

“I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE”: EXAMINING MOTIVATIONS  
FOR SPORT FANSHIP AND FANDOM IN  
THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by

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## ABSTRACT

There are a number of motivations that exist in the formation of collegiate fanship and fandom. Through a mixed-method approach, this dissertation provides an in-depth examination into the motivations individuals have when establishing allegiances for collegiate sports teams. Through a qualitative investigation of 20 interviews of collegiate sports fans, deep meaningful descriptions of motivations were discovered. Qualitative results were then empirically tested through a survey administered to 411 collegiate sports fans that reside in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) was used as the theoretical framework for this dissertation to further understand the formation of groups and the in-group/out-group dynamic. Academic, as well as applied, implications for team identification, fan identification, rivalry, Basking in Reflected Glory, Glory Out of Reflected Failures, and state pride are all present. Family, social viewing, age, as well as many other motivations, emerged as strong motivating predictors.

*Keywords: Social Identity Theory, Team Identification, Fan Identification, Mixed-Methods, Collegiate Sports*

## DEDICATION

To my late father, COL Bobby A. Towery, you are my inspiration. You consistently pushed me to be better than I was the day before. I am the man I am today because of you. I am so grateful for the lessons you taught me, especially to do everything in love. I wish that you were here to see me walk across the stage, but I know you are looking down with a proud heart. This dissertation is for you. Until we meet again.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

AKA	Also Known As
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ASU	Arkansas State University
BIRF	Basking in spite of Reflected Failures
BIRG	Basking in Reflected Glory
CORF	Cutting off Reflected Failure
CORS	Cutting off Reflected Success
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
D1	Division One
GORF	Glory out of Reflected Failure
H*	Hypothesis
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LSU	Louisiana State University
MLB	Major League Baseball
MSU	Mississippi State University
NASCAR	National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing
NBA	National Basketball Association
NFL	National Football League
NHL	National Hockey League

NOLA	New Orleans, LA
RQ*	Research Question
SEC	Southeastern Conference
SD	Standard Deviation
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SRFPS	Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale
SSIS	Sport Spectator Identification Scale
USC	University of South Carolina
U of A	University of Arkansas

*\*indicates a number follows the abbreviation*

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Social Identity Theory .....	7
Social Identity Theory Measurements .....	10
Key Concepts for Part I .....	11
Identity in Sports .....	11
Team and Fan Identification .....	12
Key Variables for Part II .....	14
Geographical Proximity and Sports .....	14
Fandom and Fanship .....	17
State Pride .....	18
Fan Behavior Expression .....	19
Rivalry .....	22
Rival Demise .....	23

Identity and Rivalry .....	25
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	25
CHAPTER THREE: PART I METHOD .....	28
Part I .....	28
Participants .....	28
Procedures .....	29
Data Analysis.....	30
Trustworthiness Checks.....	31
Researcher Reflexivity .....	32
Delimiting of Part II .....	33
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS FOR PART I .....	34
Why Do Fans Pledge Allegiance To A Particular Team? .....	34
Being born into it.....	34
Geographical proximity .....	37
State Pride.....	38
A sense of belonging .....	40
Significant moment in time .....	44
Connection to a member or affiliate of a team .....	47
How Do Fans Express Their Fandom and Fanship? .....	49
Everyday expression.....	49
A piece of who I am .....	52
Social Viewing .....	53
Not missing a game .....	55

How Do Fans Express Rivalry? .....	57
Choosing a side.....	57
Glory out of reflected failures (GORFing).....	60
CHAPTER FIVE: PART II METHOD .....	64
Sample .....	64
Instrumentation.....	65
Proximity .....	65
Demographics.....	65
Team and fan identification.....	66
Motivations.....	66
State pride.....	68
Basking in reflected glory .....	68
Rivalry perception .....	69
Glory out of reflected failures .....	69
Interactions .....	69
Team Name .....	69
Administration.....	70
Analysis Plan for Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	70
CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS FOR PART II .....	74
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION .....	89
Core Findings .....	89
Theoretical Contributions.....	98
Applied Contributions .....	101

Limitations.....	105
Direction for Future Research .....	107
Conclusion.....	110
REFERENCES .....	112
APPENDIX .....	122
Appendix A: Interview Protocol – Part I.....	122
Appendix B: Survey – Part II .....	125
Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval .....	132

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Part I qualitative participant table .....	29
Table 2: Methods used to establish trustworthiness .....	31
Table 3: Variance and reliability explained by each factor .....	74
Table 4: Rotated factor loading of motivations .....	75
Table 5: Regression table for proximity as a predictor for individual motivations.....	76
Table 6: Regression table for individual motivations as a predictor of team identification.....	77
Table 7: Stepwise regression model of motivations as a predictor of team identification.....	78
Table 8: Regression table for motivational factors as a predictor of team identification.....	79
Table 9: Regression table for individual motivations as a predictor of fan identification .....	79
Table 10: Stepwise regression model of motivations as a predictor of fan identification.....	80
Table 11: Regression table for motivational factors as a predictor of fan identification .....	81

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the world of sports, it is widely understood that fans pledge an allegiance to one team or another (Mumford, 2004). Oftentimes, these allegiances influence fans' behaviors (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976) and become part of the fans' identity (e.g., Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). It is understood that different behaviors come along with being a fan. However, little is known about *why* people become fans of certain teams in the first place. There is little to no research examining the phenomena of becoming a fan, especially within the realm of collegiate athletics. Particularly, the southern region of the United States hosts a unique setting for examination. Interestingly enough, it has been noted that in the state of Alabama, "there were more atheists [in Alabama] than the number of college football fans who didn't back either the Tide or the Tigers" (Anderson, 2014, para. 9). Thus, being a fan of a college sports team in the South is very much a part of the culture. Due to that, the South is known for being passionate about sports (e.g., the National Collegiate Athletics Association's Southeastern Conference's slogan, "*It just means more*"), yet the region only hosts a few professional teams. In many cases, the states where these fans reside do not host a professional team. Thus, many of the residents rely on experiencing their teams play football on Saturdays instead of Sundays.

Anecdotally, it may be assumed that individuals prefer one collegiate team over the other because they attended that college or university. However, for example, in 2018, only 26% of Alabama residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Spencer, 2020). However, *The New York Times* reported that 34% of Alabamians were fans of a given college team (Irwin & Quealy, 2014). In that same report, it is evident that collegiate fandom is particularly concentrated in the

South, as Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana are among the top 10 highest levels of collegiate football fandom (Irwin & Quealy, 2014). It can be seen that much of the collegiate fandom resides in areas of the states that are scarcely populated, and the report even states, “college football attracts the most fans in rural areas without professional teams” (Irwin & Quealy, 2014, para. 15). This implication does not only exist in the South, as it still holds true in states like Nebraska and Iowa. Thus, this dissertation would warrant future study in those areas as well to understand the dynamic outside of the South. In the limited scholarly attention that motivations for fanship and fandom has received, only 3.8% of individuals follow a team because it represents a school that they have attended or hope to attend (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). Thus, it is apparent that there are other factors that lead into one becoming a fan of a collegiate team.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to uncover those motivations for fanship and fandom. Fanship refers to the connection that individuals feel toward a given team, where fandom refers to the connection that individuals have with other fans of a team (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). It is one thing to understand how fans behave and interact once they become a fan, but understanding why they become fans in the first place can lead to a deeper understanding of fanship and fandom overall. The knowledge gained from this discovery would allow for the development of strategic communication campaigns that are targeted to the individual to leverage these motivations. Colleges and universities would be able to fully understand why fans are attracted to them as opposed to their counterparts. The implications would surpass just the athletic attraction, but would also address the academic attraction as the two are closely intertwined in the collegiate world (e.g., Simon, 2008). If a college or university was able to understand why individuals in a certain region were attracted to a school, they would

be able to specifically target that region based on those motivations, ultimately boosting their academic and financial recruitment in that region.

This dissertation uses existing knowledge about fan behavior to build a basis to uncover the process of how individuals become a fan. As mentioned, there is little to no research on how individuals become a fan of a team. However, it is known that individuals have levels of fanship and fandom through team and fan identification (e.g., Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), how they celebrate after their team wins or loses (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976), and how they behave when their rival loses (e.g., Havard, 2014). However, it is crucial to understand the origination of fanship and fandom in order to fully understand the behaviors associated with being a fan. Likely, little is known about the origination of fanship and fandom because it may be difficult for individuals to remember exactly why they became a fan. In the little research done, it has been noted that a portion of individuals identify that they originally became a fan because someone in their family was a fan (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). It is possible that individuals' fanship and fandom were indoctrinated in themselves at an early age, thus, making it hard to pinpoint the origination.

It is important to understand that thousands of fans attend sporting events live, much of their allegiances are likely built through media. These sporting events are likely very impactful, but fans are constantly reinforced through media (Nielsen, 2016). When fans are exposed to media about their team, they become more involved with the team (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). Other forms of media, such as the internet, have also been shown to develop and build allegiances with sports teams (McClung, Eveland, Sweeney, & James, 2012). This can also be seen through the amount of interactions teams and coaches generate on social media, with Louisiana State University's football program generating 2.65 million interactions

(SkullSparks, 2020c), Ole Miss's head football coach generating 193,000 interactions (SkullSparks, 2020a), and the University of Kentucky's head basketball coach generating 67,000 interactions all in the same month of September, 2020 (SkullSparks, 2020b). The massive amounts of media messages that fans receive impact the allegiances that these fans have toward their team.

In the chapters to follow, this dissertation will outline previous research that is related to the motivations individuals have for following certain collegiate sports teams and the ways in which this dissertation will examine it. This dissertation is broken down into two parts. Part I is designed to answer broad questions about why individuals become fans of their favorite teams. Part II is designed to answer more specific questions about the answers uncovered in Part I, and provide generalizability to the findings. **Chapter Two** will specifically outline the theoretical framework, the key concepts for Part I, and the key variables for Part II of this dissertation. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is the underlying theory that guides the overall dissertation. Social identity theory explains that individuals categorize themselves into in-groups and out-groups, adopt the norms and behaviors of their in-group, and also perceive their in-group in a more positive light than out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The concepts that are discussed for Part I pertain to identity in sport, as well as team and fan identification. Each of these concepts play a significant role in uncovering the motivating factors for becoming a fan. The chapter also discusses a few different variables for Part II: geographical proximity, fanship and fandom, a newly introduced construct of state pride, fan expression, and rivalry. As mentioned, much is understood about how fans express their fandom and fanship, but it is relevant to understand those behaviors when discussing the originating motivations. Given the dichotomy that many Southern states provide (e.g., Ole Miss and Mississippi State, Clemson and South

Carolina), it is likely that rivalry plays a role in these motivations. Lastly, the chapter introduces the proposed research questions and hypotheses.

**Chapter Three** discusses the Part I methodological foundation of this dissertation. This dissertation utilizes a two-part, mixed method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. The first methodological approach in Part I utilizes semi-structured interviews. The interviews are designed to understand *why* individuals become a fan, as well as *how* their fanship and fandom is expressed. The themes derived from the data collected in the first method will be used to better inform the second method and delimit the questions asked in Part II.

**Chapter Four** provides the results for Part I of this dissertation. Each theme that is derived from the research questions associated with the first method are provided and explained. This chapter also provides detailed accounts from each participant to provide thick descriptions of the themes and subthemes.

**Chapter Five** discusses the Part II methodological foundation. The methodology for Part II utilizes a survey aimed at collecting quantitative data to test the research questions and hypotheses listed. The survey was administered to individuals who reside in states that have at least two major colleges or universities, while also not hosting a professional team. This survey allowed for a larger population of individuals to be examined, and allowed for generalizability to be given to those given states. Collegiate fandom and fanship is not restricted to one particular area, thus, a survey was the most effective and efficient way to canvas a large geographical area. Lastly, the chapter provides the ways in which the data will be analyzed for the research questions and hypotheses.

**Chapter Six** discusses the results from Part II of this dissertation. The results from significance testing were provided for the research questions and hypotheses associated with the second method. T-tests, ANOVAs, and regression analyses were performed to help better understand the research questions and hypotheses. Results are provided both in a written and a table format to provide understandability and readability of the results. Brief descriptions of the results are provided after each question or hypothesis to provide context to the results.

Lastly, **Chapter Seven** provides the discussion of the results from this dissertation. The discussion provides the core findings and their implications. The connections made between the specific motivations individuals have for following their favorite collegiate team with their fanship and fandom relate the results to theory, and make implications for not only academia but also the professional industry. With all research studies, there are limitations. Therefore, this dissertation is not without limitations and those are explained. To finalize, the chapter provides a conclusion to the dissertation that summarizes the key takeaways of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport communication is a fairly young discipline (Kassing et al., 2004), leaving a lot of room for growth and understanding in the field. However, there has been a considerable amount of research and scholarship conducted to provide guidance for future work. This chapter discusses and examines the theoretical framework (social identity theory), key concepts for Part I (identity in sports, team identification, and fan identification), and the key variables for Part II (proximity, fanship, fandom, state pride, fan expression, and rivalry) that are used within the methodology of this dissertation. The literature review identifies the gaps in literature with regards to the motivations for individuals becoming fans of sports teams.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Social Identity Theory.** The idea that individuals have intergroup behaviors was first investigated by Tajfel and his colleagues in the early 1970's (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). This group of researchers investigated the effects of social categorization on intergroup discriminations. Their study focused on the minimal group experiment, where individuals categorized themselves based on if they underestimated or overestimated the values on an arbitrary experiment. The participants were asked to estimate the number of dots that they saw on a screen and record them. Those who underestimated bonded together and those who overestimated bonded and started to behave with intergroup behaviors simply based on the minimal effect of their estimations (Tajfel et al., 1971). Those who were a part of each group believed that their group was superior to the other, believing that their own group should be rewarded while the out-group

should be punished. Following that experiment, Tajfel partnered with Turner to further investigate these relations. In 1979, they published a piece together on the intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Later, the piece was revised and they republished the coined term, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Social identity theory explains that individuals behave differently when they are associated with a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This begins as individuals categorize into in-groups and out-groups. Everyone who is a part of the same group is a part of the in-group, where everyone else is a part of an out-group. In social identity theory, in-group members tend to view their own group with more of a positive bias in order to boost their self-esteem (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). This is where their social identity comes from, being a part of a given social group.

There are three major processes to the in-group/out-group dynamic. The first one is *social categorization* (Ellemers, 2020). Naturally, individuals categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). These groups can be anything from a teacher and student, to an athlete and fan. There are certain behaviors associated with different social categories, thus, people can understand the norms associated with different groups. Individuals are not limited to a single social group either. For example, an individual can belong to the student social group and the athlete social group.

The second part of the process pertains to *social identification* (Ellemers, 2020). Individuals within the in-group adopt the social identity of that group and conform to the standards and norms that exist within that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The beliefs and attitudes of the individuals will revolve around what is acceptable within that given group. In this

case, others will identify people by the group that they belong to. The successes and failures of the group will ultimately influence the in-group member's self-esteem and emotions.

The third part of the process is *social comparisons* (Ellemers, 2020). Once individuals categorize into social identities, they tend to compare their group against other groups. Typically, to maintain a positive social identity, in-group members will favor their group more positively than out-group members (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). In-group members will feel a sense of superiority over out-groups, even if the groups are equal or possibly inferior (Brown, 2000). This is where discrimination and prejudice are rooted from, as groups can be as simple as factors like race, ethnicity, or sexuality (Nesdale, 1999).

Following the three-part process to the in-group/out-group process, there are three major assumptions of social identity theory. First, individuals strive to have a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Second, social identities within a group are valenced, thus, carrying positive and negative associations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Finally, an individual's evaluation of a social group is relative to themselves and others, thus, the comparison between intergroup and outer-group behaviors is essential (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, social identity theory essentially predicts that in-groups will try to positively differentiate themselves from out-groups, especially by demonstrating favoritism towards in-group members and punishing out-group members (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Brewer, 2001; Hertel & Kerr, 2001; McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014; Roozen & Shulman, 2014; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The core hypothesis for the theory states: "pressures to evaluate one's own group positively through in-group/out-group comparisons lead social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40-41). These differentiations between groups, along with generating positive associations within one's own group, tends to create strong bonds between

individuals within the same group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ideals, norms, and behavior are all adopted amongst in-group members, thus creating a strong social identity within each group (Ellemers, 2020). This is apparent within the sporting community, as fans of different teams adopt ideals and traditions that are reflective of the community in which they belong.

**Social Identity Theory Measurements.** As mentioned, social identity theory is centered around the in-group and out-group dynamic. In many cases, the way that the theory is empirically tested is through minimal effect (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1971). Given everything is equal, group members are assigned to groups based on something minimal and arbitrary. This can be as simple as assigning individuals to a red or a blue team, or it can be grouping individuals together based on their results on an arbitrary survey. The important thing to note here is that the group members must know that they are a part of a team or group. From there, any given dependent variable can be measured to explain their beliefs in regards to their group as opposed to the other group.

Social identity theory studies can use variables as simple as basic demographics, such as age, sex, race, class, income, or marital status (e.g., Goldberg, 2003; Greene, 2004; Oliveira & Murphy, 2014). As long as the levels of the demographics are distinctive, they can be used to inform social identity theory on the results. Primarily, any variable that categorizes individuals into different social groups or identities can be used. For example, political party identification can be used to distinguish in-group and out-group behaviors between political ideologies (e.g., Bond, Shulman, & Gilbert, 2018). General group affiliation, such as the group identification scale (Falomir-Pichastor, Toscani, & Despointes, 2009), can be used to determine the affinity one has with a given group. However, variables can be much more complex and specific, such as the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The sport spectator

identification scale is used to measure the level of identification that an individual has with a sports league, sports team, or athlete. It is a multi-item Likert-style measurement, utilizing statements aimed at how the successes or failures of the given entity impact the individual. There are myriad variables and scales used to assess social identity theory, however, these are just a few to exemplify it.

### **Key Concepts for Part I**

**Identity in Sports.** Social identity theory, and related approaches, are used frequently in sports related research, especially when examining fans and their behaviors. Although the concept of team is loosely defined in literature, most concepts of identity in sport involve a team as the center of interest (Wann, 2006). The in-group and out-group perception that fans express is consistent with previously conducted social identity theory research (Havard, Reams, & Gray, 2013), thus confirming the theory as a primary approach to examining the concepts. Although sport fans may have other levels of identity with a myriad of different things, it has been determined that sport fans are very passionate about their identity (Raney, 2006), they maintain their identity regardless of their geographical location (Kraszewski, 2008), and their identity as a sports fan is highly important to themselves (Lewis & Gantz, 2019).

Identity can ultimately influence how fans experience sports. Meaning, highly-identified fans of a team will behave differently than lowly-identified fans. Factors such as geographical location, resources, media packages, and even simple demographics will influence how fans experience sports (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Generally, sport media consumption will increase as an individual's identity toward their favored team increases (Billings, Devlin, & Brown, 2016). The highly-identified fan is more likely to purchase apparel with their favored

team's insignia, attend live sporting events (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007), as well as consume their favored team's media (Murrell & Dietz, 1992).

**Team and Fan Identification.** Team identification refers to the level of personal and emotional commitment consumers have with a sports organization (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997) and has been defined as “the extent that a fan feels psychologically connected to a team” (Wann, 1997, p. 331). It is important to note that the concept of “team” has been loosely defined in sports communication research, as identification with individualistic sports such as auto racing (Levin, Beasley, & Gamble, 2004) and golf (Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004) have been investigated as well. These concepts of identification with individualistic sports are similar to team identification, however, for the purposes of this dissertation, team identification will refer to the sports organization as a whole.

Typically, fans can be broken down into three different levels of identification; low, medium, and high (Wann, 1997) based off of Wann and Branscombe's (1993) sports spectator scale. When fans or consumers identify highly with the team, individuals tend to define themselves in terms of the team (Sutton et al., 1997). Wann and Branscombe (1993) suggest that highly-identified fans will engage in loyal and supportive behaviors toward their preferred team, such as game attendance and spending more time and money on the team. Dees, Bennett, and Villegas (2008) also suggested that highly-identified fans are more likely to purchase their team's sponsored products than lower identified teams. Levels of identification with a team can also be associated with how fans interact with a team on social media (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2010) and their consumption of team related products (Dees et al., 2008).

Fan identification is similar to team identification in that the team is the center of the attraction. However, fan identification specifically refers to the psychological connection that individuals have with other fans of their favored team (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010) as opposed to the team itself. This is important to note because when fans have similarities with one another they are more likely to interact with each other (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). This generates a sense of community within the fanbase, and is closely tied to the concept of fandom. Team identification, on the other hand, is more closely tied to fanship as individuals feel a connection toward a given affinity. The concepts of fandom and fanship will be defined further in a later section.

