a native of Rival University B City; a Southeast State fan whose family and friends are lifelong fans of Rival University A). Fans were aware that many of their identities did not overlap entirely, and they illustrated that they deal with this by either compartmentalizing them (e.g., Southeast State-related identities and hometown-related identities) or merging them into a large inclusive framework (i.e., accepting all ingroup members across multiple identities).

4.2.1. University and team identity

Although fans demonstrated relatively inclusive structuring of their group identities on non-game days, an overlap was evident in considerations of fan's university and team identities; that is, many fans described their university and team identities in a relatively enmeshed way. An exchange between Ed and Dave regarding their tendency to affiliate themselves with the football team during a focus group illustrates the apparent overlap between group identities among fans:

> Ed: It makes me feel more associated with the school, I guess, just because I'm showing school spirit.
>
> Dave: Yeah, unity wise, when I'm here, I feel like I'm unified with all of the students, but when I'm back home, I feel like, it's different. I went to a school that was outside my state, so it makes me proud that I was able to do something that's outside the box compared to everyone else. And also showing everyone that our performance and our success is a reflection of where I'm at right now.

Similarly, Jane described her basking behaviours as a way for her to represent the university she is part of:

> I guess it's like we're representing Southeast State. But like I always think back, like I'm pretty blessed to be at Southeast State. So I wear the shirt and it's like yeah, I go to the school, I'm a student, and I live in this culture type of thing.

Comments such as those from Ed, Dave, and Jane reveal that fans often conceptualize their affiliation with the university and its football team as somewhat interchangeable. For these fans, it is apparent that an overlap exists between their perception of the university and the football team, both of which fans derive a sense of self from (in line with Heere et al., [2011a], who found that university identity was significant in explaining the variance in team identification). It appears that team identification enhances university identification such that supporting the team allows fans (in this instance, students) to feel a heightened sense of belonging in addition to distinctiveness from outgroup members.

4.2.2. Convergence of multiple group identities during competitions

Fans' ordinarily complex structuring of their group identities illustrates their ability to cognitively evaluate themselves and others on multiple dimensions (i.e., groups). However, in discussing their behaviours immediately before, during, and after Southeast State football games, it was evident the complexity of fans' social identity structuring lowered tremendously during these times. Specifically, when faced with the stress of a game against a rival university, fans' social identity complexity appeared to simplify, effectively resembling what Roccas and Brewer (2002) described as intersected or dominant (i.e., more exclusive) identity structuring; in these instances, identity derived from being a fan of the team guides their behaviours. Some fans described a consolidation—or, intersection—of team, university, student, and community identities; for others, dominance seemed to guide identity structuring, whereby one's team identity was primary and all other group identities were subordinate identities.

Kelly's explanation of how she tries to put forth a positive image for Southeast State football fans before, during, and after games illustrates the way in which group identities are collapsed into one in moments of intense rivalry and competition. Kelly described how she believes people frequently evaluate each other based on one individual at games.

> People will make generalizations just off one person, like if I'm like that, then they all must be like that. So if I'm going to be that one person, and someone sees me and is like, oh, she's a nice lady, then it's good for everyone.

Considering the notions of homogeneity (Tajfel, 1974) and prototypicality (Hogg, 2001; Tajfel, 1982) in social identity, judgments of individuals based on a single group identity (i.e., a simple, exclusive social identity complexity) are more pronounced during times of stress and ingroup threat (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), such as during a football game. As such, this stress appears to lead fans to simplify their social identity complexity to a highly exclusive state leading up to, during, and after games; this results in individuals being evaluated solely on the basis of their perceived in/outgroup membership with Southeast State football.

Olga, who identifies as a Rival University B city native and as such, has many friends who are fans of Rival University B, explained her actions on Facebook following the Southeast State football win over Rival University B:

> Everyone is always like, "why didn't you go to Rival University B? It's right there." When we beat Rival University B, I was like, "they suck, that's why I didn't go there." And that's exactly what I said on Facebook. And I got a lot of likes.

In discussing Olga's actions with her, she explained that she ordinarily does not engage in negative conversation with non-Southeast State football fans she shares other group identities with. However, as she explained, when sensing "hostile" environments leading up to and during games, she thinks nothing of engaging in "trash talk" with individuals who are not fans of Southeast State football. Instances such as these illustrate how, in situations of threatened group identity and stress, fans simplify the complexity of their social identity structuring such that evaluations of others are based on in/outgroup membership in regard to the team alone.