In many cases, fans feel a stronger sense of community with their favored team fan community than they do with their physical community (Chadborn, Edwards, & Reysen, 2018). Typically, this high-level of fan community that these individual's experience is one of the strongest predictors for high fan identity (van Driel, Gantz, & Lewis, 2019). Sports provide an ideal context for individuals to feel a part of a group, as fan identification occurs when fans want to experience an inter-group dynamic. Thus, social identity theory and sports provide the perfect arena to investigate this type of behavior. As mentioned, team identification can occur for individualistic sports. The same goes for fan identification, as individuals can still experience an inter-group dynamic with other fans by being a fan of an individual sport.

When examining the in-group and out-group dynamic, it is important to note that not all out-groups are viewed the same. This is where rivalry must be taken into consideration. The concept of rivalry is deeply rooted within social identity theory (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2018). Naturally, rivals are one of the most extreme versions of in-group/out-group behaviors, as in-group members tend to hold animosity toward out-group members (Bond, Shulman, & Gilbert,

2018). The chapter will explain rivalry further, however, rivalry may emerge in Part I of this dissertation. Thus, a brief explanation has been provided.

There are many nuances in the formation of fan allegiances that are yet to be discovered. In the current field of research, behaviors and motivations are examined after an individual becomes a fan. Thus, deeper investigation into *why* an individual becomes a fan is warranted. Thus, based on the literature provided, and the direction of the dissertation, the following research questions are proposed for part-one of this dissertation:

**RQ1:** Why do fans pledge allegiance to a particular team?

**RQ2:** How do fans express their fandom and fanship?

**RQ3:** How do fans express rivalry?

## **Key Variables for Part II**

**Geographical Proximity and Sports.** Geographical location is an interesting part of fan identification. Many professional (e.g., Las Vegas Golden Knights) and collegiate (e.g., Auburn University) teams are directly tied to physical cities. The name of the team ties a city directly to a fan's identity with a team, which could potentially reduce a fan's fandom or fanship if they do not live in or near that city, or boost it for those who do. However, teams that have ties to an entire state (e.g., Colorado Rockies, University of Alabama) have the opportunity to expand their fanship and fandom across an entire state, embracing all of those that live within the state's borders. It is possible that individuals who identify highly as an upstanding citizen within their state would also be more likely to identify with a team that embraces their entire state, as fandom can be built on American values (Hugenberg & Hugenberg, 2008). This is where the proximity of a fan to a team comes into play. How close, or far, a fan is to the team can ultimately influence a fan's fandom or fanship. As mentioned prior, teams that have a city tied to their name possibly

limit fanship and fandom based on their proximity. However, teams with states in their name have the possibility to expand fanship and fandom to a larger proximity, encompassing a whole state. It is important to note that identity still exists for sports that do not render a physical location (e.g., NASCAR; Hugenberg & Hugenberg, 2008), however, the influence for such primarily has to do with the branded sponsor of the athlete (Levin, Beasley, & Gamble, 2004).

Geographical proximity could also hinder fandom and fanship as well. The further that a fan is from the team would likely create a disassociation with the team simply due to the fact that they are not surrounded by others who are a fan. This can happen both to individuals who live in a rural setting but also to those who live out of the state, where there are simply less fans. If a fan wants to express their fandom during a game, then they often have to go to a sports bar where the game is being shown (Gantz, 2012). These fan's fandom may become lowered because they are not immersed in a community that puts the team at the center of their focus, and must rely on alternatives to find their in-group (e.g., sports bar). If a fan does not have neighbors for miles around them, they may feel disassociated with the community of fans. The same goes for those who live in places where other fanbases take precedent over their own, especially if a rival (e.g., an Alabama fan living in Auburn). They may also not have the possibility to co-view games or matches at sports bars due to their rural location as well. In these cases, their fanship and fandom likely comes from their parental team affiliations (i.e., who their parents were a fan of; Wann, Tucker, & Shrader, 1996). This distance and disassociation have the potential to lower their fanship as well, because there are not opportunities for the fan to become highly identified with a given team. This is evident in Wann, Tucker, and Schrader's (1996) study that determined geographical reasons were the fourth strongest predictor for why a fan no longer follows their favored team, followed by a lack of friends or peers that follow the team. However, the opposite

could also occur. Fans may invest even more time consuming their teams' content so that they can still feel the positive rewards of being a fan, because they need to in order to remain connected to the action. In today's digital world, it is quite easy for individuals to remain connected toward their team via social media (e.g., Nisar, Prabhakar, & Patil, 2018). This high level of investment could likely increase their fanship and their fandom. When a fan invests so much emotion and psychological energy in their team's success and failures, they will feel more identified with the team (Balcaite, Edwards, & Buscombe, 2015) and will likely feel more connected with their fanbase. This is a common occurrence for the highly-identified fan that gets displaced due to some other factor or factors.

In the 1990's, cities invested in the development of downtown parks and areas for professional sports (Turner & Rosentraub, 2002). The primary reason for doing so was to bring high-end wealthy fans into the city centers to boost economic revenue due to the associations with naming rights with large corporations of the arenas (Turner & Rosentraub, 2002). In turn, this boosted the overall economy of the cities by having an influx of consumers entering the city centers. It can be argued that the fandom for these teams in the city centers grew to be stronger due to the direct appeal of having a team be embraced by the city as a whole. However, this boost in fandom was tied to professional teams that were hosted by each city for those fans in the immediate area. If fans that live in rural areas, or live in displaced cities, want to express their fandom they often travel to sports bars within city limits to consume the sporting event (Kraszewski, 2008). Given what is presented on geography and sports, this dissertation proposes the following research question and hypotheses:

**RQ4a:** Does proximity to an individual's favorite college team shape the motivations derived from part I?

**H1:** Proximity will positively predict team identification.

**H2:** Proximity will positively predict fan identification.

**Fandom and Fanship.** There are a variety of factors that influence how being a sports fan plays out, and what their fanship and fandom look like. Generally speaking, fandom refers to “an individual’s connection with other fans of a sports team” (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010, p. 177). The concept of fandom explores the way in which fans feel a part of the fanbase community. Fanship, however, refers more to the extent in which a fan identifies with something specific within the sport (e.g., the league, sport, team, etc.). Reysen and Branscombe (2010) explained it as “an individual’s sense of connection to a sports team” (p. 177), where Gantz and Wenner (1995) described it as “terms of perceived knowledgeable about sports, interest in viewing televised sports, and number of televised sports viewed” (p. 61). The concept of fanship explores the affinities a fan has with a given entity.

The concepts of fandom and fanship are influenced by the same numerous factors that alter the way fans consume sports and both are ways of using identification to express interest or connection to something and with others that are interested in the same thing (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Different factors, such as geographical location of the fan, have an impact on fandom. For example, if a fan lives in Tuscaloosa, that fan may have high levels of fandom for the University of Alabama because they are immersed in the fan community. Being a fan of the team is like being a part of the Tuscaloosa community. Everywhere the fan goes, they see Alabama insignia and hear people talking about the sports at Alabama. Likely, this boosts that fan’s fandom because the individual sees themselves as being a part of the in-group of being a fan of the team. The same communal influences likely increase their fanship as well. Constant reinforcement of team messages could likely increase the level of identification a fan has toward

the team or its players. Players and coaches are a part of the Tuscaloosa community, so fans may interact with these players and coaches outside of the realm of a game. Parasocial interactions have been shown to be predictors for fanship (Chung & Hwang, 2015), thus, it could be argued that physical interactions would do the same. These interactions would likely drive interest within that given sport and could result in the sensation that the fan is actually a part of the team. With the increase of fandom here, fans may need to invest more into the successes and failures of the team so that they can communicate with other members in the community. These investments could also likely result in higher levels of fanship. Given what is known about fanship and fandom, this dissertation proposes the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ4b:** Do motivations derived from Part I alter identity levels with a team?

**RQ4c:** What demographics (e.g., race, gender, age) beyond proximity influence motivations derived from Part I?

**H3:** Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively correlate with team identification.

**H4:** Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively correlate with fan identification.

**State Pride.** The concept of state pride has been scarcely researched within the context of the communication discipline. However, concepts such as nationalism and patriotism have been vastly investigated (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), especially within the sport communication discipline (e.g., Billings, Brown, & Brown, 2013; Hayashi et al., 2016; Stankovic, 2004). Patriotism, generally, is considered to be a concept focused on the pride one has in their country (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Nationalism, however, takes patriotism further to explain not only pride, but levels of superiority one has of their country when

compared to others (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Essentially, a patriot is proud to be from their country while a nationalist believes their country is better than every other.

These same principles of patriotism and nationalism can be applied to the individual state level. There could be varying degrees as well, such that one is simply proud to be from a certain state or that they could see their own state as superior to others. State pride is at the micro-level when compared to the meso-level patriotism concept and the macro-level nationalism concept.

Given the core principles of Tajfel et al.'s (1986) social identity theory that individuals adopt the social identity of like in-group members, it would make sense that individuals with high-levels of state pride would gravitate toward collegiate teams with the state's name (e.g., The University of Alabama, The University of Kentucky) rather than collegiate teams that do not (e.g., Auburn University, The University of Louisville). The item from Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) patriotism scale that states "*the fact that I am an American is an important part of my identity*", when adapted for state pride, captures the concept of identity that one has with their own state. Given what is known about state pride, this dissertation poses the following research question and hypothesis:

**RQ5:** How does proximity alter levels of state pride?

**H5:** Individuals that are a fan of a team that has the state name in it (e.g., The University of Alabama, The University of Kentucky) are more likely to have higher levels of state pride than fans of teams without the name (e.g., Auburn University, The University of Louisville).

**Fan Behavior Expression.** Relative to the history of scholarship into sport communication, the concepts of Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing) and Cutting of Reflected Failures (CORFing) have long been a part of it (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; End, Dietz-Uhler, &

Demakakos, 2003; Fan, Billings, Zhu, & Yu, 2020; Havard et al., 2013). These concepts were first investigated by Cialdini et al. (1976) when they tested a hypothesis that students at a university were more likely to wear their team's logo after a football win, and less likely after a football loss. These concepts are rooted in the identity of individuals, as BIRGing is associated with language such as "we" and "us" (Cialdini et al., 1976). The success of the team is associated as a success for themselves, just as if they were a part of the team. The opposite side is CORFing, where individuals try to distance or disassociate themselves with the failures of their team (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Typically, the language associated with CORFing are "they" or "them" (Cialdini et al., 1976). This language provides a barrier between the team and the individual.

Interestingly enough, the concepts of BIRGing and CORFing were first investigated before the popular communication theory, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). However, social identity theory explains a lot of these motivations that come from BIRGing and CORFing. When an individual is BIRGing, they are building their connection with their in-group (Cialdini et al., 1976). An individual building their image by bragging about a win that they associate with is much the same as publicly establishing an association with a successful in-group. The same basic underlying conception works for CORFing as well. Distancing an individual from an unsuccessful group can be used to protect an individual's social identity. BIRGing and CORFing both allow individual fans to manage their social identities through self-promotion and exemplifications.

BIRGing and CORFing can take a lot of different forms as it relates to the victory or loss of a fan's team (Cialdini et al., 1976). Often, BIRGing takes the form of how fans communicate after their team is victorious. For example, students at the University of Alabama may state, "we

are the national champions!” after winning the college football national championship. They may also say things like, “*we* played really well” or “I can’t wait for *us* to play again next year.” These are overt language choices that proliferate the association of the individual with the team’s success. The counterpart to these examples could be, “I can’t believe *they* lost the national championship”, after the University of Alabama lost the game. They may also say things like, “*they* looked really bad on the field” or “there is no way that *they* will make it there again next year.” The use of “*they*” is an attempt to disassociate the failure from themselves. BIRGing and CORFing have primarily been investigated within the realm of sports, however, these concepts do extend past sports as they have been applied to different contexts such as politics (e.g., Miller, 2009).

Many similar concepts have stemmed from the original two, such as; blasting, Basking in spite of Reflected Failures (BIRFing; Aiken & Campbell, 2005), and Cutting of Reflected Success (CORSing; Aiken & Campbell, 2005). Many of these fan behaviors still stem from the original underlying concepts of intergroup behaviors. It is crucial to understand that there are extensions to the original BIRGing and CORFing behaviors, as fan expression is not a dichotomous concept.

This dissertation is particularly interested in the concept of BIRGing. Little research has been given to fan expression behaviors as it relates to one’s proximity to a team. Thus, it is important to first investigate how these fans choose to celebrate their favored team’s victory. Once these behaviors are understood, research on alternative fan expression behaviors can be conducted more effectively. Thus, given what is known about fan expression, this dissertation poses the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ6:** How does proximity influence the amount individuals BIRG?

**H6:** Team identification will positively predict BIRGing.

**H7:** Fan identification will positively predict BIRGing.

**Rivalry.** The concept of rivalry is not as clear as some may think it would be. It has been operationalized as a dispute density, where rivalry is determined by the number and duration of matchups (Goertz & Diehl, 1993). However, this may pose a problem for certain sports and leagues where opponents meet multiple times throughout the year, such as Major League Baseball or the National Hockey League (Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012). As a result, rivals are often referred to as an out-group to the team (Luellen & Wann, 2010). Based off the idea of an out-group, Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schaffer (2013) defined 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. 10-11). Rivalry seems to develop over time, often taking these concepts into play to develop the rivalries individuals see today.

The concept of rivalry plays a significant role in how individuals typically enjoy sports and how fans associate with teams. The scholars of Tyler and Cobbs have investigated how rivalry influences one’s social identity. Rivalry is essentially an extreme case of social identity, where a rival is an extreme or highly opposed out-group to an individual’s identified in-group (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). For example, a fan of the University of Alabama would have rivalry with Auburn University fans. Auburn University is an extreme out-group to Alabama fans, as they greatly oppose one another. Not all out-groups are a rival, though. For example, Boise State University’s football fans would be an out-group to University of Alabama fans, but would not be considered a rival. This is because Boise State does not impose a high direct threat to Alabama fans.

Rivalry has a large impact on the way that fans enjoy watching games. Raney and Kinnally (2009) investigated how enjoyment can be influenced by a rival game. Essentially, the more an individual identifies with their team, the more enjoyment they receive from a rival victory. Fans also perceive rival matchups (in football) to be more violent in nature than non-rival games, regardless if the game is truly more violent or not (Raney & Kinnally, 2009). In the case for football, these increased perceptions of violence correspond with increased levels of enjoyment, thus, fans receive more enjoyment from these rival games (Raney & Kinnally, 2009). Rivalry is not just associated with overall enjoyment or perceptions of violence; it is also connected to mood and self-esteem (Knobloch-Westerwick, Abdallah, & Billings, 2019). The result of a rival game has a direct short-term impact on a fan's moods and self-esteem. When a team wins a rival game, their fans experience a boost in self-esteem and in mood, while the inverse is true for the losing fanbase.

In many cases, rivalry has a larger impact on the highly-identified fan. Fans with high levels of identity with a team really internalize the successes and failures of the team. In these cases, highly-identified fans are likely to BIRG after a rival win (Havard et al., 2013). They are also likely to Basking in spite of Reflected Failure (BIRFing) when their team loses, as these fans feel as if they are a part of the team (Aiken & Campbell, 2005). Regardless of the outcome, they are likely to bask with the team. This is not to say that these tendencies do not exist with lower identified fans, it just means that it is heightened with highly-identified fans.

**Rival Demise.** Rivalry poses an interesting phenomenon on how fans perceive the outcomes for their rival's team when matched against other opponents. The concept of Glory out of Reflected Failures (GORFing) explains that rival fans receive pleasure and enjoyment out of the demise of their rival (Havard, 2014). For example, University of Alabama fans would receive

pleasure out of the loss of Auburn University's team to an opponent. The concept is closely related to *schadenfreude*, which explains that individuals receive enjoyment and pleasure through the demise of others (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). Thus, fans may not only watch sports to witness their team win, but also to witness their rival lose.

The idea that individuals receive pleasure through the demise of their rival is rooted in two different theories, the disposition of mirth theory (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) and sport disposition theory (Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). The disposition of mirth theory suggests that an individual will experience pleasure when someone they admire is successful, as well as experience displeasure when someone they admire is unsuccessful (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). Sport disposition theory is similar, explaining that fans will cheer when their favored team is successful, but also when the team's opponent is unsuccessful (Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). This can be seen through the aggressive behaviors expressed by soccer fans (Spaaij, 2008), as well as the behavior expressed by a University of Alabama fan when they poisoned trees on their rival's campus, Auburn University (Bonesteel, 2020). This is congruent with previous research that suggested highly-identified fans would be willing to commit crimes, including violent crimes, toward individuals of a rival team (Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003; Wann, Petersen, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999). Rivalry can be connected to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Goethals, 1986) as well, where individuals look to those that they perceived to be better, and subsequently make comparisons between themselves, the perceived better, and others. Thus, individuals are constantly comparing themselves against others, realistic or unobtainable (Bissell & Zhou, 2004).

Prior to the last decade, there was little to no research conducted on the perception fans' have of their favored teams' rivals. In order to fill that gap, the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception

Scale (SRFPS; Havard et al., 2013) was developed and validated to measure the perception a fan has of their opposing rival. The scale has been used to measure the level of animosity, or lack thereof, that a fan has toward their rival team in both collegiate football and basketball (Havard et al., 2013). This variable, along with the other concepts rooted in rivalry and demise, will allow for a more robust understanding of how individuals feel and behavior in accordance with their rival. Based on what we know about rival demise, this dissertation proposes the following questions and hypothesis:

**RQ7:** How does proximity influence the levels in which fans receive pleasure through their rival's demise?

**H8:** Perceived rivalry will positively predict the likelihood of GORFing.

**Identity and Rivalry.** Wann and Branscombe's (1993) sport spectator's identification scale is directly derived from social identity theory, as it measures how much a fan identifies with their preferred team. Thus, when trying to understand how rivalry may influence team perception, it is crucial to employ a framework that includes social identity theory and the SSIS.

One of the biggest drawbacks to the inclusion of social identity theory is that it is included in most sports related research. The overuse of the theory could potentially be harmful, as the field may become too saturated with social identity work. It is possible that the theory is not parsimonious enough, as it tries to explain all in-group and out-group behaviors. That being understood, social identity theory is the foundational theory to explain rival behavior. However, not all rivalries are created equal in the sense that all members of the groups behave in the same way. It is possible that an extension to social identity theory that examines just rivalry is warranted.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The research questions and hypotheses of this dissertation will be answered through a two-part study. Part I will use a qualitative methodology to investigate the behaviors mentioned, and set the foundation for this dissertation. Given the exploratory nature of this dissertation, an excess of research questions and hypotheses have been proposed through this literature review. It is hard to predict what phenomena will emerge to examine in Part II, thus, many possible questions have been provided. Following the conclusion of Part I, some research questions were delimited to provide a more precise quantitative examination in Part II. More details about each part of the study, along with their methodology, are presented in chapter three.

Based on the literature reviewed on social identity theory, as well as the literature on sports communication, this dissertation proposes the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1:** Why do fans pledge allegiance to a particular team?

**RQ2:** How do fans express their fandom and fanship?

**RQ3:** How do fans express rivalry?

**RQ4a:** Does proximity an individual's favorite college team shape motivations derived from Part I?

**RQ4b:** Do motivations derived from Part I alter identity levels with a team?

**RQ4c:** What demographics (e.g., race, gender, age) beyond proximity influence motivations derived from Part I?

**RQ5:** How does proximity alter levels of state pride?

**RQ6:** How does proximity influence the amount individuals BIRG?

**RQ7:** How does proximity influence the levels in which fans receive pleasure through their rival's demise?

**H1:** Proximity will positively predict team identification.

**H2:** Proximity will positively predict fan identification.

**H3:** Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively correlate with team identification.

**H4:** Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively correlate with fan identification.

**H5:** Individuals that are a fan of a team that has the state name in it (e.g., The University of Alabama, The University of Kentucky) are more likely to have higher levels of state pride than fans of teams without the name (e.g., Auburn University, The University of Louisville).

**H6:** Team identification will positively predict BIRGing.

**H7:** Fan identification will positively predict BIRGing.

**H8:** Perceived rivalry will positively predict the likelihood of GORFing.

## CHAPTER THREE: PART I METHOD

This dissertation utilizes two different methodologies to investigate the proposed research questions. This chapter discuss the qualitative method for Part I, explaining the participants, procedures, analyses, trustworthiness checks, as well as the researcher reflexivity.

### Part I

Part I utilized a qualitative design to explore the motivations for collegiate athletic fandom and fanship. Qualitative methodology affords researchers the opportunity to examine individuals' opinions and experiences (Tracy, 2013). Data was collected through telephone and Zoom individual interviews. Interviews allow researchers to gain one-on-one, deep understandings of a phenomenon (Tracy, 2013). Thus, interviews were selected as they are the most appropriate and effective methodology. The purpose was to get a basic understanding of the motivations for collegiate fandom and fanship in order to better inform a second quantitative study.

**Participants.** Participants ( $n = 20$ ) were individual adults that reside in either Alabama ( $n = 2$ ), Arkansas ( $n = 3$ ), Kentucky ( $n = 3$ ), Mississippi ( $n = 5$ ), or South Carolina ( $n = 7$ ). Participants were recruited through a purposive snowball sampling method on social media forums (Reddit and Facebook). Through a purposive sample, individuals were selected to participate based on their qualification for the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) and their information-rich source (Merriam, 2009). A recruitment message was used to target collegiate fans that live in the aforementioned states, and asked individuals to participate in a research study about collegiate

fan­ship and fan­dom. At the con­clu­sion of each inter­view, the par­ti­ci­p­ants were asked if they can refer some­one else to be inter­viewed to be included as part of the snow­ball sam­pling approach (Noy, 2008). The sam­ple included at least two par­ti­ci­p­ants from each state. The require­ment to par­ti­ci­p­ate in the inter­view was that the par­ti­ci­p­ant had at least one favored col­le­gi­ate team within their state’s bor­ders. The demog­ra­phics of the sam­ple were 95% ( $n = 19$ ) white, 5% ( $n = 1$ ) black, 60% ( $n = 12$ ) male, 40% ( $n = 8$ ) female, and their ages ranged from 20 to 72 ( $M = 35.2$ ). The par­ti­ci­p­ant in­for­ma­tion is listed in Table 1.

*Table 1: Part I qualita­tive par­ti­ci­p­ant table*

Pseudonym	State	Team	Age	Gender	Race
Anne	AL	Alabama	28	Female	White
Jane	AL	Auburn	27	Female	White
Andrew	AR	Arkansas State	35	Male	White
Mike	AR	Arkansas	31	Male	White
Alexis	AR	Arkansas	44	Female	White
Frank	KY	Kentucky	31	Male	White
Juliet	KY	Louisville	53	Female	White
Jimmy	KY	Louisville	28	Male	White
Isabel	MS	Mississippi State	25	Female	White
John	MS	Ole Miss	51	Male	White
Randy	MS	Mississippi State	72	Male	White
Sarah	MS	Ole Miss	20	Female	White
Samuel	MS	Ole Miss	40	Male	Black
Francesca	SC	South Carolina	28	Female	White
Jeb	SC	South Carolina	30	Male	White
Nicole	SC	Clemson	58	Female	White
Jared	SC	South Carolina	29	Male	White
Nolan	SC	South Carolina	23	Male	White
Nathaniel	SC	Clemson	25	Male	White
Rick	SC	Clemson	26	Male	White

**Procedures.** After receiving Institutional Review Board approval in November of 2020, inter­views were con­ducted with indi­vid­u­als that signed an in­formed con­sent. Each inter­view was audio re­corded with par­ti­ci­p­ants’ con­sent, a stan­dard pro­ce­dure for inter­views. Prior to the

beginning of each interview, informal conversations occurred to establish rapport. A semi-structured interview protocol was used with questions that focused on the motivation for fandom and fanship for their favored collegiate team in their state. A semi-structured interview protocol was used because it allows for flexibility within the interview, and allows researchers to explore participants' responses deeper. The beginning of each interview started with broad questions, such as "which sport teams do you watch the most?" and "how do you watch the games?" Then, more specific questions about fanship and fandom followed. Formal questions were followed with probes and follow-up questions in order to more deeply investigate the participants' experiences. The interviews ranged from 38 minutes to 86 minutes ( $M = 61.7$  minutes). Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the primary investigator, resulting in 426 single-spaced pages. In the transcripts, gender-specific pseudonyms were assigned to further establish confidentiality.

**Data Analysis.** Social identity theory was used to deductively establish codes within the data, as it is linked to the formation of groups (Tajfel et al., 1971). However, an emergent thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) was also used to help determine if other themes or theories emerged from the data that were not deductively anticipated. First, the transcripts were read while listening to the audio recording to establish accuracy of the transcripts. The data was then coded by hand to first identify patterns, and to collapse any repetitive codes. Codes then were integrated into themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) by grouping like codes together. This is where social identity theory and other themes emerged. Next, labels for themes were added to generate the findings. These findings were then shared with a qualitative graduate student, unfamiliar with the study, to help triangulate and verify the themes (Flick, 2004; Tracy, 2013). To verify that the findings are a trustworthy representation of the data, a senior qualitative

scholar was consulted regularly to check the accuracy of the analysis (Berger, 2015). These consultations also helped to identify any bias, as there have been subliminal biases from the primary investigator that may not otherwise have been noticed (Berger, 2015). Direct quotations from each participant were used within the discussion to illustrate thick description, concrete detail, and rigor (Tracy, 2010). Where necessary, punctuation and verbal fillers were removed to establish a clearer understanding.

*Table 2: Methods used to establish trustworthiness (Lemon, 2019)*

<b>Trustworthiness Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants had the right to refuse participation and be audio recorded</li> <li>• Completed notetaking after interviews</li> <li>• Relaxation exercises and notes were used before and after interviews</li> <li>• Completed member checks with five participants</li> </ul>
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used verbatim transcripts and thick descriptions in data analysis</li> </ul>
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent themes were reported across transcripts</li> </ul>
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed several debriefing sessions with a senior qualitative scholar on the committee</li> <li>• Completed several debriefing sessions with a non-involved communication graduate colleague</li> </ul>
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed respect and empathy during interviews</li> <li>• Committed confidentiality and anonymity through assigned pseudonyms</li> </ul>

**Trustworthiness Checks.** Trustworthiness checks ensure the credible representation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was established using five steps outlined by Lemon (2019) as shown in Table 1. To establish credibility, participants had the right to refuse participation and audio recording. This allowed the best recollections of each participant’s perceptions to be gathered. Handwritten notes and summations were created immediately following each interview to capture immediate themes that may have been detected. Mindful relaxation happened before and after each interview to allow for the researcher to be attuned to

the present. These relaxation exercises consisted of simple yoga stretches while listening to soothing music in a quiet room for 10 minutes. Lastly, member checks occurred with five participants who agreed to be contacted at a later date. This ensured that the themes were representative of the participants perceptions and experiences.

Second, transferability was checked to ensure that the findings from Part I will be applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to do so, verbatim transcripts were used for data analysis. Also, thick descriptions from each interview were used to present each theme. Third, each transcript was checked to identify that the themes were present in each interview. This allowed for dependability in the data, which explains that the findings are unique in place and time and are consistent across all findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Fourth, a senior qualitative scholar on this committee was consulted throughout the process, and was used to evaluate the confirmability of the themes and findings. A communication graduate colleague, unfamiliar with the research, was consulted to verify the confirmability of each theme. Lastly, to establish and maintain integrity, respect and understanding was shown to each participant. The researcher was empathetic to the feelings and experiences presented by each participant. All of the participants were given confidentiality and anonymity.

**Researcher Reflexivity.** Given that the primary researcher is fan of a collegiate team in the sample, it must be taken into consideration, especially when evaluating circumstances related to rivalry. It is understood that the researcher is the instrument for gathering and interpreting data (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), thus reflexivity of the researcher's personal interest was noted. It is hard to separate ourselves from what we know, because we too are shaped by our own lived experiences. Thus, claims made from Part I are shaped by both the participants experiences and

the discussion with the researcher (Lemon, 2019). Although the researcher could not remove any knowledge or experiences with the subject matter, the researcher's own experiences were suppressed in the formal interviews to allow for the openness of each participant's lived experiences. As an invested collegiate sports fan, the researcher found that many of the findings were also reflections of experiences that the researcher had. Lastly, the researcher debriefed with a senior qualitative scholar on this committee to allow for any personal biases to be noted.

**Delimiting of Part II.** Part of the purpose of Part I was to delimit the amount of research questions and hypotheses asked in Part II. Given that Part II was built upon Part I, it was impossible to know what questions to ask in Part II until Part I was completed. Thus, the findings from RQ1-3 were used to delimit the initially proposed research questions and hypotheses. The latter were presented in a proposal to establish what Part II of this dissertation may have looked like. It is crucial to understand that this dissertation did not seek to answer 12 research questions and eight hypotheses.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS FOR PART I

Many themes and patterns emerged from the data that supported each of the three main research questions. Research Question 1: Why do fans pledge allegiance to a particular team? Research Question 2: How do fans express their fanship and fandom? Research Question 3: How do fans express rivalry? It is evident from the data that there are reasons for why an individual may become, or maintain being fan of a collegiate team in a state with no professional teams.

### **Why do fans pledge allegiance to a particular team?**

Four main themes, and two sub-themes, emerged from the data to answer Research Question 1: being born into it, geographical proximity, state pride, a sense of belonging, a significant moment in time, and a connection to a present/former player or member of a team.

**Being born into it.** Relatives and family members have a strong influence into the teams in which individuals follow. Often individuals are 'born into' their collegiate allegiances. Frank explained this well:

So, um, you know, majority of rural Kentucky residents probably have a similar story. Um, but just growing up, I can remember as far back as I can remember. You know, my entire family was University of Kentucky fans and that's something I was just kind of born into.

Many times, family members have a direct influence on which collegiate team individuals follow. Influences from family members can come from parents, siblings, grandparents, or even cousins. Jeb also was influenced at an early age by his family, as many of them were already South Carolina fans:

I have, you know, a couple more family members that lean towards the Gamecocks and things like that. So, you know, that kind of steered me in the direction of being, “okay, let me see what this is about and let me experience this.”

However, John’s experience came from a singular source, rather than a total family influence. He explained, “My brother was already an Ole Miss fan, you know, it just made sense.” In that case, John’s older brother guided his allegiance toward Ole Miss that has stuck with him throughout his entire life so far. Samuel had a similar experience, stating, “I really didn't even consider a Mississippi school for college until I was about 16. And that was because my brother was two years older than me and went to Ole Miss.” Although Samuel’s allegiance didn’t start until he was considering college, his older brother had the same type of influence as John’s brother did.

Nolan did not really follow college sports until his older brother decided to go the University of South Carolina (USC). As a young kid, he too was influenced by his brother’s allegiance. He explained, “My brother went to school at USC from 2007 to 2011. That was on their rise in baseball and on their rise in football. And so, I just kind of transferred my loyalty to him being up there.” When his brother decided to attend school at USC, and start following their sports teams, Nolan decided to start following them as well.

These singular influential family members have nearly shaped and grafted the sports allegiances that these individuals have. Alexis provided a similar, yet different, experience to the other participants. Her allegiance started from her cousin, who actually played and worked for the University of Arkansas (U of A) women’s basketball team. She too played basketball, and looked up to her cousin. She explained:

One of my distant cousins played on the women’s basketball team and then she was a grad assistant and she’s actually the one who like let my parents know, “hey, they’re going to be needing someone” and she knew that I was, you know, like, about to go to college and everything so that’s kind of how I got to the U of A.

This family tie did not only shape Alexis into becoming a fan of Arkansas, it also influenced her to actually be a part of the team.

Family influences also came later in life for participants. While some weren't necessarily indoctrinated into the allegiance from the time of their birth, they were influenced by their family at some point. For Randy, this came from his sister after he had a career in the military. He explained, "I came to Mississippi State out of the Air Force, and my sister was working here and I wanted to finish my degree. So, I came to Mississippi State not knowing that much about Mississippi State." After beginning his journey at Mississippi State University (MSU), he became a fan of their athletic teams. However, without the influence from his sister, he may have never even thought of Mississippi State. Isabel's experience was similar to Randy's in the sense that she did not really think of Mississippi State until she had influence from her husband. The time that they spent together watching the games not only lead her to becoming a fan, but also led her to become a passionate fan. Her initial reason for following Mississippi State originated with her husband and his influence in shaping her into the fan she is today. She explained:

I never really just cared or, you know, really watched the games until I started dating [my husband] and he was a Mississippi State fan. So naturally, whenever the game was on, we watched together. And, I just started becoming a fan because he was a fan. And then I actually really, like, starting to love them [the team].

Having a family tie to a team was one of the most consistent themes across all interviews. Nearly every participant expressed that their family played a role in their allegiance to a team. Some individuals were assigned a team at birth, some were influenced by their siblings, some were influenced by extended family, and some were influenced by their newly acquired family. Regardless, family played a significant role in why individuals chose to be a fan of their favorite collegiate team.

**Geographical proximity.** Given that the participants in this study live in states with no professional teams, their allegiances often are a result of their geographical proximity to a college team. Every participant was a fan of a college team within their state's borders. When deciding which team to follow, it almost always came back to their geographical proximity to the team. Rick's team was a representation of his state and where he is from. He mentioned that some people in other areas can just choose a team to follow because of the many options that they have. However, the geographical proximity to his team pushed him to follow and support that team. It became a representation of where he is from. Rick explained this well:

There are people that can choose your team, or you can kind of do the geographic thing. I went the geographic route... it's just that sense of being connected to like, the community and you know, like, it's your team, like that's what's coming out of your state.

Jared had a similar experience, explaining that his father did not want him rooting for a team far away so that he had the opportunity to actually go watch his team play. He stated:

I would say it's 100% geographical because that's where we went, that's like where we went to games and it's the local team. And, Dad didn't want me rooting for a team that was, you know, over 1000 miles away that I couldn't go see.

The opportunity for Jared to actually be able to go witness his team play was an influential factor in deciding which teams to follow. If he were to choose to follow a team that was across the country, he likely would not have as many opportunities to go watch the team play in person. So that close geographical proximity allowed for an opportunity to be more involved with his team.

Some participants were from, or living, in the area that these collegiate teams play. Thus, being closely involved with the physical community drove them to become a fan of that team. When Randy was asked about why he chose to follow Mississippi State, his initial statement said, "Well, because I'm living here in Starkville and I'm close to the community, and I'm close to the university." This may seem obvious, but his close-knit connection from where he is living played a role in the origination of his allegiance. Andrew had a similar response when asked

about why he became a fan of Arkansas State University (ASU), and said, “You know, growing up, going to games, living like... we live about maybe 5, 10 minutes from campus.” His close geographical proximity to ASU provided an avenue for him to attend the sporting events live. Much like Jared explained earlier, being able to easily attend games because of close proximity ultimately originated Andrew’s allegiance.

A theme of being ‘your state’s team’ emerged as well. Often, participants referenced that they became a fan of their team because they were simply from that state rather than just being close to team. When Alexis was asked why she chose to follow the University of Arkansas, she said, “I am born and raised in this state and that’s where I went to school.” Not only did her residence in the state lead her to become a fan, but it also led her to attend the university as a student. These in-state geographical influences were prevalent across many participants, and one of their first responses to why they became a fan was often related to the geographical location.

Isabel explained this well, stating:

I think the environment really does have a lot to do with it just because that is your state’s team... I think really just where I live has a lot to do with it and the environment of where I grew up and who I grew up around.

She explained that where she is living played a role in not only her allegiance, but also those who were around her. These geographical influences influenced those who she was around, which in turn also influenced her. Thus, it is apparent that these geographical ties have a large impact on the teams that individuals choose to follow.

***State Pride.*** As a result of geography playing a role in the formation of these allegiances, state pride also emerged as a determining factor in participants allegiances as a sub-theme. When individuals are proud of where they are from, their allegiances to that state’s team are often a reflection of that. For example, Isabel explained how state pride played an influential role in her formation as a fan. She stated, “I feel like it [state pride] plays a role in supporting the team...

So, you know, you're proud to be from Mississippi, so, I'm gonna follow Mississippi State.” She directly tied her pride of Mississippi to her allegiance to MSU. Randy was very similar in his sentiment by saying, “Yeah, you're proud to be a bulldog, and you're proud to represent Mississippi the best you can.” For him, being proud of his allegiance to his team was a representation of the entire state as a whole. For Mike, this pride for his team and his state influenced where and what he wanted to do after he graduated from the University of Arkansas. He explained, “Just like regional pride, I guess. Just kind of like, I chose to live here afterwards. I moved away for a little bit and, like, wanted to come back here.” The state pride he has for Arkansas, and the University of Arkansas, drew him to move back to Fayetteville after being away. So not only did it influence his allegiance, but it also drew him to want to physically be back in the same city as the University.

Seemingly, some teams incorporate this idea of state pride into their teams, and their fans notice it and are attracted to it. For example, Nolan pointed out how USC uses this idea by stating, “Definitely there was some state pride. I mean, there's a reason why we're the school that has the state flag as part of our entrance and kind of our warm up.” His reference is in comparison to Clemson, who does not incorporate state pride in their identity. It is clear that state pride is meaningful to their fans, and is an influential motivation for their allegiances. Jeb provided a lengthy, but detailed example that reiterates Nolan's experience:

I mean, it is mostly being proud of South Carolina is what it boils down to, being proud of your state. One thing that always conflicted me with Clemson is that it feels like Clemson's their own brand. If you were to ask somebody in California that really didn't know too much about football, ‘where is the university of Clemson at?’ I bet you they wouldn't tell you South Carolina unless they really followed sports, you know, and it feels like they kind of branched off from that. But the University of South Carolina, we still use our state flag and everything. Everything based on the state, man. And to me, South Carolina are very proud people on that. That's where a lot of it stems from. Well, and now, thinking about it, it's probably what drew me to them... you know, being proud of where you come from.

Through both Nolan and Jeb's testaments, it seems as if a presentation of state pride influences their allegiance to their team as opposed to the other team in their state. Therefore, geographical proximity influenced participants to choose a team within their state, but a participant's state pride influenced them on which team within their state to follow.

**A sense of belonging.** One of the driving factors for individuals when deciding to follow a team was the sense of belonging to a special group. Each fanbase is unique and has different values associated with it. Often, individuals wanted to be a part of something special and be a part of a group that they can relate to that they are passionate about. Randy explained this well, stating:

It means that I have a fan base that I can always count on, um, for support. And if I, ever, you know, need to talk to someone or, you know, discuss our season or, you know, just talk fan stuff. You know, bulldog fans are always good. We always have great personalities, and we're not afraid, to, you know, talk to other fans and, you know, compare notes and those kind of things like that. But I think just being a part of a group of people that are loyal to your university. I think that's the most important thing is getting that, um, that ability to do that. And it means a lot to me that have, you know, MSU fans that, you know, I could walk up to anywhere in the country and instantly connect, you know, so that that's a big one.

This connection to other fans in the same group establishes a community in which many individuals feel as though they can rely on for support. These communities are imagined, as participants are not physically interacting with other members on a day-to-day basis, and may never know most of the other members. The idea that members of these select fan groups actually know one another is common amongst the participants. Even though these individuals have never met each other, they often feel as if they know each other on a personal level, so much so that they could see themselves spending time together. Jimmy explained this level of connection well, stating, "So it's just having a connection to the school of the city. If I find people in another city that are Louisville fans, you automatically know that you hang out. We know each other on a certain level."

These communities allow for individuals to connect with other fans all across the world. Many times, when these individuals are traveling or out and about, if they see someone wearing their team's insignia, they know that they can relate and connect to that individual, all without knowing anything about that person. Nicole explained that she knows she can connect with someone when she sees someone wearing the Clemon paw insignia. She said, "I guess it's just part of being part of that community...and it stretches out all over. So, you never know who you may come across, wherever you are, and you have something in common if you see the Paw." This instant connection to other fans across the globe provides them a sense of belonging to this special group. This seems to be even more so when an individual is part of a smaller, or lesser known, team like Arkansas State. In reference to this idea, Andrew said:

Because you almost feel like you're a part of a select group. You know, it's not the main... It's not the mainstream group in the area. It's not, you know, the hip thing to do, but it's just... it's almost like it's your own thing, in some ways. It's kind of a cool feeling with that.

These imagined interactions make individuals feel unique and special because they belong to a select group that all shares the same passion as them. John said when, "Somebody else enjoys something as much as you and you share that with them, you're like a community." These shared interests bring these fans together as if they are their own imagined community that values the same ideals.

In some cases, individuals decided to bring that community into their daily lives. So much so, that they have essentially chosen the people to surround themselves with based on which sports teams that they follow. This may happen in a natural sense, but many times these individuals end up involving themselves personally with those who share the same collegiate allegiance. Jared explained that most of the people that he is typically around are also people who are fans of USC, stating, "I mean, I've surrounded myself with a lot of people who, you

know, also either went to or pull for South Carolina. So, like, the community aspect is very important.” So, his allegiance to USC has ultimately shaped who he chooses to spend time with, simply based off of their initial mutual connection to USC. Those mutual connections allow him to experience a feeling of connection among other USC fans. Isabel reflected a similar idea, explaining that it is more enjoyable to be around people who also follow her favorite team. She said:

It's fun to be around other people who also support them and getting to hang out and know that, like, they're people who you enjoy hanging out with but also people who have the same interests. And so, it just, it really does make you feel like you are in a community.

Thus, it is evident that this connection to a select group not only influences what teams that they follow, but it also influences the day-to-day lives of these individuals. These connections run deep into the personal lives, so much so that it dictates who they enjoy spending time with.

The sense of being in this together also stemmed from this sense of belonging.