5. Discussion

The overarching purpose of the current study was to understand the influence of multiple group identities in sport fans' celebrations of team success. Two areas of insight surfaced in conducting the research. First, fans appear to engage in basking and blasting behaviours to reinforce feelings of belongingness derived from supporting the football team. Second, in addition to identifying with the team, fans also derive a sense of self from other groups, such as the university or their hometown. Fans' structuring of their multiple group identities is ordinarily high in complexity (i.e., inclusive), however the stress and ingroup threat associated with contests against rival teams results in lower social identity complexity (i.e., exclusive). In the remaining pages of this article, I discuss the themes, potential implications for scholars and sport managers, and the limitations of the current study.

5.1. Basking and blasting to belong

In line with scholars' findings in previous studies (e.g., Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wann & Branscombe, 1990), in the current study it was evident that fans celebrate the success of the Southeast State football team to enhance their self-esteem via confirmation of ingroup membership. Specifically, fans described instances of basking and blasting following Southeast State victories; engaging in these behaviours provides a sense of likeness with other Southeast State fans and distinction from fans of other teams.

For sport marketers endeavouring to foster a sense of community whereby the brand (i.e., sport organization) itself is perceived as a member of the community (brand animation, e.g., Fournier, 1998), it is suggested that sport marketers strive to ride the emotional roller-coaster of fandom via marketing activities (e.g., communicating notions of hope and anxiousness during or leading up to key games, or leveraging pride and happiness following success). Social media could be a viable avenue for sport organizations to engage in celebrations of team success alongside fans (Armstrong, Delia, & Giardina, 2014). Indeed, as Armstrong et al. (2014) noted, sport entities such as the Los Angeles Kings have been successful in such endeavours, allowing social media managers to act as fans of the team in official team communications. However, because fans frequently blast rivals (as evident in the current study), sport organizations must strive to maintain a balance of

playfulness and responsibility in their communications so as to not encourage divisive, potentially dangerous environments for fans.

In situations where historical, often geographically bound rivalries are present, blasting appears to be essential in the sense of belonging individuals derive from basking in the success of the team. Fans' tendency to publicly convey negative sentiments towards rival university fans illustrates an almost teamcentric phenomenon similar to ethnocentrism. If one considers Tajfel's (1982) continuum of social interaction, teamcentric tendencies may push an individual further away from the interpersonal polar of the continuum towards the intergroup polar, whereby evaluations of another are based on perceptions of the group (relative to their own group). Separately, the sense of enjoyment fans derive from blasting suggests a sense of intergroup schadenfreude (Dalakas & Melancon, 2012; Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003), whereby an ingroup member experiences malicious pleasure from an outgroup's misfortune.

Basking appears to intensify teamcentric beliefs and intergroup schadenfreude, thus illuminating a darker side to fans celebrating a team's success. The finding in the current study that individuals leverage their identity as a fan of the team to derogate others adds to the growing body of literature regarding negative consequences of team identification in regard to rivalry (e.g., Dalakas & Melancon, 2012; Ewing et al., 2013; Havard, 2014; Havard et al., 2013; Kilduff et al., 2010). Continued pursuit of this line of research will not only be valuable to scholars in understanding intergroup relations in sport, but should also benefit sport managers in illustrating the importance of being ethically cognizant of marketing activities in relation to rival entities.

5.2. The exclusiveness of group identity in celebrations of team success

Fans in the current study identified with multiple entities, including their university, the team, and their hometown or state. In terms of identity structuring, fans demonstrated a relatively complex (i.e., inclusive) group identity structure; they were aware some of their group identities did not seamlessly overlap, yet they were accepting of individuals who might be ingroup members on one dimension (e.g., identifying with those who share the same hometown) and outgroup members on another (e.g., team identification). However, when facing an ingroup threat to their team identity, there was a dramatic decrease in complexity (i.e., more exclusive); such identity threat is common during football games against rivals, potentially explaining why fans have a tendency to celebrate team success through basking and blasting behaviours (i.e., the act of doing so allows fans to cope with threat by reinforcing their team identity). As well, the idea that social identity complexity may fluctuate (i.e., from inclusive to exclusive) based on sport contests adds support to the contextual dependency of social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Acknowledging fans' identification with multiple groups, socially responsible marketing activities that embrace inclusiveness during sport contests could be beneficial to sport organizations seeking to minimize fan hostility. One viable suggestion would be for sport leagues and their sponsors to promote unity across teams within a league. For example, leading up to the 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, Coca-Cola (a FIFA World Cup partner) promoted the Happiness Flag, a digital photomosaic comprised of thousands of pictures of football fans from around the world. In promoting the Happiness Flag, Coca-Cola sought to emphasize the power of football to bring the world together despite differences in beliefs (Olenski, 2014). Efforts such as those of Coca-Cola and FIFA are illustrative of the possible ways in which a sport league and its sponsors might be able to complement individual team-based marketing communications by encouraging fans to recall that despite their vested interest in particular teams, they share a common interest in the sport itself, thus possibly curtailing negative fan behaviour.