Regardless of the successes or failures a team endures, people want to associate themselves with a group that sticks together. This indicates that these allegiances to these groups are special, strong, and deep. Seemingly, it is a relationship that individuals want to be in because everyone is in it for the long haul. They aren't fair-weather, they're real genuine connections. Jeb provided a lengthy, yet very detailed, explanation to this phenomenon:

To me, it's like that construction worker man. He wakes up in the morning, his back's hurting. He doesn't wanna go to work, everything like, he's just, his whole body hurts. But he's got three kids the he's got to feed. So, he puts them boots on and that hard hat and he goes and does it. And like the nurse that's working 60 to 80 hours a week, she's dog tired. She knows she's got to do it. There's nothing beautiful about being a Gamecock fan as far as the trophy case. It's a lifestyle choice. It's as if you embrace being an underdog. You embrace the struggles that it is to be a fan of South Carolina. This ain't for everybody, man. You know it ain't. And that's why Gamecock fans resonate so well with each other. Because we know when you see another one. We know he's for real. We know he's riding with us, and that we're alike.

Essentially, he is explaining that fans in his community are committed. They do not leave when things get hard, they stick around and support each other. It is almost as if it is their duty to stand by their team and support them, regardless of how well the team is doing. He explained that at times it isn't easy being a fan, but being a fan of USC is extremely important to him and to other members of that community, so he continues to stand by and support the team. This sense of deep commitment by him, and that community, brings an attraction to his allegiance toward USC. Although not as thorough, Sarah provided a similar explanation to her allegiance toward Ole Miss. She said:

I think it gives you sort of a sense of a community, I mean, we're all part of, we're all fans of the losing team. So, it brings people together a little bit that way, and when we do win, even better, and everyone is happy.

Regardless of the outcomes of each game, the sense of community still remains. It brings people together, and that is attractive to many. When the team is successful, it is a positive thing, but that sense of belonging to a special group that is committed toward one another is really what being a fan is all about.

In some cases, this sense of belonging runs deeper than just connecting with other members of the group. Some individuals have such a deep connection to their team, that they almost feel as if they are a member of that team. When a fan becomes so passionate about their team, they feel as if they are actually out on the field or court competing for their team. Juliet explained this idea by stating:

You feel a personal connection when you're walking around campus and you'll see, you know, one of the players that you watched the night before. You know, you go to a reception and they will be there. So, you know, you just kind of feel like you're a part of it.

That deep personal connection she mentioned illustrates the idea that she feels as though she is actually a member of the team. She followed that statement up with this:

It means that in kind of an abstract sense, I am a part of the team. Even though I'm not. They're playing, obviously I am not coaching or having anything to do with it. But as a supporter, you are. You are part of the team, you know, you're an extension of what they do on the court.

Not only does she feel as if she is a part of the team in an abstract way, but she feels as if she is an extension of what the team does during the competition. Her actions as a supporter, and member of the community, has led to a sense of belonging to not only the fan group, but the team as well. During the interview with Jeb, he was repeatedly using the word “we.” When asked about what he meant by that, he stated, “When I say we, I say we as in like I'm on the team, man. That's kind of what I mean by we.” It is evident that these types of belonging can become so personal for some, that they actually feel as if they influence the outcomes of competitions. Overall, these connections are just a sense of belonging, rather than an actual physical connection with a team or fan of a team.

**Significant moment in time.** The aforementioned themes are typically motivations for individuals to initially gain interest in their allegiances. Once their interests are peaked through those motivation, there comes a significant moment in time when they “buy-in.” These significant moments in time vary by experience, but all relate in a sense that the fan can pin point a moment when it all came together. Francesca pinpointed an experience she had while touring different college campuses to attend:

This was in 2009. Tim Tebow was still the quarterback at Florida. I went and I was able to sit with the band and kind of hang out with them during the game. And it was a crazy atmosphere. We ended up losing, but I think it was just funny to me. I don't know what it was about it, but the student section started chanting, like, ‘f\*ck Tim Tebow’. I was like, I wanna go to school here.

Francesca’s initial attraction to USC came from one of the previously mentioned motivations, but the buy-in to her allegiance was pinpointed to a singular experience she had. At that moment in time, it clicked for her that USC was her team. Typically, these experiences came for

individuals when they were watching a specific team. Jared's moment in time came after he enrolled at USC. He recalled the time when they beat number one ranked Alabama at home, and how that really made him become a fan. He said:

I became a fan in 2010, which was kind of the beginning of the good years here and got sucked in. No offense to Alabama, but Carolina played Alabama when they were number one. And it was awesome. Just a freshman at the time and had a great time. And it was my introduction to SEC football. You know, I've just been a fan ever since.

Following that experience, Jared committed to becoming a fan. The overall excitement and experience of that moment had a lasting impact on him, and helped shape him into the fan he is now. Jimmy's experience was very similar, except he had two moments in time, both concretizing his allegiance toward Louisville. He explained his experience like this:

Sophomore year, we won the national title [in men's basketball] and I was able to go to those games in Atlanta. So, getting that experience and then football, we had a good, good coach. And then we also Teddy Bridgewater at quarterback. So, yeah, the tools and the players gave us some success, and then we wrap it up with the sugar bowl my sophomore year and we beat Florida. NOLA for New Year's and the Sugar Bowl victory, uh, fell in love.

After Louisville won the national championship in men's basketball, Jimmy became even more committed. However, having extreme success in football the same year greatly impacted his allegiance. Those two extremely positive experiences solidified his commitment to the team.

Sometimes, these significant moments in time came when the participants stepped onto campus for the first time and experienced the atmosphere. These moments captured them as a fan of the team, even before they ever watched the team play. Juliet explained this through her experience as a teenager touring different campuses. She said, "I was 16, and it was the first time I went to a college campus. That cemented it. So, you're walking like, 'wow, this is pretty cool. This is where I'm gonna go'." From that moment on, she was a fan of that school's sports teams, even though she had not really watched them play. The experience of her being on the campus in which the team plays was enough for her to buy-in. Rick's experience was very similar to

Juliet's, he stated, "So then I went up to visit them one time, and it's just an awesome place, and I was just blown away, love at first sight kind of thing." This experience for him was so impactful that he not only decided to attend school there, he also fell in love with the school and team.

These singular moments are extremely impactful on these individuals, and can be recollected even decades after they occur. Samuel's story was not different. He decided to attend school at Ole Miss, but wasn't quite a fan. He explains his story as such:

I was just like, I'm gonna just go the Ole Miss game because it's cool. I like it. At that point, I still wasn't a fan until I got to Ole Miss and started going to the grove and going to the games and started meeting more and more Ole Miss fans and how much they cared about school. And you're here. You get engulfed in it. And at that point, I was like, 'Hey, I'm all in on this. This is fun. I'm having a great time here.'

Not all moments in time came from an in-person experience, some came through a different form of media. For Nicole, it came from watching Clemson play football on TV. She explained her moment in time:

Prior to me going [to Clemson], watching Clemson football is how I learned that Clemson exists, or existed. I grew up in Cincinnati, and when I was in high school starting to think about colleges, and did not want to go to any of the schools within a small radius of Cincinnati, AKA 'did not want to go to Ohio State', or many others, but definitely not there. Clemson was actually playing Ohio State in the Gator Bowl the year that Woody Hayes, who was the Ohio state coach, punched a player that ended his career. Well, that was a Clemson player. So, that was my first introduction was to what Clemson was through football.

These experiences happen across all media, whether it is physically being in the environment in which the team exists, or simply watching them play on television. Regardless, each moment and experience can be just as impactful.

These significant moments in time can happen at any point. As mentioned prior, these moments occurred right before, or while they were attending that school. For some, these moments happen well before then. As mentioned earlier, Alexis had a tie to Arkansas through

her cousin. She explains her moment in time through an experience she had while playing basketball as a child:

I was, like, my daughters age, I was 12. But we used to go as a team and we would go [to the University of Arkansas] and they would have these, like an exhibition game or something and we would go and watch them play and we would all get autographs after the game, and talk to the players, and all of that. And that kind of, I think, built in my mind.

For her, that moment in time built a strong connection for her with Arkansas and their basketball program. Her experience watching that game, and getting to interact with the team, lead to a foundational allegiance toward the Razorbacks. For some, this interaction with members of a team, or their coaches, really helped solidify their allegiance.

*Connection to a member or affiliate of a team.* Within the theme of a significant moment in time, a sub-theme emerged. In many cases, individuals had an interaction or a connection with either a member or an affiliate of their favored team. These members and affiliates varied but were all associated with their favorite team, and ranged across media. For example, John's connection to an affiliate for the team came from a play-by-play radio commentator for Ole Miss when he was a kid. He explains his story as:

When I was a boy, I really enjoyed the sports commentator, the play-by-play guy, his name was Stan Torgerson. He was very animated and had some neat sayings that I just loved. I even would record him on tape, and I still have some of these tapes, but I would record him just to hear what he would say on tape. So, I would play like I was him and I knew the players because of him and I enjoyed listening because I never got to go to anything as a kid so everything was radio and I enjoyed listening to radio broadcasts.

John created a personal connection with Mr. Torgerson, who was the voice of Ole Miss radio spanning from 1955 – 1984 (Ole Miss Athletics, 2006). He embodied the radio broadcast and would reenact plays in his yard while listening to recorded tapes of Mr. Torgerson. For John, this type of personal connection only created a strong bond and allegiance for Ole Miss.

When individuals were able to physically interact with members of a team, their allegiances grew even stronger. For example, Nolan was able to sit next to the family members of baseball players when he was at a game. The interaction with family members of players on the team had a lasting impact on him. Following the game, he was also able to interact with the players on the team. When asked if that influenced why he was a fan, he explained:

It makes it personable. And, you feel like you have a relationship with them and even, you know, they just go home and, you know, party and drink. And they forget about you later. You still have that interaction that you're not gonna forget, and that was a big part of me becoming a fan.

Even though that player, or family member, may forget about the interaction later on, the fan who experienced it will remember it forever. In Nolan's case, it led him to become a fan. For others, connections to members of the team occur on a regular basis. Although these experiences happen regularly, they help reinforce that allegiance. For Samuel, he works at Ole Miss. Thus, he routinely interacts with his students who are also athletes on different teams. Not only does he interact with them at work, he goes out of his way to make sure that he supports them in their sport as well. He stated, "I try to support all the sports anyway I can because they're my students." This included going to cross country meets, or golf matches, just to maintain a connection to support of these student athletes. So, for him, these connections to players expanded his fandom and help him maintain an overall personal connection to the team.

Jeb had a unique experience with a connection to a member of his favorite team. When he was playing football in high school, he played for Steve Taneyhill. He mentioned that this connection to Taneyhill helped shape his interest in South Carolina, because Taneyhill was, "a legend at the University of South Carolina who was a quarterback in the nineties." His interaction with Taneyhill was almost daily, much like Samuel's, where they both discussed that these interactions played a role in their fandom. Jeb also mentioned that South Carolina was the

only team that was interested in him to play collegiate football, and stated that their interest in him, “drew me to them.” Although Jeb did not end up playing football for South Carolina, he did keep that allegiance that was formed during his time with Taneyhill.

When these interactions occur at an early age, they have the opportunity to be very impactful. For example, Alexis had the opportunity to attend a basketball camp at the University of Arkansas when she was young. She mentioned that the interactions with some of the players during that time helped mold her into the fan she is today. She specifically cited one instance that stuck with her:

I remember they were in the gym one day... [I had these] ugly Nike high tops, I got some of the guys to sign them. Ernie Murray was one of them... He was a walk on, or he just wasn't like one of the main starters, but he was really nice, you know, and just down to earth... That really stuck with me. You know, and it's funny because I actually ran into him again, when I was in college. And I said, “Hey, you actually signed my shoe when I was little.”

That interaction for Alexis was a defining moment in time, where a single act of kindness from a player on the team created a fan for life. These interactions have the possibility to shape the teams that individuals follow, especially when the interaction is extremely possible. Like Nolan mentioned earlier, these players may forget all about the interaction, but to the fan, they will remember them forever.

### **How do fans express their fandom and fanship?**

The second research question focused on the ways in which individuals expressed their fanship and fandom. Four main themes, and one sub-theme, emerged from the data: everyday expression, a piece of who I am, social viewing, and not missing a game.

**Everyday expression.** Expressing individual fandom is a part of their everyday lives. Often, individuals are constantly wearing team insignia, displaying it on their cars or in their homes, or even posting about it on social media. For Frank, this was apparent. Everyone around

him knows his allegiance to Kentucky because it is mostly what he wears on a day-to-day basis, even so much so that he gladly invites anyone to gift him Kentucky apparel or paraphernalia for holidays or birthdays. He mentioned that “90% of my closet is Kentucky... So, everyone knows, like Christmas time, you can get me something Kentucky.” Juliet explained a similar sentiment by saying, “I could send you a picture of my closet,” in reference to how she physically shows and displays her fandom. She explained this further by recollecting a time that she went on vacation. She said, “It was about a year ago or something. We were looking at pictures from one weekend, a bunch of stuff we have done, and in every single picture we had sports stuff on.” Although this expression of fandom was not directly intentional, she noticed it herself when she looked back on photographs of her and her family from a vacation that did not involve sports.

Having a closet full of collegiate team apparel is very common, even so much so that the colors of the clothing that individuals frequently wear reflect the colors of that team. John said, “Everything that I wear has Ole Miss on it... everything in my closet is red and blue. Most of the things got Ole Miss on it.” So not only does he wear Ole Miss apparel, but his closet also reflects the team’s colors. Randy explained something similar when asked about his expression for MSU. He said, “I constantly wear a Mississippi State hat,” and followed that up with, “You know, maroon and white all the way.” So, his day-to-day clothing also typically reflected the team’s colors. These expressions seemed normal to these individuals as well. Andrew said, “I wear an ASU hat around work or out on the town... A hat or shirt sometimes. I got a bumper sticker on the truck. So, just little things like that. Nothing too, you know, out of the ordinary.” What is intriguing is that he said that what he does is nothing out of the ordinary. This implies that an everyday expression of fandom is a normal behavior for members of these select groups.

Every participant explained that they make an effort to wear some type of apparel on game days. However, Jimmy said that his “wardrobe doesn't really change between game day and regular.” This further explains this norm when it comes to the everyday expression of fandom. Anyone who interacts with these fans will know which team they follow simply based on the apparel that they are wearing. In some cases, individuals would intentionally wear the team insignia when they were out and about or traveling. Nathaniel explained, “When I first started traveling, I would wear a Clemson shirt in the airport, no matter what, every time. Because I was just like, you know, I want to show where I'm from.” This was an intentional act made by Nathaniel to ensure that others knew he was a fan of that team. This idea relates back to the sense of belonging mentioned in the previous section to display that he is a member of that select group.

Everyday expression was inherent for some individuals. When initially asked about their physical display of fandom, a few respondents said they do not physically show their fandom outside of gameday apparel. However, when asked if someone would be able to tell that they are a fan of their team if they were to walk in their house, the responses shifted. Nicole explained this well, she responded with, “If you walk in my living room, I have a picture of one of the main buildings on Clemson's campus. And, I also have a small, plaque kind of thing, that's like the crest of Clemson.” Her initial reaction was that she did not express her fandom daily, yet she has Clemson décor in her living room. Mike was the same way. He initially explained that he only displays his fandom on gamedays, yet he stated, “Yeah, I mean, I've got a bunch of, like, just collectible stuff that hangs on the wall... pennants, posters.” So, he too did not think about the inherent everyday expression of fandom that displays. This further demonstrates that the

everyday expression of fandom runs deep in individuals, so much so that it becomes a part of their daily lives, whether they realize it or not.

*A piece of who I am.* It is apparent that an expression of fandom is part of the daily lives of each individual fan, as this emerged as a sub-theme. However, these expressions run deep in the identification and personality that these individuals have. When Andrew was asked if being a fan of his team was important to him, he responded with, “You know, it’s just a part of who I am in some ways.” In a sense, Andrew has associated his allegiance with ASU to be a reflection of who he is as a person. Nicole’s response to the same question was very similar, stating, “It’s just a little piece of who I am.” These associations and allegiances are deeply ingrained in who they are as a person, so much so that they, explicitly stated that the teams that they follow are a representation of who they are, even outside the world of sports. Frank stated this idea well and said, “In simple terms, it’s just a part of who I am.”

Many of the participants reflected that others identify them as being a fan of their favorite team. It has become somewhat of an outward reflection of who they are as a person. Sarah reinforced that by claiming that “it’s a part of my identity a little bit now.” Prior to her following Ole Miss, she wasn’t vested in college sports. However, once she committed to becoming a fan, it became a piece of her overall identity. For Samuel, it was more extreme. He said, “I think I identify with it. I think that’s an important part of my life. ...So it is it something I strongly identify with, I am called Mr. Ole Miss quite often.” His identity is so closely tied to being a fan of Ole Miss that those around him call him “Mr. Ole Miss.” So not only is his allegiance toward Ole Miss a part of his every day expression, but it is also a part of other’s every day expression of him.

These adaptations in identity seemingly happened naturally. By associating themselves with their select group, they naturally began to obtain the identity of that group. Randy stated, “I think it sort of adds to my psyche and my personality, to be a member of the bulldog nation.” This psyche and personality shift came from his membership with other MSU fans. However, for some, an intentional effort was made that resulted in their adaption of identity. For example, Nolan explained the effort that he put into being a fan that resulted in this identity shift:

I worked my butt off to get my degree. I worked a lot of odd jobs in between to figure out what I wanted to do. And just to even make sure I gave time to athletics because it meant, you know, skipping a class or two every now and then for basketball because they played midweek games, just to be in line so I could move up to the front quickly. And it's just, it's part of my, I guess, my identity.

This conscious effort to adopt the identity of the group results in a lifestyle. Each select group has its own norms, traditions, and behaviors associated with it. To be a member of this group, you must adopt those practices, which ultimately results in identification with that group. Jeb explained, “To me it has been a lifestyle choice man to be a South Carolina Gamecock.” His choice of words shows that his intent was to not just be a fan of USC, but to actually be a South Carolina Gamecock, further progressing the notion of identity.

**Social Viewing.** The expression of fandom for participants typically came in the form of wanting to experience games with other people who were also fans of the same team. This idea emerged in an implicit manner, where responses to, *how do you typically watch your team play?* resulted in associations with other fans. Most of the time individuals did not explicitly state that they preferred to watch their team play with others, rather their answers implied that they were watching with others. For example, Randy said, “Mainly it is my family, my wife and my daughter.” This means that when he is watching his team play, he is usually with his family, who are also fans of the same team. Francesca’s experience was similar. She stated, “Before this season [because of Covid-19], we would tailgate every game at that the game [and then] just go

back to somebody else's house and watch the game there. And then for away games, we would do house watching.” Not only did Francesca and her friends tailgate together, they also went and watched the game on television together. When there was an away game, her and her friends made an effort to be together to watch the game. This helps illustrate the idea that she is always with other fans when she watches her team play.

In addition, the attempt to watch games with other fans was intentional. Some respondents explained that they like to watch their team play with certain people. This is because the respondents enjoy the environment and experiences when they are around certain people. Isabel explained that “most of time we watch with [friends]. They're huge MSU fans, too. It's just one of those things where we like the same team. They're into baseball just as much as I am. So normally, we watch with them.” Isabel and her husband make an intentional effort to watch their team play with the same group of friends because they are all extremely passionate about the team.

Jared typically watched his team play with his father, as it allowed him quality time to spend with him since they shared the same allegiance in teams. When asked why he specifically chose to watch games with his father, he explained, “You know, I connected a lot to my dad through sports... you know, it's quality time. It's a year talking, you know about the game and, like, I'm really into strategy and stuff like that.” This fandom outlet provided Jared a whole season of football where he had a chance to spend time with his father. This also reflects the idea that individuals can connect deeply with one another over their shared interest in sports and teams. Nathaniel's experience is similar in the sense that he is always actively seeking out someone to watch the games with, whether it is friends or family. He said, “I would say pretty much every game, I watch with someone. I watch it with friends, or I watch it with my dad or

something... But I've never watched a game by myself.” Nathaniel has never experienced a game by himself because he always finds someone to watch with. It is evident that this expression of fandom is really important to him in order to experience a game. He explained that he has never been in a situation where he had to watch by himself, thus keeping high levels of fandom present for him.

The conscious choice to watch games with others also has an influence on which sport the individual watches. In many cases, these individuals are fans of more than just one sport at their respective schools. With that, there may be different people that they watch with depending on which sport they are watching. For example, Samuel explained, “Football, I go [to the games] with my son. College football is my son.” He then goes on to explain, “My wife loves basketball. So [we] watch women's basketball a lot, and my daughter just likes cheerleaders.” Depending on which sport Samuel is watching dictates who he may be watching with. In Nolan’s case, he ends up watching more football because his wife is more into football than some of the other sports. He said, “Basically, we'll both watch football together just because she's more into football than basketball. So, we'll try to watch [basketball], but sometimes I'll just follow online with friends.” Even though his wife may not choose to watch a basketball game with him, he still finds alternative ways to watch the games with friends. For example, he partakes in a group text message chat with his friends during the game. While this isn’t a physical interaction between him and his friends, they are still experiencing the games together.

**Not missing a game.** The expression of fanship for these fans was very apparent, so much so that the idea of missing a game was problematic and very rare. Juliet expressed, “yeah, it's rare that we would miss a women's game.” Not only is it problematic, it rarely occurs. Nearly every participant expressed some type of sentiment that implied that they were going to find a

way to watch their team play. For many of them, that meant blocking off an entire day or even weekend to ensure that they were able to watch their teams play. Jared explained, “I kind of plan Saturday around watching the game for the most part.” He makes sure that he has his day planned out so that he doesn’t miss the game. Rick does that as well, he said, “I’m watching every game. It’s definitely like when I wake up on Saturday, I’m like, okay, Clemson game is at this time, block it off. Then I’ll figure out what I’m gonna do the rest of the day.” Watching the game is a priority. Rick’s first action on Saturday is to make sure that he has time to watch his team play, then he focuses on what else the day entails. Isabel reiterated that same idea by saying, “We do plan our Saturdays or Fridays around baseball.” In the case of baseball, that may include blocking off multiple days for watching and that is exactly what she and her husband do.

However, it isn’t always possible to completely block off a weekend, or even just a few hours within a day. The games will be played when they are scheduled, so sometimes ‘life’ got in the way. However, this did not always mean that they were going to miss a game. Frank provided an example of when this happened to him. He recollected:

I can recall a wedding from three years ago. He had it in March, so it was March Madness. I remember just like two tables full of my fraternity brothers everyone that went to UK. Where we were all gathered at the reception watching the game, it was pretty funny.

Frank, along with many others, was not going to let a wedding reception stand in the way of them watching the game. While the game wasn’t important enough for them to not attend the wedding, it was important enough for them to find a way to watch it at the wedding.

Surprisingly, Frank was not the only person who had this experience. Francesca explained a time where she too was also at a wedding during a game. She said, “I was at a wedding a couple weeks ago, and there were a couple of us who knew the game was on and we would watch portions of it [on our phone] at the wedding.” This indicates that something as monumental as a

wedding will not completely get in the way of these fans ability to watch a game. Samuel had a similar experience, albeit not a wedding, but while his son was competing in cross country. He recounted his experience, and said, “Even when my son was running cross country and I missed Ole Miss home games, which I hate, but I was literally at cross-country meets with my chair and my wife and my phone streaming Ole Miss games.” He went on further to justify his means by saying, “I mean, I only see him at the starting line and finish line anyway, so I watch a game in between.” Even though his son’s cross country meet prohibited him from attending the games, he still found a way to enjoy both.

These examples further demonstrate that the participants express their fanship regularly, so much so that they try to take preventative action to not miss a game. When conflicting occasions arise, they are still looking for ways to at least experience portions of the game. With Nicole stating things like, “You know, it's just whatever happens. I mean, if Clemson's on, I don't care if I'm by myself or If I'm in the middle of the mall, I'll go ahead and watch it,” and Mike stating, “I'm tuning in, whether I'm by myself or with other people,” it is clear that watching their team play is important to them.

### **How do fans express rivalry?**

To answer the third research question, two main themes emerged: choosing a side and glory out of reflected failures (GORFing). Within this research question, rivalry appeared to have a process. The rivalry was first dictated through being forced to choose a side and then the expression of GORFing emerged.

**Choosing a side.** In every state that was examined, there were at least two major division one (D1) athletic programs in the state. For residents in those states, the decision of which team to follow came down to a dichotomous choice, regardless of how many teams were hosted in that

state. For example, in the state of Alabama, the choices came down to Auburn University or the University of Alabama. For the most part, residents excluded teams such as the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Troy University, despite the fact that these schools have D1 athletic programs. This dichotomous culture emerged in every state examined, except Arkansas, where the choice excluded the other major team, Arkansas State University.

Nearly every participant talked about this dichotomous choice without being prompted to talk about it. John said, “We lived in North Mississippi and... you either were Ole Miss or Mississippi State... You know when I was a kid, it was pretty much that way, Mississippi State or Ole Miss.” In Mississippi, you had to choose either Ole Miss or Mississippi state. Isabel reflected on this idea by describing the individuals that she is normally around, and said, “95% of people who I am around daily, they’re either Ole Miss or Mississippi State.” The people that she is around at work, or sees in her daily routines, are either fans of one of those two teams.

In Kentucky, the same occasion occurred. The choices of which team to follow came down to either the University of Kentucky or the University of Louisville. In reference to this dichotomy, Juliet said, “Everybody in Kentucky has to pick a side, just have to.” It seems as if it is a “rite of passage” for everyone that lives in the state. Ultimately, these choices are dictated by the culture of the state because each of the two schools host a rivalry between them. The same dichotomous choice emerged in Alabama, where the choice is between Auburn University and the University of Alabama. Jane said, “If you if you live in Alabama, you either gotta go for Alabama, or you gotta go for Auburn.” She explained that the choice you make is brought up when you meet someone for the first time. She further explained, “And when you first meet somebody and you're like talking to them and stuff in Alabama, one of the first things you say is, ‘War Eagle or Roll Tide?’” The reflection of which team an individual follows is used in a

manner of how to get to know a person in Alabama, which relates back to the earlier theme that emerged, a part of who I am.

The choice of which team to follow is typically made in one of two different moments. The first moment occurs for those who are from that state, where the choice is either influenced or made while an adolescent. In South Carolina, this comes through different events that occur in grade school. Nathaniel provided an example of these types of events:

Every year we would have a Clemson/Carolina day or whatever. Every kid in school wears, you know, a Clemson or Carolina shirt to school... They [the school] would have a can food drive every year, and you had to donate in one team's name. Whichever team got the most, they did something in, like, the school hallway to celebrate Clemson or Carolina and stuff like that. So, it's super prevalent.

These choices were forced upon the kids at an early age, to choose one side or another. When asked if kids were allowed to choose a different school within the state, he explained that it had to either be Clemson or South Carolina. This further supported the dichotomous culture that emerged through these discussions. Jeb further explained, “When I was growing up, you have to make a decision, man. Are you a Tiger or are you a Gamecock? That's just how it goes in that state, man. You're one or the other.” These decisions are not encouraged by either team, rather, the culture within the state fosters the need to choose between the two.

The second moment for choosing which team to follow occurs for those who move to the state later in life. Even though individuals may have no previous ties to the state they are moving to, they too are expected to choose a side. Nicole explained this moment for those who move to South Carolina, “When people move here from out of state, essentially, you're told you have to take sides... We don't care where you went to school. This is South Carolina. You have to pick.” If you're new to the state, there is an expectation that you should follow one of the two prominent teams in that state. It does not matter if you already had a team that you followed, or if you attended a different university, you have to choose. Once that decision is made, you stick to

that choice. Nicole recollected on a specific time that a co-worker moved in from a different state, and the staff made her choose a side. She explained that her co-worker said, “I've been asked who I pull for [in reference to sides]. And when I say Penn State, the answer is, no, that doesn't count, Clemson or Carolina?” This answer provided further clarity into how the culture of these states facilitate a dichotomous choice between sides, regardless if you are an adolescent or if you are an adult who moved to the area and may have already followed a different team.

**Glory out of reflected failures (GORFing).** Once individuals go through the dichotomous choice of which team to follow, a deep sense of rivalry is established. The two teams are constantly competing against one another, whether it is through sports, academics, or even canned food drives in elementary school. Through these competitions, an expression of GORFing emerges, where each side wants the other side to fail. When the other side fails, even when it is against someone else, fans receive pleasure out of the rivals demise. Frank expressed this in reference to Louisville, “I want them to suffer. So, it's probably morbid in the sense, but I know I'm not alone on that. But I just don't want any success for them in their program.” His expression of rivalry, through GORFing, is so extreme that he would like to see Louisville fail in every aspect. However, this isn't unique to Kentucky fans. Jimmy, in reference to Kentucky, said, “I mean, if they lose the Arkansas or South Carolina, I'll just laugh.” Jimmy finds it humorous when Kentucky loses to another opponent, and even says that, “Oh yeah, that's always a good day [when Kentucky loses].” His mood, and even how his day goes, is positively impacted whenever his rival loses.

Much like the choosing of sides, GORFing is not unique to just one of these states. When Jeb was asked about Clemson, he responded with, “Hell yeah, if they would go zero and 12, that would make me happy.” Much like Frank, Jeb wants zero success for Clemson. Clemson's

failures bring happiness and joy to him. Francesca expressed a similar notion when she was asked who she wanted to win the 2019 College Football National Championship. She said, “LSU [Louisiana State University] all the way! I hate Clemson.” Her favorite team’s rival was competing for a national title, and she mentioned that she would have rooted for anyone who was playing against Clemson, it just happened to be Louisiana State University. In college sports, the national championship is the highest team accomplishment, and she expressed strong support to any opposition that would prevent Clemson from obtaining that. Nathaniel expressed this same general idea when referencing USC. In response to how it makes him feel to see them lose, he said, “Happy if you want a one-word answer... it's just kind of a funny thing... It just gives less credence to any kind of trash talk you're gonna hear.” The trash talk that he is referring to is the banter that occurs between the two teams each year leading up to their rival match up.

In Mississippi, an interesting dynamic occurred. Participants from both teams expressed similar GORFing sentiments as every other state, where they received some type of pleasure when their rival loses. In reference to Ole Miss losing, Randy said, “We love it...we don't feel sorry for Ole Miss if they lose to Alabama, Arkansas, or you know anybody else like that... We just have a big grin on our face.” In reference to Mississippi State losing, Samuel said, “It's more funny to me. You know, the less they win, the more angry they get, and their message boards are hilarious.” Samuel likes when MSU loses because he finds humor and enjoyment in the way in which MSU fans talk on social media. John expressed something similar, “When rivals lose, I almost get the same satisfaction as if we won a game.” Even though both fanbases expressed GORFing behaviors about each other, it seemed as if their expectations within that rivalry were different. For example, Randy explained the rivalry as such:

You know, some people think that Mississippi State is University of Mississippi, and that's not true. But that is our big, big, big rivalry every year. And as long as we win that

game every year, the heck with the rest of the season, you know? So that's the most important game of the year.

For Randy, winning the game against Ole Miss is extremely important, so much so that the rest of the season really doesn't matter, as long as they beat Ole Miss. This helps illustrate the importance that rivalry plays in his allegiance. To further explain this unique dynamic, Samuel said this in reference to MSU, "They're [MSU] obsessed with being the best in the state. We're obsessed with being the best in the nation." He went on further to say, "If you told me I could go 11 and one and make the SEC championship game, and potentially college football playoffs, but I have to lose the State every year. I'll take it." That is the complete opposite of what Randy said. Randy explained that he would rather lose every game, as long as they beat Ole Miss. Samuel further supported that idea by saying, "If you told a MSU fan that, they'd rather go one and 11... that's the difference in the schools." Although the dichotomous choice, as well as GORFing, exists within the state of Mississippi, it seems as if the two fanbases differ in goals and expectations.

The expression of rivalry extends past the playing field and infiltrates the family life and academics of their rival school. In multiple instances, participants expressed a strong negative sentiment toward the possibility of one of their children deciding to attend their rival's school. For example, Francesca stated that, "If they want to go to Clemson, they can pay themselves." Her GORFing expression toward Clemson is strong enough that she would choose to not help monetarily support one of her children through school if they decided to go to her rival's school. This helps illustrate how powerful GORFing can be, and how influential these behaviors can be. Samuel expressed the same attitude about his children. He said, "I told my kids, like, I will not pay for your college if you go to Mississippi State." Not only will he not financially support them to attend that school, he already told them that. Ultimately, that could shape the decisions

that his children make when considering what schools to attend, as well as what career field they may want to enter. These influences help show the power and impact that these allegiances may have on individuals.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PART II METHOD

Part II utilized a quantitative methodology by employing a survey as the research instrument. Surveys have been used to empirically investigate sports fandom and fanship effectively in the past (e.g., Billings & Rauhley, 2013; van Driel, Gantz, & Lewis, 2019), including previous dissertations (e.g., Abdallah, 2020; Guo, 2020). Thus, survey methodology was presented as an effective and appropriate way to investigate motivations for fanship and fandom.

### Sample

The sample included 411 U.S. legal aged adults that live in the following states; Alabama ( $n = 87$ , 21.168%), Arkansas ( $n = 73$ , 17.762%), Kentucky ( $n = 88$ , 21.411%), Mississippi ( $n = 80$ , 19.465%), and South Carolina ( $n = 83$ , 20.195%). States in the Southeast were only considered for this dissertation as there are a large concentration of college fans in the Southeast (Irwin & Quealy, 2014).

Participants were first obtained through Cloud Research ( $n = 92$ ; Litman, Robinson, & Abberbock, 2017). Efficient and timely data collection presented as a problem through Cloud Research, thus a Qualtrics panel was established to collect the remainder of the sample ( $n = 319$ ). The total sample included 133 males (32.360%), 278 females (67.640%), with no individuals listing any other gender. The sample included two (0.487%) Asian, 49 (11.922%) Black or African American, 354 (86.131%) White, and six (1.460%) individuals that identified their race as other. Income levels varied, as 35 (8.516%) identified their yearly household income as less than \$10,000, 189 (45.985%) as \$10,000 to \$49,000, 136 (33.090%) as \$50,000 to \$99,999, 41

(9.976%) as \$100,000 to \$149,000, and 10 (2.433%) as more than \$150,000. Lastly, formal education varied amongst participants, as seven (1.703%) identified their highest level of completed education as less than a high school diploma, 81 (19.708%) as high school degree or equivalent, 114 (27.737%) as some college with no degree, 54 (13.139%) as Associates degree, 99 (24.088%) as Bachelor degree, 44 (10.706%) as Master degree, seven (1.703%) as professional degree, and five (1.217%) as Doctoral degree. Ages ranged from 18 to 84 ( $M = 49.932$ ,  $SD = 16.263$ ). The qualifier of the survey was that the respondents were at least a fan of college team within their state's borders. It is important to note that given the sample was recruited through two separate avenues, the only differences between the two were a slight increase in age for Qualtrics ( $M = 52.879$ ), and formal educational backgrounds were slightly different between the two. Age and education were the only two demographic differences between the Qualtrics and Cloud Research.

### **Instrumentation**

**Proximity.** The primary variable for this dissertation was the proximity (in miles) to an individual's favorite college team from where the individual resided. The individuals reported the zip code that they reside in on the survey. Distances were then calculated from the individuals' zip code of residence to the zip code of their favorite college team's school. Travel distance was used as it is the distance in which an individual would have to travel to attend a live home sporting event.

**Demographics.** Demographics were gender, race, household income, education level, employment status, marital status, presence of children, if they attended or graduated from their favorite collegiate team's school, if someone in their family attended the college school that they

are a fan of, if someone in their family was a fan of their favorite collegiate team before they were, and the city/state/zip code in which they reside.

**Team and fan identification.** Team identification was operationalized as the level of identification that an individual has with a collegiate sports team. This was measured by using the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.9225$ ) for the individuals' favorite college team. Cronbach's alpha scores that range from 0.70 to 0.79 are considered to be acceptable, 0.80 to 0.89 are considered to be good, and above 0.90 are considered to be excellent (George & Mallery, 2003). The SSIS is a seven-item, five-point Likert additive scale ranging from seven to 35 ( $M = 23.937$ ,  $SD = 7.119$ ). The higher the response, the stronger the participant's team identification. Items include statements such as, "*how important to you is it that your favorite college team wins*" and, "*how important is being a fan of your favorite college team to you?*"

Fan identification was operationalized as the level of identification that an individual has with other fans of the same college sports team. This was measured by using an adapted scale from Luhtanen and Crocker (2002) that Reysen and Branscombe (2010) used to measure fan identification (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.7476$ ). It is a four-item, five-point Likert scale ranging from four to 20 ( $M = 10.265$ ,  $SD = 3.756$ ). The higher the response, the stronger the participant's fan identification. Items include statements such as, "*the fan group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am*" and, "*in general, belonging to a fan group is an important part of my self-image.*"

**Motivations.** Motivations for fanship and fandom were derived from Part I of this dissertation. Each motivation was implemented as a single item, using a five-point Likert scale

ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The higher the response, the more agreement they have with the statement. The motivation statements are as follows:

*The closer you live to a team, the bigger fan you are. (M = 2.956, SD = 1.295)*

*I enjoy watching my favorite college team play MORE when I am with other people who are fans of the same team. (M = 3.698, SD = 1.114)*

*I make every effort to watch my team play. (M = 3.788, SD = 1.184)*

*I like to follow current, former, or future players on social media. (M = 2.793, SD = 1.357)*

*I like to follow current, former, or future coaches and/or staff members on social media. (M = 2.655, SD = 1.330)*

*Not having a major league professional sports team in my state makes my fandom for my favorite college team stronger. (M = 3.341, SD = 1.248)*

*In my state, there is an 'unwritten' rule that citizens must be a fan of one the two major schools in the state (e.g., Alabama or Auburn, Clemson or South Carolina, etc.). (M = 3.350, SD = 1.345)*

*Typically, I receive enjoyment when my favorite team's rival loses a game. (M = 3.304, SD = 1.258)*

*College rivalry is important in my state. (M = 4.139, SD = 0.979)*

*I had a positive experience that drew me closer to my favorite college team. (M = 3.289, SD = 1.135)*

*Positive experiences made my fandom for my favorite college team stronger. (M = 3.364, SD = 1.099)*

*I am more likely to surround myself with fans of my favorite college team. (M = 3.416, SD = 1.126)*

*I feel connected to other fans of my favorite college team, even if I have not met them before. (M = 3.484, SD = 1.105)*

*The college team that my family (or someone in my family) followed had a positive influence on the origination of my favorite college team fandom. (M = 3.418, SD = 1.183)*

**State pride.** State pride was operationalized as the level of pride that an individual possesses for the state in which they reside. The variable was developed from an adapted version of Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) patriotism scale to fit state pride rather than national pride (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). The measure was a 10-item, five-point Likert additive scale ranging from 10 to 50 ( $M = 39.450$ ,  $SD = 7.824$ ). In their scale, certain items state "*I am proud to be an American*" and "*I love my country.*" These scale items were adjusted to read "*I am proud to be from my state*" or "*I love my state*" In their nationalism scale, an item reads "*generally, the more influence America has on other nations, the better off they are.*" This was adjusted to read, "*generally, the more influence my state has on other states, the better off they are.*" These adjustments were made to get a measurement of the pride and superiority one feels about their state. The higher the response, the more state pride an individual possesses.

**Basking in reflected glory.** BIRGing was operationalized as the level of association one portrays after their preferred collegiate team has success. This was measured using the Kwon, Trail, and Lee's (2008; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.9493$ ) adapted three-item, five-point BIRGing additive scale ranging from three to 15 ( $M = 9.170$ ,  $SD = 3.802$ ). The higher the response, the more BIRGing behaviors are apparent. Items include statements such as, "*I would like to let others*

*know about my association with my favorite college team” and, “I would like to publicize my connection with my favorite college team.”*

**Rivalry perception.** Rivalry perception was operationalized as the mental perception one has of their preferred collegiate team’s rival. This was measured by using the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception scale (SRFPS; Havard et al., 2013; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.8304$ ). The scale was a 12-item additive scale that uses a five-point Likert response ranging from 10 to 60 ( $M = 35.898$ ,  $SD = 8.874$ ). Items include statements such as, *“the academic prestige of my favorite team’s rival is poor”* and *“fans of my favored team’s rival do not show respect for others.”* The higher the response, the poorer the participant’s perception of their rival.

**Glory out of reflected failures.** GORFing was operationalized as the level of enjoyment that an individual receives when their rival team has failures. This variable was measured using Billings, Qiao, Brown, and Devlin’s (2016) GORFing scale (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.8202$ ). This measurement was a six-item, five-point Likert response additive scale ranging from six to 30 ( $M = 13.920$ ,  $SD = 5.528$ ). The higher the response, the more GORFing behaviors are apparent. Items include statements such as, *“do you feel happy if your rival is defeated by another opponent”* and, *“do you feel pride if your rival is defeated by another opponent?”*

**Interactions.** Physical interaction was operationalized as any physical interaction that an individual has had with any associated member of a team. This included players, coaches, and staff. This was measured by asking participants if they have ever had any physical interactions with a player, coach, or staff member of their favored collegiate team. 143 (34.793%) of respondents had physical interactions while 268 (65.207%) did not.

**Team Name.** The final variable was the actual team that they are a fan of, and if it contains the state’s name in it. This was indicated in the survey by simply asking the respondents

what their favored collegiate team is. After the data was collected, the team names were recoded into a separate column that indicated if the team's name had the state's name in it. 297 (72.263%) of respondents were a fan of a team that contains the state's name, while 114 (27.737%) were fans of teams that did not contain the state's name.