5.3. Limitations

Considering the current study, three limitations are worthy of noting. First, the research was conducted with university students in regard to their basking tendencies with their university's football team; their inherent connection to the university as students cannot be ignored. However, given that seminal work pertaining to BIRGing was conducted with university students (Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986; Wann & Branscombe, 1990) and many follow-up studies have been conducted in intercollegiate sport settings (e.g., Trail et al., 2012), the sample and setting were deemed appropriate for the purpose of the study. Second, nearly all of the fans interviewed were allegiant fans of the university's football team; while the insight obtained provides a rich understanding of fans with the strongest team connection, comparisons were not able to be made between 'low' and 'high' identified individuals. Third, because the study was cross sectional and the university's football team was undefeated during the study, I was not able to obtain insight on how basking and blasting behaviours are influenced by losses or across multiple seasons. Further research is needed to better understand the structuring of multiple group identities in conjunction with team losses. Nonetheless, the themes identified in the current study should provide researchers with a set of working hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) for future examinations of why sport fans celebrate the success of sport teams and the influence of multiple group identities in such celebrations.

6. Conclusion

In the current study, I used social identity theory and social identity complexity as theoretical frameworks to conduct interviews and focus groups with sport fans to understand how their multiple group identities are influential in affiliating

themselves with a sport entity. I discovered that fans bask and blast for an enhanced sense of inclusiveness and distinctiveness, and possess multiple group identities which converge into a highly exclusive social identity structure immediately before, during, and after games against rivals. The findings of the current study provide breadth and depth to the consumer behaviour literature by acknowledging the influence of multiple group identities in celebrations of team success.

Appendix A. Summary of Interview and Focus Group Questions

- Where are you from?
- How did you make the decision to attend Southeast State University?
- In addition to your status as a Southeast State student, are you a member of or do you participate in any clubs, organizations or teams at Southeast State?
- Would you consider yourself a fan/supporter of Southeast State football?
  ○ Have you become a fan since arriving at Southeast State or were you a fan prior to attending Southeast State as a student?
  ○ Are most of the people you know fans/supporters of Southeast State football?
    • How did this influence you becoming a fan/supporter of Southeast State football? (Probe: Are your friends/family fans/supporters of the team?)
  ○ Do you know people who are fans/supporters of teams other than Southeast State?
    • (If yes) What teams are they fans/supporters of? (Probe: Are these friends, family members?)
- How many home football games have you attended this season?
  ○ Have you travelled to and/or watched away games on television?
- When you attend/watch Southeast State football games, do you wear team apparel?
  ○ Why do you wear Southeast State apparel to attend or watch football games? (Probe: Do you wear licensed apparel to show support for the team? Do you wear it to show support for the university/city/state/other? Do you wear it because other fans or people you know wear it?)
  ○ (If no) Why do you not wear Southeast State apparel to attend/watch games?
- Why do you (or do you not) wear Southeast State licensed apparel on non-game days?
  ○ Do you consciously wear Southeast State apparel before and after football games?
  ○ Does wearing Southeast State licensed apparel make you feel differently? How? (Probe: Does wearing licensed apparel reinforce your feeling of fandom? Does it make you feel proud to be a Southeast State fan or student?)
- In addition to wearing Southeast State apparel, in what other ways (and why) do you publicly display your affiliation with Southeast State? (Probe: What do you do after Southeast State football games? Do you talk about the game to others?)
- How (if it at all) does your mood change when Southeast State wins or loses a game?
  ○ Does it depend on the "type" of win or loss (i.e., opponent, score)?
  ○ How often—or to what degree—do you feel proud prior to or after games? (Probe: guilt, shame)? How (if at all) do you show your pride (/guilt/shame)?
- Does the win/loss of Southeast State feel at all like a win/loss to you personally?
  ○ Do you ever find yourself talking about how you "are" a [team mascot] before, during, or after a game? Or talking to others about how "we" won or lost the game?

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