**Administration**

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, data was collected via an online survey built using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The survey was disseminated using Amazon Cloud Research and a Qualtrics panel. The choice to use these services, rather than a student sample, was that the results from a student sample would not answer the desired questions. Specifically, the results likely indicate that they are a fan of the University of Alabama because that is where they attend school. It is possible that some other motivations would emerge, but the results would be clouded by the bias of their attendance.

Following Part I, a pre-test for Part II was conducted by disseminating the survey to students in an introductory level media class. The goal of the pretest was to check basic reliability of the scales used in the survey as well as determine the overall average length of completion. As mentioned earlier, the results of a college sample would likely be bias, however the sample is diverse enough to pretest the survey. The pretest data, nor reliability data, was not used in the final sample for analysis. This pretest was done to save time and resources.

**Analysis Plan for Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Research Question	Variables	Statistical Test
RQ1: Why do fans pledge allegiance to a particular team?		Themes derived from interviews.

<b>RQ2:</b> How do fans express their fandom and fanship?		Themes derived from interviews.
<b>RQ3:</b> How do fans express rivalry?		Themes derived from interviews.
<b>RQ4a:</b> Does proximity to an individual's favorite college team shape the motivations derived from part I?	IV: Proximity DV: Motivations	Regression
<b>RQ4b:</b> Do motivations derived from Part I alter identity levels with a team?	IV: Motivations DV: Team Identification DV: Fan Identification	Regression
<b>RQ4c:</b> What demographics (e.g., race, gender, age) beyond proximity influence motivations derived from Part I?	IV: Demographics DV: Motivations	ANOVA, Regression, T-Test
<b>RQ5:</b> How does proximity alter levels of state pride?	IV: Proximity DV: State Pride	Regression
<b>RQ6:</b> How does proximity influence the amount individuals BIRG?	IV: Proximity DV: BIRGing	Regression

<b>RQ7:</b> How does proximity influence the levels in which fans receive pleasure through their rival's demise?	IV: Proximity DV: GORFing	Regression
<b>H1:</b> Proximity will positively predict team identification.	IV: Proximity DV: Team Identification	Regression
<b>H2:</b> Proximity will positively predict fan identification.	IV: Proximity DV: Fan Identification	Regression
<b>H3:</b> Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively predict team identification.	IV: Physical Interaction DV: Team Identification	T-Test
<b>H4:</b> Physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively predict fan identification.	IV: Physical Interaction DV: Fan Identification	T-Test
<b>H5:</b> Individuals that are a fan of a team that has the state name in it (e.g., The University of Alabama, The University of Kentucky) are	IV: Team Name DV: State Pride	T-Test

more likely to have higher levels of state pride than fans of teams without the name (e.g., Auburn University, The University of Louisville).		
<b>H6:</b> Team identification will positively predict BIRGing.	IV: Team Identification DV: BIRGing	T-Test
<b>H7:</b> Fan identification will positively predict BIRGing.	IV: Fan Identification DV: BIRGing	T-Test
<b>H8:</b> Perceived rivalry will positively predict the likelihood of GORFing.	IV: SRFPS DV: GORFing	T-Test

## CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS FOR PART II

This chapter provides the results from Part II of this dissertation as well as examines each research question and hypotheses. Throughout the chapter, t-tests, ANOVAs, and regressions are used to provide quantitative analyses for each research question and hypothesis. For each section, the research question or hypothesis is restated first to provide consistent clarity.

In order to further understand the contributing factors for fan motivation, an exploratory four factor analysis was performed. Factor one identified the contributing factors between fans and their importance of experiencing games together. Factor two identified contributing factors of being connected to a team, to include not missing a game. Factor three identified the contributing factors of rivalry. Factor four identified to contributing factors of culture and norms. Factors one and two resulted in reliable measures, while three and four did not. Variance and reliability by each factor is presented in Table 3, and loading factor values are presented in Table 4.

*Table 3: Variance and reliability explained by each factor*

Factor	Variance	Percent	Cumulative percent	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Factor 1	2.667	19.068	19.068	0.835
Factor 2	2.660	19.002	38.070	0.834
Factor 3	1.832	13.084	51.154	0.637
Factor 4	1.656	11.830	62.985	0.657

Table 4: Rotated factor loading of motivations

Motivations	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Communality Estimates
Closer to a team	0.078	0.194	-0.146	<b>0.795</b>	0.696
Watching with others	0.238	0.093	0.297	<b>0.491</b>	0.394
Not missing a game	<b>0.391</b>	<b>0.583</b>	0.217	0.021	0.540
Following players on social media	0.203	<b>0.863</b>	0.014	0.183	0.820
Following coaches on social media	0.165	<b>0.837</b>	-0.022	0.220	0.777
Not having a professional team	0.162	0.118	<b>0.368</b>	<b>0.584</b>	0.517
Unwritten rule	0.145	-0.058	<b>0.688</b>	<b>0.364</b>	0.630
Enjoyment through rival loss	-0.034	<b>0.541</b>	<b>0.591</b>	-0.002	0.643
In-state rivalry	0.252	0.101	<b>0.743</b>	0.002	0.626
Positive experience drew them closer	<b>0.840</b>	0.165	0.104	0.149	0.765
Positive experience made fandom stronger	<b>0.844</b>	0.154	0.118	0.156	0.775
Surround with other fans	<b>0.602</b>	<b>0.446</b>	0.121	0.141	0.596
Connected with other fans	<b>0.517</b>	<b>0.498</b>	0.262	0.100	0.593
Family influence	<b>0.476</b>	0.106	0.240	<b>0.389</b>	0.446

Note: Bold text indicates loading value larger than 0.300.

Research Question 4a queried whether proximity to an individual’s favorite college team shapes Part I motivations. To answer this question, regression analyses were performed for each motivation. The only significant results regarded proximity to an individual’s favorite college team, as it was a strong negative predictor for feeling a connection to other fans, even if they do not know them personally,  $b = -0.001$ ,  $t(409) = -2.72$ ,  $p = 0.007$ . This single finding serves as the sole answer to RQ4. Results for each motivation are presented in Table 5.

*Table 5: Regression table for proximity as a predictor for individual motivations*

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	DF	t	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> adj.	p
Closer to a team	-0.001	0.001	1	-1.490	0.005	0.003	0.136
Watching with others	-0.000	0.001	1	-0.58	0.001	-0.002	0.561
Not missing a game	-0.001	0.001	1	-1.65	0.007	0.004	0.100
Following players on social media	-0.001	0.001	1	-1.60	0.006	0.004	0.111
Following coaches on social media	-0.002	0.001	1	-1.89	0.009	0.006	0.060
Not having a professional team	-0.001	0.001	1	-0.71	0.001	-0.001	0.481
Unwritten rule	0.000	0.001	1	0.44	0.000	-0.002	0.661
Enjoyment through rival loss	0.000	0.001	1	0.12	0.000	-0.002	0.910
In-state rivalry	-0.000	0.001	1	-0.24	0.000	-0.002	0.809
Positive experience drew them closer	-0.001	0.001	1	-1.92	0.009	0.007	0.055
Positive experience made fandom stronger	-0.001	0.001	1	-1.53	0.006	0.003	0.127

Surround with other fans	-0.000	0.001	1	-0.65	0.001	-0.001	0.515
Connected with other fans	-0.002	0.001	1	-2.72	0.018	0.015	0.007
							*
Family influence	-0.000	0.001	1	-0.43	0.000	-0.002	0.665

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\*significance at  $p < 0.05$ \*

Research Question 4b queried whether Part I motivations altered identity levels with a team. To answer this question, individual linear regression analyses were performed for each motivation and identity, as well as linear regression with the two reliable factors and identities. A forward stepwise regression model was developed by entering motivations less than 0.25, and removing mediations more than 0.10, until the stopping rule was met to determine the most significant combination of contributing motivations for both identities. Results for team identification are presented in Table 6, 7, and 8. Results for fan identification are presented in Table 9, 10, and 11.

*Table 6: Regression table for individual motivations as a predictor of team identification*

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	DF	T	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> adj.	p
Closer to a team	0.014	0.009	1	1.55	0.006	0.003	0.123
Watching with others	0.032	0.008	1	4.19	0.041	0.039	< 0.001*
Not missing a game	0.115	0.006	1	19.27	0.476	0.475	< 0.001*
Following players on social media	0.086	0.008	1	10.10	0.200	0.198	< 0.001*
Following coaches on social media	0.073	0.008	1	8.64	0.154	0.152	< 0.001*
Not having a professional team	0.040	0.008	1	4.71	0.052	0.050	< 0.001*

Unwritten rule	0.037	0.009	1	4.01	0.038	0.036	< 0.001*
Enjoyment through rival loss	0.066	0.008	1	8.19	0.141	0.139	< 0.001*
In-state rivalry	0.042	0.006	1	6.46	0.093	0.090	< 0.001*
Positive experience drew them closer	0.068	0.007	1	9.46	0.180	0.178	< 0.001*
Positive experience made fandom stronger	0.066	0.007	1	9.56	0.183	0.181	< 0.001*
Surround with other fans	0.070	0.007	1	9.92	0.194	0.192	< 0.001*
Connected with other fans	0.076	0.007	1	11.41	0.241	0.240	< 0.001*
Family influence	0.041	0.008	1	5.10	0.060	0.057	< 0.001*

\*significance at  $p < 0.050$ \*

Table 7: Stepwise regression model of motivations as a predictor of team identification

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	$p$	$r^2$	$r^2$ adj.
Model	7	11249.201	1607.030	67.963	<0.001*	0.541	0.533
Error	403	9529.154	23.650				
Total	410	20778.355					

  

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	t	$p$
Intercept	4.026	1.262	3.191	0.002*
Closer to a team	-0.562	0.195	-2.880	0.004*
Not missing a game	3.175	0.251	12.626	<0.001*
Following coaches on social media	0.354	0.217	1.632	0.103
Enjoyment through rival loss	0.500	0.220	2.274	0.024*

In-state rivalry	0.425	0.272	1.567	0.118
Positive experiences drew them closer	0.844	0.250	3.369	0.001*
Connected with other fans	0.669	0.280	2.387	0.017*

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\*significance at  $p < 0.050$ \*

*Table 8: Regression table for motivational factors as a predictor of team identification*

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	DF	T	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> adj.	p
Factor 1	5.175	0.326	1	15.890	0.382	0.380	< 0.001*
Factor 2	4.955	0.299	1	16.55	0.401	0.400	< 0.001*

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\*significance at  $p < 0.050$ \*

*Table 9: Regression table for individual motivations as a predictor of fan identification*

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	DF	T	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> adj.	p
Closer to a team	0.071	0.017	1	4.27	0.043	0.040	< 0.001*
Watching with others	0.043	0.015	1	3.00	0.021	0.020	0.003*
Not missing a game	0.134	0.014	1	9.50	0.181	0.179	< 0.001*
Following players on social media	0.162	0.016	1	10.17	0.202	0.200	< 0.001*
Following coaches on social media	0.154	0.016	1	9.73	0.188	0.186	< 0.001*
Not having a professional team	0.072	0.016	1	4.52	0.048	0.045	< 0.001*
Unwritten rule	0.028	0.018	1	1.56	0.006	0.003	0.119
Enjoyment through rival loss	0.095	0.016	1	5.97	0.080	0.079	< 0.001*

In-state rivalry	0.033	0.013	1	2.56	0.016	0.013	0.011*
Positive experience drew them closer	0.103	0.014	1	7.36	0.117	0.115	< 0.001*
Positive experience made fandom stronger	0.102	0.014	1	7.50	0.121	0.119	< 0.001*
Surround with other fans	0.141	0.013	1	10.76	0.221	0.219	< 0.001*
Connected with other fans	0.125	0.013	1	9.50	0.181	0.179	< 0.001*
Family influence	0.075	0.015	1	4.96	0.057	0.054	< 0.001*

\*significance at  $p < 0.05$ \*

Table 10: Stepwise regression model of motivations as a predictor of fan identification

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	$p$	$r^2$	$r^2$ adj.
Model	8	1949.805	243.762	25.559	<0.001*	0.337	0.324
Error	402	3833.450	9.536				
Total	410	5783.256					

  

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	t	$p$
Intercept	3.597	0.829	4.340	<0.001*
Watching with others	-0.192	0.148	-1.297	0.195
Not missing a game	0.500	0.163	3.076	0.002*
Following coaches on social media	0.574	0.136	4.231	<0.001*
Enjoyment through rival loss	0.250	0.140	1.783	0.075
In-state rivalry	-0.376	0.174	-2.166	0.031*

Positive experiences made fandom stronger	0.290	0.172	1.680	0.094
Surround with other fans	0.795	0.184	4.325	<0.001*
Connected with other fans	0.299	0.194	1.543	0.124

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\*significance at  $p < 0.050$ \*

*Table 11: Regression table for motivational factors as a predictor of fan identification*

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	DF	T	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> adj.	p
Factor 1	2.259	0.188	1	12.030	0.261	0.259	< 0.001*
Factor 2	2.303	0.169	1	13.590	0.311	0.309	< 0.001*

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\*significance at  $p < 0.050$ \*

Every Part I motivation, except for agreement that the closer you live to a team the bigger fan you are, positively altered team identification levels, albeit weak. Similarly, every Part I motivation, except for agreement that there is an unwritten rule that individuals must be a fan of one of the major college teams, positively altered fan identification levels, although weak. The stepwise regression models serve to identify the interaction of motivations that result in both team and fan identification. The linear regression analyses with each factor and identity identified that the combination of motivations positively influenced both identities in a weak to moderate level. These results serve to answer RQ4b.

Research Question 4c queries which demographics, other than proximity, influence Part I motivations. To answer this question, regression analyses, t-tests, and ANOVAs were performed for each motivation and demographic. Results are presented together by demographic.

Predictably, individuals that indicated they graduated from their favorite team's school ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $n = 77$ ) reported higher levels of importance of being close to a team for their fandom

than individuals that did not graduate from their favorite team ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $n = 334$ ),  $t(409) = 2.49$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.015$ ,  $p = 0.013$ .

Age was a significant negative predictor for the importance of watching their team play with others as a motivation for fandom,  $b = -0.010$ ,  $t(409) = -3.04$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for importance of following players on social media for their fandom,  $b = -0.015$ ,  $t(409) = -3.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for importance of following coaches on social media for their fandom,  $b = -0.011$ ,  $t(409) = -3.78$ ,  $p = 0.005$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for how much not having a professional team in their state positively influenced their allegiance to their favorite college team,  $b = -0.010$ ,  $t(409) = -2.68$ ,  $p = 0.008$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for agreement that there is an unwritten rule in each state that citizens must be a fan of one of the two main college teams,  $b = -0.010$ ,  $t(409) = -2.51$ ,  $p = 0.013$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for the amount of pleasure an individual receives when their rival loses,  $b = -0.012$ ,  $t(409) = -3.09$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for the agreement that positive experiences drew individuals closer to a team,  $b = -0.012$ ,  $t(409) = -3.50$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for the agreement that positive experiences made their fandom for their favorite college team stronger,  $b = -0.009$ ,  $t(409) = -2.69$ ,  $p = 0.007$ . Age was a strong negative predictor for agreement that someone in their family positively influenced their fandom for their college team,  $b = -0.013$ ,  $t(409) = -3.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . These results indicate that as an individual gets older, these motivations are less prevalent.

Females reported higher importance for watching with others ( $M = 3.788$ ,  $n = 278$ ) than males ( $M = 3.511$ ,  $n = 133$ ) when it came to fandom,  $t(409) = -2.37$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.014$ ,  $p = 0.018$ .

Race was a determining factor in importance of not missing a game for their fandom. Black/African American respondents ( $M = 4.000$ ,  $n = 49$ ) reported higher importance than white

( $M = 3.788$ ,  $n = 354$ ), Asian ( $M = 3.000$ ,  $n = 2$ ) and individuals who listed their race as other ( $M = 2.333$ ,  $n = 6$ ),  $F(3, 407) = 3.92$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.028$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.028$ ,  $p = 0.009$ .

Full-time employees indicated higher levels of importance to follow players on social media ( $M = 3.057$ ,  $n = 141$ ) for their fandom than all other employment statuses combined ( $M = 2.735$ ,  $n = 270$ ),  $F(7, 403) = 2.11$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.035$ ,  $p = 0.042$ .

Predictably, individuals who attended the school that they are a fan of reported higher levels of influence from not having a professional team in their state on their allegiance ( $M = 3.582$ ,  $n = 110$ ) than individuals who did not attend the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.252$ ,  $n = 301$ ),  $t(409) = 2.38$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.014$ ,  $p = 0.018$ . Individuals who attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.818$ ,  $n = 110$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences drew them closer to the team than individuals who did not attend the school ( $M = 3.233$ ,  $n = 301$ ),  $t(409) = 4.75$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.052$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Individuals who attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.955$ ,  $n = 110$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences made their fandom for their college team stronger than individuals who did not attend the school ( $M = 3.422$ ,  $n = 301$ ),  $t(409) = 4.45$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.046$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Individuals who attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.682$ ,  $n = 110$ ) reported higher agreement that they feel connected to other fans of the same team, even if they do not know the other fans personally, than individuals who did not attend the school ( $M = 3.412$ ,  $n = 301$ ),  $t(409) = 2.29$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.012$ ,  $p = 0.014$ .

Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan before them ( $M = 3.515$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher agreement that there is an unwritten rule in each state that citizens must be a fan of one of the two main college teams than individuals who did not have a family member who was a fan before them ( $M = 3.145$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure ( $M = 2.645$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 7.81$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.037$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Individuals who reported that someone in their

family was a fan before they were ( $M = 3.904$ ,  $n = 270$ ) indicated higher importance of watching their team play with others than those who didn't report that someone in their family was a fan ( $M = 3.364$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if someone in their family was a fan ( $M = 3.097$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 15.04$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.069$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan of the team that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.481$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences drew them closer to the team than individuals who did not have a family member who was a fan ( $M = 3.345$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member was a fan ( $M = 2.742$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 6.17$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.029$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan of the team that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.641$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences made their fandom for their collegiate team stronger than individuals who did not have a family member that was a fan ( $M = 3.509$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member was a fan ( $M = 3.100$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 3.64$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.018$ ,  $p = 0.027$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan of the team that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.500$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher levels of wanting to surround themselves with other fans of their college team than individuals who did not have a family member that was a fan ( $M = 3.327$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member was a fan ( $M = 3.000$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 3.24$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.016$ ,  $p = 0.040$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan of the team that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.596$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher levels of feeling connected to other fans of the same team, even if they do not know the other fans personally, than individuals who did not have a family member that was a fan ( $M = 3.345$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member was a fan ( $M = 3.000$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 5.34$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.026$ ,  $p = 0.005$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family was a fan of the team that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.726$ ,  $n = 270$ ) reported higher

agreement that someone in their family positively influenced their fandom for their college team than individuals who did not have a family member that was a fan ( $M = 2.864$ ,  $n = 110$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member was a fan ( $M = 2.710$ ,  $n = 31$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 30.64$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.131$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Individuals who indicated that someone in their family attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.792$ ,  $n = 178$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences made their fandom for their college team stronger than individuals who did not have a family member attend the school ( $M = 3.377$ ,  $n = 212$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member attended ( $M = 3.524$ ,  $n = 21$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 7.11$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.034$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.640$ ,  $n = 178$ ) reported higher agreement that they feel connected to other fans of the same team, even if they do not know the other fans personally, than individuals who did not have a family member attend the school ( $M = 3.349$ ,  $n = 212$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member attended ( $M = 3.524$ ,  $n = 21$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 3.42$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.016$ ,  $p = 0.034$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.652$ ,  $n = 178$ ) reported higher agreement that positive experiences drew them closer to the team than individuals who did not have a family member attend the school ( $M = 3.198$ ,  $n = 212$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member attended ( $M = 3.095$ ,  $n = 21$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 8.80$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.041$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Individuals who indicated that someone in their family attended the school that they are a fan of ( $M = 3.689$ ,  $n = 178$ ) reported higher agreement that someone in their family positively influenced their fandom for their college team than individuals who did not have a family member attend the school ( $M = 3.208$ ,  $n = 212$ ) or those who were unsure if a family member attended ( $M = 3.333$ ,  $n = 21$ ),  $F(2, 408) = 8.03$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.038$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Individuals who have children ( $M = 3.410$ ,  $n = 261$ ) indicated more enjoyment when their rivals lose than individuals without children ( $M = 3.120$ ,  $n = 150$ ),  $t(409) = 2.26$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.012$ ,  $p = 0.024$ . Individuals who have children ( $M = 3.483$ ,  $n = 261$ ) reported lower agreement that positive experiences made their fandom for their collegiate team stronger than individuals without children ( $M = 3.707$ ,  $n = 150$ ),  $t(409) = -1.996$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.010$ ,  $p = 0.047$ .

Predictably, motivations were going to differ by demographic categories. While each demographic category had some influence on a motivation, age consistently played a role in almost every motivation. As an individual gets older, Part I motivations begin to become less relevant to the individual. Similarly, family dynamics were highly relevant. Having a family member who was already a fan, or a family member that attended the school that the individual was a fan of, influenced a large portion of the Part I motivations. The identification of these results serves to answer RQ4c.

Research Question 5 queries how proximity alters levels of state pride. To answer this question, a regression analysis was performed. An individual's proximity to their favorite college team does not alter levels of state pride,  $b = 0.001$ ,  $t(409) = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.832$ . This means that regardless of a fan's proximity to their favorite college team, state pride levels did not differ. This result serves to answer RQ5.

Research Question 6 questions how proximity may influence the amount individuals BIRG. To answer this question, a regression analysis was performed. An individual's proximity to their favorite college team does not influence the amount they BIRG,  $b = -0.001$ ,  $t(409) = -0.52$ ,  $p = 0.610$ . This means that regardless of a fan's proximity to their favorite college team, BIRGing levels did not differ. This result serves to answer RQ6.

Research Question 7 inquires about how proximity influences the levels in which fans receive pleasure through their rival's demise. To answer this question, a regression analysis was performed. An individual's proximity to their favorite college team does not influence the amount they receive pleasure through their rival's demise,  $b = -0.005$ ,  $t(409) = -1.48$ ,  $p = 0.140$ . This means that regardless of a fan's proximity to their favorite college team, GORFing levels did not differ. This result serves to answer RQ7.

Hypothesis 1 forecasts that proximity will positively predict team identification. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed. An individuals' proximity to their favorite college team did not positively predict team identification,  $b = -0.004$ ,  $t(409) = -0.87$ ,  $p = 0.390$ . This means that regardless of a fan's proximity to their favorite college team, team identification levels did not differ. H1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 queries that proximity will positively predict fan identification. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed. An individual's proximity to their favorite college team did not positively predict fan identification,  $b = -0.003$ ,  $t(409) = -1.01$ ,  $p = 0.310$ . This means that regardless of a fan's proximity to their favorite college team, fan identification levels did not differ. H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively predict team identification. To test this hypothesis, a t-test was conducted. Individuals that have had physical interactions ( $M = 26.231$ ,  $n = 143$ ) have higher levels of team identification than individuals that have not had physical interactions ( $M = 22.713$ ,  $n = 288$ ),  $t(409) = 4.90$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.056$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . H3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 posits that physical interactions with past, present, or future affiliates of a team will positively predict fan identification. To test this hypothesis, a t-test was conducted.

Individuals that have had physical interactions ( $M = 10.895$ ,  $n = 143$ ) have higher levels of fan identification than individuals that have not had physical interactions ( $M = 10.082$ ,  $n = 268$ ),  $t(409) = 2.10$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.011$ ,  $p = 0.036$ . H4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 suggests that individuals that are a fan of a team that has the state name in it (e.g., The University of Alabama, The University of Kentucky) are more likely to have higher levels of state pride than fans of teams without the name (e.g., Auburn University, The University of Louisville). To test this hypothesis, a t-test was conducted. Individuals who are a fan of a team that has the state's name in it ( $M = 39.993$ ,  $n = 297$ ) report higher levels of state pride than individuals that are a fan of a team that does not have the state's name in it ( $M = 38.035$ ,  $n = 114$ ),  $t(409) = -2.28$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.013$ ,  $p = 0.023$ . H5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6 posits that team identification will positively predict BIRGing. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed. Team identification significantly predicted positive BIRGing,  $b = 0.345$ ,  $t(409) = 17.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . H6 was supported.

Hypothesis 7 suggests that fan identification will positively predict BIRGing. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed. Fan identification significantly predicted positive BIRGing,  $b = 0.522$ ,  $t(409) = 12.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . H7 was supported.

Hypothesis 8 predicts that perceived rivalry will positively predict the likelihood of GORFing. To test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed. Perceived rivalry significantly predicted positive GORFing,  $b = 0.267$ ,  $t(409) = 9.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . H8 was supported.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the results from both Part I and Part II of this dissertation. Throughout the chapter, the core findings, theoretical contributions, applied contributions, limitations, direction for future research, and conclusion are presented.

### **Core Findings**

Given that there is limited research in the realm of the motivations individuals have for becoming fans of collegiate teams, there are a plethora of core findings to discuss. Part I of this dissertation identified many different reasons why fans pledge long-term allegiances to their preferred college team. Most of the time, it revolved around family. Family ties were constantly mentioned as to why individuals began to follow their preferred college teams. These could have been mentions of their parent already being a fan, or that they simply were born into a family that already supported one team or another. The power of family, and the allegiances they have, emerged as a strong reason why individuals began to follow their team. In some cases, it served as a pseudo-inheritance. Once an individual becomes a part of a family, they inherited allegiance a collegiate sports team. For example, when Isabela married her husband, she inherited his allegiance toward MSU. When she married into her husband's family, she inherited his interests, which included his allegiance for Mississippi State. Anecdotally, this same idea can be seen during baby showers, where onesies with a team on it are given as a gift from friends and family. Once a child is born into a family, they inherit the allegiance of their family and are expected to become a fan of that team. In Part II of this dissertation, these findings were further progressed to illustrate how having family ties with their allegiances made nearly every other predictor

stronger. This is congruent with Wann, Tucker, and Schrader's (1996) study that identified family as a reason why an individual would initially become a fan of their favorite sports team. Their study showed that a small percentage of their sample indicated family as a reason for why they became a fan of their team. However, when prompted, individuals may not list family as one of their top reasons why they became a fan. Yet, this dissertation investigated these originations more deeply, and family emerged as having a strong influence on fans' allegiances. This suggests that family ties have much more influence than initially suggested by Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996). Given that this dissertation examined collegiate fanship and fandom in a specific region, this also helps to extend Wann, Tucker, and Schrader's (1996) study to further explain how family, along with other motivations, influenced this specific population.

A prominent motivation identified in Part I indicated there was a significant moment in time that further solidified an individual's allegiance. These significant moments in time varied among experiences but were crucial in the development of the individual's fanship and fandom. For example, participants talked about a time when they went to a football game as a student prospect. She mentioned how electric the students were, and their raw vulgarity, and how that specific moment led her to buy-into being a Gamecock fan. Whereas Jimmy's experience came from witnessing Louisville having back-to-back success at the national level for their basketball and football programs. Although these two experiences were different, they shared the same level of significance for the both of them. In Part II, these positive experiences were further examined, which resulted in significant relationships that either initiated their fandom, or in some cases, made their fandom stronger. This is congruent with previous research that identified that experience and identification levels are related (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). However, this dissertation identified that there is typically a significant moment in time where a singular

experience greatly influenced identification levels and served a solidifying factor in fans' allegiances.

Part I of this dissertation identified the role that geographical proximity played in the origination of the individuals' allegiances. Given that the sample for this dissertation came from states that do not have professional teams, it is logical that their favorite college team would be a team close by. Many participants mentioned their close proximity to the team as an initial reason why they began to follow their favorite college team. However, after further examination in Part II, it seems as if geographical proximity stops at the origination level, meaning it is only a factor that initiates the fandom and fanship, but does not continue past that. Proximity was not a predictor for any of the other motivations, other than feeling a sense of connection to other fans. This finding is anecdotally logical, given that the closer an individual is to a team's physical location the more they feel connected to that team and their fans, which relates to the sense of connection motivation that was identified in Part I. If an individual is immersed within a community, they are likely to feel a sense of connection to them. The further they are from this community, the weaker that connection may seem. However, that is the only role proximity played. Although little has been researched in this area, Gantz (2012) identified that displaced fans would still gather in areas together to watch their team play which likely helps maintain their fanship and fandom, even though their geographical proximity to their team is far away.

Proximity was not a predictor of any other motivation, nor was it a predictor of fanship or fandom, however, proximity facilitated other motivations. For example, proximity facilitated the opportunity for individuals to have physical interactions with members of a team, which was shown to have a significant impact on fanship and fandom. Proximity also facilitated the opportunity for fans to physically attend games, where Jared explained that his father didn't want

him rooting for a team 1,000 miles away because he wouldn't have the opportunity to go see his team play. Even though proximity did not prove to have a direct significant relation to motivation, it still played a vital role in the establishment of fans' allegiances.

Every motivation from Part I was further examined in Part II to provide generalizability from the data. Through this examination, it is evident that these motivations played a role in myriad contexts. However, from a basic perspective, nearly every motivation averaged above a 3.0 of agreement indicating at least slight agreement. This rudimentary finding suggests that from an empirical standpoint, these motivations were further validated as significant motivations. Previous research has determined that 87% of Americans consider themselves sports fans (Menefee, 2020), alluding that motivations for sports fandom and fanship should be relevant to a majority of the population. The only motivations that averaged any slight disagreement (less than 3.0) were motivations related to social media. Individuals' importance of following members of the team on social media was not there, even for those who were not physically close to the team. This is not to suggest that sports and social media are not important, but rather that they do not have much influential power in reasons why individuals follow a team. One of the only significant findings from social media came when it was examined against an individual's employment status. Individuals that were employed full time gave larger importance to following these individuals on social media than every other employment status combined, possibly because when an individual works 40-plus hours a week, they do not have much free time to watch their team play. At a minimum, fans can check social media quickly to stay updated on what is going on with their team. This was reiterated in Part I when individuals mentioned that they would check social media updates on their team if they had to work, or had other obligations. These findings are also congruent with Nisar, Prabhaker, and Patil's (2018)

suggestion that fans use social media to remain connected to their team. This dissertation takes Nisar, Prabhaker, and Patil's (2018) findings further, as fully-employed individuals place more importance on using social media to follow their team than those in other employment statuses. Thus, different subsets of a population used and relied on social media differently. Given that the sample came from individuals who lived in the state that their favorite team is from, it is also possible that social media play a stronger role in displaced fans.

As one would predict, varying demographics would not only have different influences on why individuals became a fan of their team, but also how they behave as fans. Simply put, demographics place individuals into groups, and individuals behave differently as a group. A few demographics have already been discussed, but one of the most influential demographic predictors were age. Gantz and Lewis (2021) previously determined that sport fanship typically decreases over an individual's lifespan. This dissertation found similar results; however, it was found that nearly every other motivation decreased as individuals aged as well. As an individual got older, watching their team play with others, the importance of following members of their team on social media, the impact of not having a professional team in their state, that there is an unwritten rule that citizens must be a fan of one of the two big teams in their state, the amount the individual GORFs, the role that positive experiences played in their fandom, and the role family played in their fandom, all decreased. These motivations were less prevalent as an individual got older. This could possibly be because as an individual gets older it may be harder to recollect why they became a fan in the first place. In terms of social media importance, it is known that social media use is less amongst individuals who are older (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013). This helps explain why there is less importance to follow members of a team on social media as an individual gets older.

One of the findings from Part I indicated that individuals typically wanted to watch their team play with other people. When this notion was examined across demographics in Part II, it was found that women, more than men, emphasized more importance of watching with other people. Previous research indicates that some women use sports as a medium to connect with men (Whiteside & Hardin, 2011), which potentially helps to illustrate and provide reason for this finding. In their piece, they argue that traditional gender roles influence the way in which women consume sports. If women are charged with the domestic household work, then their leisure time to watch sports usually involves the traditional male role in a heterosexual relationship, or it is spent with other friends in a social outing.

In terms of demographics, a few unforeseen relationships emerged in the findings. First, race was a determining factor when examining the importance of not missing their team play. Black/African American participants indicated higher levels of importance when it came to not missing a game, than every other race. This finding is intriguing, as most sports research examine phenomena from a collective standpoint. However, Armstrong (2002) suggested that Black/African Americans consume sports differently than other races. This provides some clarity to this finding, as it seems as if the way in which sports fans watch their team play may be different depending on their racial identity. This suggests that, as scholars, we should not assume that the average sports fan consumes sports media the same and that future research should examine how race plays a role.

The second unforeseen finding from demographics came when the presence of a child or children had a relationship in how individual's GORF. Surprisingly, individuals who have children reported higher levels of GORFing behaviors than individuals who do not have children. Without a deeper investigation into this idea, it is hard to determine exactly why individuals with

children like to see their rivals lose more than individuals without children. It is possible that individuals with children like to experience sports with their kids, thus resulting in more investment with the team. In Part I, multiple respondents mentioned bonding with their children (or a parental figure) over sports. These emotional bonds with children through sports likely result in a more deeply vested fan as a parent or a child. As found in this dissertation, there is a positive relationship between GORFing levels and fanship levels. Thus, these bonds that lead to higher levels of fanship would likely result in higher levels of GORFing.

An understudied realm of sports communication research lies in the area of how physical interactions with members of a team influence levels of fanship and fandom. Much has been done on parasocial relationships, and their interactions online, but the physical interactions an individual may have been largely left out. It is understood that interactions with players and teams online increase fanship (Chung & Hwang, 2015) and make fans feel a sense of interpersonal connectedness to the athlete (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012), but physical in-person interactions and how they influence identity levels have largely been left out. Part I of this dissertation identified that when individuals had a chance to meet and interact with members of their preferred college team, those interactions left a lasting positive impact on their fandom. To further investigate this idea, Part II related those interactions with levels of fanship and fandom. As a result, these interactions were positively related to higher levels of both fanship and fandom. This indicates that being able to meet and talk with members of a team will likely increase an individual's fanship and their fandom, whether in a formal or coincidental setting. These interactions humanize the players and allows for the fan to see them as more than just a player for their favorite team. Although proximity did not play as large of a role as was predicted, it would be logical to assume that the closer an individual lives to a team the more

likely the individual would be to bump into a player or coach of their team. If someone lives near Clemson, the chances of them bumping into head football coach Dabo Swinney or star quarterback Trevor Lawrence are higher than if they lived in Red Hill, SC. The opportunity to bump into them exists everywhere, but chances are likely higher if they live near the areas in which these members reside. Even though there are no direct relationships with proximity and levels of fandom and fanhood, proximity may result in increased chances of meeting a member of their team, thus resulting in higher levels of fandom and fanhood.

Lastly, the concept of state pride is largely missing in communication literature. Concepts such as nationalism and patriotism, which involve pride for one's country, are regularly investigated concepts in sports communication literature (e.g., Billings, Brown, & Brown, 2013; Hayashi et al., 2016; Stankovic, 2004). State pride is a subset of nationalism and patriotism, given that nations (at least in the United States) are broken down by states. Anderson (1983) explained that nations are essentially imagined communities due to the idea that "members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). Thus, when citizens develop a national identity, they are envisioning connections with people they have never met. This idea still holds true at the state level, but given that states are geographically smaller than nations, there are more opportunities for citizens to know one another. In the United States, cultures can be vastly different amongst states. For example, the culture in Alabama is much different than the culture in California. So, at the state level, compared to the national level, citizens of each state have more opportunity to share culture, norms, and beliefs with fellow citizens of their state. This also provides more opportunities for state citizens to interact, get to know one another, and connect on a more intimate level. Granted, states are still very large in

population, thus, state pride is still based off an imagined community that Anderson (1983) argues. However, the magnitude of these imagined communities is likely less at the state level when compared to an entire nation. This leaves opportunity for the concept of state pride to be further developed in future research.

The newly introduced concept of state pride, which is the level of connection and pride that an individual has for the state they live in, was measured using an adapted patriotism scale from Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) to fit state pride rather than country pride. Part I found that, in many cases, state pride played a role in their fandom because of the unwritten rule that citizens had to be a fan of one of the two big schools in their state. This dichotomous dynamic resulted in claiming which team is the best in their state and the bragging rights that came along with them.

The most significant finding involving state pride came when state pride levels were examined across teams. When a team's name included the state name (e.g., the University of Alabama), those fans reported higher levels of state pride than individuals who were a fan of a team that did not contain the state's name (e.g., Auburn University). This is not to say that individuals who were fans of teams without the state's name lacked state pride, this only suggests that those who were fans of teams with the state's name in it have higher levels of state pride. One likely explanation comes from the individuals that do not have a direct tie to the school. Those individuals who have no direct tie to the team, and are proud of where they live, are likely to follow a team that is representative of the state that they live in. The same idea can be applied to those who attended the school that has the state's name in it. Those individuals are likely to be a proud graduate of that institution, and that institution is also a reflection of the state that they reside in.

A likely explanation for the state pride phenomenon also includes the idea the flagship university in each state contained the state's name in their title (Flagship Institutions and Tuition by State, 2021). For example, the flagship university in Kentucky is The University of Kentucky, and the flagship university in Arkansas is The University of Arkansas. The flagship title that each of these schools have likely influences the levels of state pride that their fans and students have, given that the school is representative of that whole state. Each of these schools also have higher attendance rates and are much larger than most of the schools in their state, leading to a much larger alumnus population and fanbase. The sheer number of fans likely also influences the levels of state pride the fans of these teams have. Due to the concept of state pride being new, especially the role that it plays in fanship and fandom, more research is needed to further unpack the relationship state pride plays in collegiate sports.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

The inclusion of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) proved to be a crucial element when investigating college fan allegiances in the South. To start, a key finding from Part I indicated that individuals sought a sense of belonging and connectedness. Part of their motivation to follow one team or another came from the idea that they were going to be a part of a community of fans that shared the same interests and ideals. This follows the first major process of social identity theory, where individuals socially categorize themselves into in-groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). These individuals are simply categorizing themselves into a social group of other fans that share a common interest in the team that they follow. This finding helps progress the theory into the realm of establishing communities of fans (i.e., in-groups) in sports.

Another element of social identity theory pertains to self-identification with the in-group. Once groups have been socially categorized, individuals begin to adopt the identity of that group

(Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Part I found that individuals' fan identity became a reflection of their own personal identity. Some participants claimed that being a fan of their team was a part of who they were and that the team was a part of their identity. One participant even claimed that he is colloquially known as "Mr. Ole Miss" (Samuel), signaling that being a fan of Ole Miss was a large part of his identity. In Part II, individuals reported positive identification levels for fandom ( $M = 10.365$ ,  $SD = 3.756$ ) and fanship ( $M = 23.937$ ,  $SD = 7.119$ ) which further clarifies that individuals adopt a social identity with other members of the group, as well as the group overall. Given that fanbases are quite large, Part II investigated the level of connection individuals feel with other members of their group, even if the individual did not know the other members personally. When individuals were asked to record their agreement to, "*I feel connected to other fans of my favorite college team, even if I have not met them before,*" they indicated a positive mean agreement of 3.484 ( $SD = 1.105$ ). On average, participants agreed that they feel a sense of connection to other members of their in-group, even if they do not know them personally. The simple fact that the other people are also a member of their in-group provides a sense of connectedness within that group.

The concept of BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976) emerged as an apparent part of the inter-group dynamic of sports fans. In Part I, nearly every participant stated that they physically express their association with their team on a daily basis. This ranged from individuals claiming that their closet was mostly full of team apparel, or that their home décor was representative of the team they follow. In many cases, individuals were not even aware of how often they display their allegiance until they were prompted. These displays of BIRGing were nearly routine for the individuals, regardless of which day of the week it was. They constantly were publicly displaying their fandom. In Cialdini et al.'s (1976) study, they found that individuals used words

like *us* or *we* when individuals referred to their favorite team. This was further supported as one participant in Part I said that when they use word, *we*, they use it as if the participant was on the team. This simple statement helps progress the notion that individuals adopt the identity of the group, and in some cases feel as if they are actually on the team. When identity measures were examined alongside BIRGing behaviors in Part II, it was found that both team and fan identification levels were strong predictors of BIRGing behaviors. Meaning, the more an individual identifies with a team, or other fans of that team, the more likely they are to BIRG. This finding help to progress BIRG research by further associating BIRGing behaviors with the inter-group dynamic in social identity theory.

The last portion of Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory pertains to social comparisons. In this portion, in-groups tend to view their group in a more positive light than the out-group. While there are many out-groups to a fan, the biggest out-group to a fan is their team's rival. Abram and Hogg (1988) claimed that in-group members will favor their in-group over their out-group, and in many cases feel a sense of superiority over their out-group. Part II investigated this idea by measuring fans' overall perception of their rival. On average, participants scored a 35.898 (SD = 8.874) on the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (Havard et al., 2013), indicating that on average, participants viewed their rival in a negative manner and believed that their team was superior to their rival. Closely tied to rival perception, individuals may have GORFing behaviors that indicate a level of satisfaction that they receive when their rival loses. Through Part II, it was found that rival perception levels are a positive predictor of GORFing behaviors. Meaning, the more individuals view their rival as inferior, the more satisfaction they receive when their rival fails. In Tajfel et al.'s (1971) minimal group experiment, they found that the in-group members felt as if out-group members should be

punished. In the sports world, a form of punishment would be to have a team fail. Thus, these findings help further unpack the notion that highly-identified in-group sports fan like to see their rival punished.

### **Applied Contributions**

Given the nature of this dissertation, there are many applied contributions for the sports media industry. Understanding how and why individuals are attracted to one team or another is useful knowledge for any given team or communication department. Plowman (2013) defines strategic communication as “the management of communications between an organization and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe” (p. 550). For teams, long-terms goals would include generating strong, life-long allegiances with their fans. The measurable objectives that Plowman (2013) mentions may include ticket sales, donations, attendance rates, or even fanship and fandom levels of fans. With the knowledge gained from this dissertation, strategic communication plans can be made to leverage motivations and relationships in order to conduct more successful campaigns.

As a result, it was found that family ties have strong influential power when it comes to not only the origination of an individual’s fandom, but also levels of fanship and fandom. First, teams need to understand that family relationships are important to an individual in the sense that team allegiances are likely connected to family. Thus, providing messaging about family, and how family relates to their team, should garnish a positive reaction from the message receiver. For example, the Ole Miss Cheerleading team used a Twitter post to welcome a new staff member to the Ole Miss *family* (Ole Miss Cheer, 2020). This use of family has the possibility of invoking an emotional connection an individual has with their own family and associating it with the Ole Miss Cheer team. Plowman and Wilson (2018) argue that social media are a key

component to strategic communication, thus, creating social media based fanship and fandom campaigns that leverage motivations have a strong possibility of being largely impactful.

Family is also important to note because if a team can create an allegiance in an individual, those allegiances are likely going to spread throughout that individual's family. Given that many allegiances are created because a member of their family influenced them, it is reasonable to assume that those new allegiances would at least partially carry through to new generations of that family. This is why it is important to take advantage of opportunities when individuals are a child. If a team can create an allegiance with a child, then that allegiance has the possibility to carry on for a long time. Thus, creating events that appeal to children are great ways to create long-lasting allegiances. In Part I, many participants described a significant moment in time while they were still in adolescence that played a large role in the creation of their fandom. This can be something like being able to meet players after a game, watching their team play in a high-stakes game, or even just attending a game with a parent. Although there is no direct science that can indicate when this moment will be, teams should try and appeal to children when they believe a significant moment may happen. As was unveiled in Part II, both children and family played a significant role in the origination of fanship and fandom with these teams. If teams can leverage these ideals in their messaging, stronger, or even possibly more, allegiances should be a result.

Levels of state pride emerged as a predictor of which type of team a fan would likely follow. Teams with their state's name in it should recognize that their fans likely have higher levels of state pride than their in-state competitors. When developing messaging campaigns, communication strategists should use this to their advantage. For example, teams that have the state's name in it should use iconic state symbols in their messaging. This can be the use of their

state's flag, the outline of the state, or even appealing to the traditions of that state. This becomes even more important when messaging strategies are used to target residents of their state who may have no other ties to the school. If an individual is undecided on which team to follow, and they are a longtime resident of that state, appealing to their state pride is likely to at least get their attention. If they are a proud resident of that state, it should be an easy transition for them to become a fan of that state's team. This provides opportunities for these types of teams to extend their messaging across the entire state, regardless of the individual's proximity to the team. Those teams that do not have their state's name in it should also recognize that appealing to an individual's state pride may not be the most effective messaging strategy. Fans of those teams still had high levels of state pride, but appeals to other motivations may yield stronger results.

One of the key objectives of strategic communication, as well as integrated marketing communication, is to build and maintain a cross-channel brand identity (Pedersen, Laucella, Kian, & Geurin, 2021). One way to build and maintain a brand identity for teams that contain the state's name would be to appeal to state pride across channels. For example, Mississippi State University created a billboard campaign that spread across the state of Mississippi consisting of billboards that read, "Welcome to our State" (Welcome to Mississippi: This is our state, 2012). This campaign focused on the idea that Mississippi State University was the state of Mississippi's team, which further connected the state, and its identity, with Mississippi State University. A way to make this campaign even more successful would be to continue this brand identity across multiple media, such as social media, television commercials, and print advertisements. This dissertation identified a strong relationship between state pride and teams with the state's name in it, thus, validating state pride as a strong motivating factor in fanship and fandom.

Predictably, rivalry emerged as an important factor in the individual's state. Teams and schools likely already understand that, but these findings help further identify that notion. The notion that there is an unwritten rule in each state that citizens must be a fan of one of the big two schools in the state can be helpful for every team in a state. From the standpoint of one of those two big teams, teams can understand that most of their competition comes from the other big school. Depending on which school it is, state pride can be used (or not used) to create a competitive edge against the other. From the standpoint of a smaller school, messaging strategists should recognize that majority of the citizens in their state already believe that they must be a fan of one of the other two big teams. Also, playing into rivalry can boost excitement amongst the fans they already have. Respectable banter has the possibility of creating stronger allegiances, as rivalry importance has a positive influence on an individual's fandom [ $b = 0.479$ ,  $t(409) = 2.54$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ] and fanship [ $b = 2.21$ ,  $t(409) = 6.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .] Those individuals who believe rivalry is important in their state tend to have higher levels of fandom and fanship. If schools can maintain a healthy rivalry, their fans will likely develop stronger levels of fandom and fanship over time. Social media managers for sports teams should recognize this and use these ideals to boost excitement across their channels with their fans. Likely, this playful banter would incite social media engagement with many fans of both teams in the rivalry, resulting in more excitement about the rivalry game.

Although proximity was not a strong predictor, it was found that the closer an individual lives to their favorite team, the more connected they feel to other fans. Teams can use this to try and boost a sense of connection in areas that are further away from the team's location. A goal of a team may be to create a sense of connection amongst fans, regardless of where they live. Targeting areas that lack connection, and establishing community-based events, may have the

opportunity to boost a sense of connection. Fandom directly relates to the connection that fans feel with other fans of the same team (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), so these events and messaging strategies would likely boost fandom amongst their fans as well. Given that a key aspect of strategic communication is to provide consistent messaging across channels (Pedersen, Laucella, Kian, & Geurin, 2021), these community-based events would help to build and maintain brand identity across media.

Knowing that proximity does not influence motivations for becoming a fan or the level of identity a fan has can help teams understand that their fanbases are not directly tied to how close a fan lives to the team. Understanding this, teams should not only direct their strategies to areas close to their team, but also state-wide. In the age of social media, this strategy is much easier as fans from everywhere can consume the message online.

### **Limitations**

This dissertation is not without limitations. It is understood that there may have been certain elements that limited the scope of this research. To begin, the largest, and least predictable limitation, came from the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic halted nearly all day-to-day operations across the United States and internationally. This included the cessation of every sport, from local youth sports to professional sports. The impact from COVID-19 changed the landscape of sports and media influence (Parrott, Towery, & Billings, 2021), which included limited scheduled games and restricted spectator attendance. Given that the data for this dissertation was collected during a time of uncertainty and a never-before-seen era in sports, the participants from Part I and Part II had to solely rely on the normal experiences they had prior to the pandemic. The interviews with each participant had to be conducted virtually as well where in-person interviews would have likely provided more intimate

experiences. Given that for a large portion of 2020 sports were absent, it is possible the absence may have influenced the identity levels that individuals had for their favorite teams.

Unfortunately, this was a variable that all sports researchers could not control during this time.

The second limitation for this dissertation deals with the samples for each part. In Part I, the sample was predominantly white. Given that the sampling procedures involved random participants through a snowball sample, the sample happened to end up predominantly white. As found in Part II, race differed for certain aspects. In the future, a more racially diverse sample should be ascertained because it may elicit different results in the research. In Part II, the acquisition of participants came from two different sources. This was not the initial plan, as Cloud Research was the intended service to obtain the entire sample. However, after weeks of slow recruitment, it was determined that a robust sample may take too long to acquire, likely due to the smaller number of participants using this service. This is may also be due to the specific scope of this research that examined sports fans in five specific states in a more rural part of the country. However, after this was identified, a Qualtrics panel was employed to try and fill the rest of the sample. The same requirements and qualifications were employed for each service. To further confirm that the participants responses were consistent between the two services, analyses were performed to validate that the two recruitment samples were not inherently different from one another. In an ideal situation, the entire sample would be drawn using the same service. For researchers exploring similar phenomena in the future, it would be suggested to use a Qualtrics panel from the start. The last sample limitation deals with Part II. The sample was predominantly female. Given that the sample was random, this occurrence was happenstance. It was found that males and females differed in certain aspects, so a more equal representation in the future may yield more significant findings.

The third limitation for this dissertation involves the generalizability of the findings. To start, qualitative research is not intended to generalize findings. Second, the overall dissertation only investigated states in the American Southeast, so, the quantitative results can only be generalized to that specific region. In the United States, there are regional differences in culture and motivations, much like there are culture differences that were explained earlier. These regional differences may result in different fanship and fandom motivations, due to the nature that sport media consumption is likely different than the sports media consumption in the American South. Thus, a national, or international, examination may yield different results.

The final limitation for this study involved the decision on whether or not to include Ole Miss as a team that included the state's full name. The official team is the University of Mississippi; however, the team is colloquially known as Ole Miss. After reviewing the entries from each participant, every participant that was a fan of that team listed the team's name as Ole Miss. Given that every participant referred to the team as Ole Miss, the decision to not include Ole Miss as a team that contains the state's name was made. In the future, researchers should investigate this unique phenomenon more in-depth to understand this naming dynamic more fully.

### **Directions for future research**

This dissertation leaves many opportunities for future research direction. Through an in-depth literature review, only one study was found that examined the origination of sport fanship and fandom (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). Given that this is likely the second study that has examined this phenomenon, further research should be conducted in this realm.

The examination for this dissertation only included states with no professional teams that are also located in the Southeast. This decision was made as there is a large concentration of

collegiate sports fans in this area, and college sports are an attraction for fans who live in rural regions that do not have professional teams (Irwin & Quealy, 2014). To further generalize the findings from this dissertation, future examinations should include similar states that are located outside of the South (e.g., Nebraska, Iowa, Idaho). These states are similar in rurality, while also not hosting a major league professional team (e.g., NFL, NBA, NHL, & MLB). Future research should also include a national examination, where professional team states can be compared against non-professional team states. In some cases, certain locales in professional team states host multiple professional teams and collegiate teams (e.g., Los Angeles, CA). These areas would be particularly intriguing to investigate as locals would have many teams to choose an allegiance to. In a national examination, motivations for displaced collegiate fans, as well as professional fans, could be investigated to help better understand why individuals who are not located near a team decide to form an allegiance.

Continuing in the theme of professional sports, there are many opportunities to continue this line of research to investigate professional fanship and fandom motivations. Particularly, investigating the motivations for professional fanship and fandom in states that do not host a professional team. This dissertation identified that there is an assumption that individuals who do not have a professional team in their state have stronger collegiate allegiances. However, in Part I, many individuals indicated that they are a fan of at least one professional sports team. In many cases, they identified that they preferred collegiate sports, but the fanship and fandom for a professional team still existed. Once these motivations are understood, collegiate and professional motivations can be compared and contrasted, as well as the motivation for those who live in states with or without professional teams. These phenomena should be further investigated.

This dissertation introduced the concept of state pride. Although this measure was used to further understand collegiate sport motivations, this concept has the possibility to inform a myriad of different studies. Future research should further validate Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) adapted scale to fit state pride. Likely, a new-to-the-world scale could be developed for this new concept. This is not to state that the adapted scale did not measure state pride accurately, rather more in-depth research into this specific concept should be conducted.

This dissertation examined the proximity that an individual resided from their favorite college team. Future research should examine the proximity an individual resides from their favorite college team's rival, and how that may influence identity levels, rival perceptions, and GORFing behaviors. Likely, these different concepts may influence how close or far the individual lives from their rival team. Once obtained, ratio levels can also be created to identify if there are relationships between the proximity to their favorite college team and the proximity to their favorite college team's rival together.

Lastly, the opportunity to create a sports fan motivation scale exists. This dissertation identified a number of different motivations for collegiate fanship and fandom. These motivations can likely be formulated into a scale to quantify the amount of influence an individual receives when they develop into a college sports fan. Scales such as the SSIS (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and fandom scale (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010) provide insight into specific identity levels with an entity, but do not provide any context into the influence they receive at those levels. A sports fan motivation scale has the possibility to help future researchers determine the reasons why their sample became a fan of their favored sports team in a quantitative manner, something that is largely missing from current research. A sports fan motivation scale could then be used in tandem with other scales to relate motivation levels with

identity levels. It is possible that there may be differences in the formation of professional, or international, team allegiances, thus, the sport fan motivation scale should be created following the examination of those two entities.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation examined the motivations for collegiate fanship and fandom in Southeastern states that do not host a professional team. With this study, team and fan identification, BIRGing, GORFing, rivalry, proximity, and state pride were all linked to various motivations for fanship and fandom. This dissertation utilized a two-part method that entailed both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Through both methodologies, rich data emerged to first identify motivation and then link these motivations to a number of different concepts. Given that this investigation provided a unique field of study, more research in this area is likely to rise. It is clear that social identity theory played a key role in the formation of collegiate sports allegiances. The inter-group dynamic that collegiate sports fans experience follows patterns of different social identity research that has been conducted. These fans seek a sense of belonging to a group that shares the same ideals as them, and as a result, adopt a strong identity with other members of that group, and the group overall. The concept of rivalry, and the perception that in-group members have of their rival, pairs perfectly with the in-group/out-group dynamic that social identity theory posits. As these fans develop a strong identity within their group, the more negative they view their rival. Through this investigation, this dynamic was important. As respondents typically agreed that college rivalry was important in their state, it creates an us-versus-them mentality, where individuals believe that their group is superior to their out-group.

There are many applied contributions that are a result of this dissertation. Teams, and universities, can use the information revealed to better understand why certain individuals are

attracted to one team or another. If used properly, fanship and fandom can likely be built, developed, and spread to more followers of those teams through strategically crafted messages. Given that proximity to a team did not emerge as a significant predictor for motivation, or fanship and fandom, these teams can focus their attention across the entire state. Concepts such as state pride, family, rivalry, and significant moments in time can be leveraged to create a campaign that appeals to the specific individual fan. In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and the absence of sports, we learned that sports are truly an important aspect in peoples' lives. Knowing this, the importance of understanding the rudimentary reasons why individuals create such strong allegiances to a team becomes even more important. It can be hard to pinpoint exactly why someone became a fan of a team, however, this dissertation provided significant insight into the process an individual goes through when picking a team to follow.

This dissertation provided a unique view into the lives of collegiate sports fans who live in a state absent of a professional team. This provided the perfect opportunity to investigate their fanship and fandom without the confounding variable influence of a professional team. Much was learned through this investigation; however, more is still left to be learned about this unique phenomenon.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol – Part I

#### Interview Protocol – Part I of Dissertation

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. This study has been approved by the University of Alabama's Institutional Review Board. In today's interview, we will be talking about what it means to be a fan of your favorite team as well as how you became a fan of your team. The purpose of this study is to identify the underlying motivations for why individuals follow the sports teams that they do. Everything discussed in this interview is confidential, and there will be no connection to you published in this study. So, let's get started.

*(Lettered questions will only be used as probes, if needed)*

1. Which sports team (e.g., Football, baseball, basketball, etc.) do you watch/follow the most? \*
2. Why is that your team? \*
3. How do you watch the teams play? \*
  - a. *For example, on TV, streaming, social media, newspaper, etc.*
4. Who do you watch games with? \*
  - a. *Typically, do you watch the games alone, in a small group (family, friends, etc.), or in large gatherings (bars/restaurants)?*
5. Do you ever go to the games live? \*
  - a. If yes, which sports do you go to the most? Why?

- b. If no, what is the biggest reason why not?

Now that we have talked a little about how you watch the games, we are going to talk about what it means to be a fan of your team.

6. What made you become a fan of your team? \*
7. How long have you been a fan of your team? \*
8. Is being a fan of your team important to? If so, how? \*
9. What does it mean to you to be a fan of your favorite team?
10. How does where you are from shape the teams that you follow? \*
11. How do you physically show that you are a fan of your team? \*
  - a. *(For example, do you wear a lot of clothing that has the logo on it, do you have a flag in your yard?)*
  - b. *Do you do this all the time, only on game days, or after the team wins?*

Continuing with the same topic, I am now going to ask you about memories you have associated with your team.

12. Tell me about your first memory associated with your team? \*
  - a. *What was that experience like? How did you feel? Who was there? What happened? What do you feel now as you recollect this experience?*
13. Tell me about a time that your team won a game.
  - a. *How do you feel? What do you do?*
14. Who do you consider to be the biggest rival to your team?\*
15. Now, tell me a time that your team won a game against your rival. \*
  - a. *How do you feel? What do you do?*
16. Tell me about a time that your team lost a regular game.

a. *How do you feel? What do you do?*

17. Now, tell me about a time that your team lost to your rival. \*

a. *How do you feel? What do you do?*

18. How does it make you feel when your rival loses to a different opponent? \*

a. What do you do then?

Now that we have talked about what it means to be a fan of your team and the memories associated with it, we will move on to talk about the differences between professional and collegiate teams.

19. Are you a fan of a professional team? Can you provide a specific example? \*

20. Would you consider yourself a bigger fan of your favorite pro team or your favorite college team? Why? \*

21. When compared to your college team, do you express your professional fandom differently? How?

22. Do you watch the games the same?

23. If I were to ask one of your friends or family members which sports team you were the biggest fan of, what would they say? \* (*Specifically referencing “sports team” to not give a bias toward pro or college*)

Now that we have talked about your sports teams, let’s briefly talk about yourself.

24. Where are you originally from? Where do you live now? \*

25. Are you proud to be where you are from? \*

26. Are you married? Do you have kids? \*

a. If yes, do they share the same interest in your sports teams as you? Why?

27. That is all the questions I have for you today. Is there something I didn't ask, or you think would be important for me to know about your experience of being a sports fan? \*

28. Do you have anyone you can recommend to this study? \*

Thank you for your time. Would you be ok with me contacting you at a later date if I have any questions about the information you shared here today? Also, if you would like for me to follow up with you about the results of this study, please let me know.

\*must ask questions if limited on time

## Appendix B: Survey – Part II

### Informed Consent

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

#### **Consent Form Key Information:**

- Participate in a 30-minute survey
- Participate in a survey that asks you why you follow the sporting teams that you do.
- No information collected will connect your identity with the responses
- Potential for the survey to contain questions that may make you feel uncomfortable.

**Purpose of the research study:** This study seeks to understand why individuals follow the teams that they do as associated with their geographical locations.

**What you will do in the study:** This study will ask you specific questions about your motivations for following the teams that you do. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the survey at any time.

**Time required:** The study will require about 30 minutes of your time.

**Risks:** There are no anticipated risks in this study, however there may be some questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits for participants. The study may help us understand how adults chose to follow the teams that they do.

**Confidentiality:** The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to the data.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**How to withdraw from the study:** If you wish to withdraw from the study once you begin, simply close the online window.

There is no penalty for withdrawing.

**Compensation/Reimbursement:** You will receive a monetary compensation for completing this survey.

**Using data beyond this study:** The data collected from this study may be included in writing and development of future studies.

The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. Your information will be stored, and may be used and shared for future research studies, including but not limited to lectures, presentations, or other publications. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. However, the information you provide may be combined with the information provided by others to create a large data set. Your name and other information that could potentially identify you will not be connected to the information shared with other researchers nor will they attempt to identify you.

**If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:**

Name of Principal Investigator: Nathan Towery

Title: Graduate Student

Department Name: Journalism and Creative Media

Telephone: 205-348-8599

Email address: ntowery@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Andrew Billings

Department Name: Journalism and Creative Media

Telephone: +1 205-348-8658

Email address: acbillings@ua.edu

**If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact:**

Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at [rscpliance@research.ua.edu](mailto:rscpliance@research.ua.edu).

1. Do you agree to participate in the study listed above?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. Do you consider yourself a fan of a **collegiate** sports team?
  - a. Yes, No
  - b. If yes, please identify the team in which you most identify \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the following statements in terms of your favorite college team  
Sports Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) – 5-point scale

3. How important to YOU is it that your favorite college team wins?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
4. How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of your favorite college team?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
5. How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of your favorite college team?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
6. During the season, how closely do you follow your favorite college team via ANY of the following: a) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or newspaper, d) on the internet?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
7. How important is being a fan of your favorite college team to YOU?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
8. How much do YOU dislike your favorite college team's greatest rivals?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)
9. How often do YOU display your favorite college team's name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?  
(Not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very much so)

Please respond to the following statements in terms of group membership with other fans of your favorite collegiate team. Identification with a group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2002) – 5-point scale.

10. Overall, my fan group membership has very little to do with how I feel about myself

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

11. The fan group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

12. The fan group I belong to is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

13. In general, belonging to a fan group is an important part of my self-image

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

Please respond to the following statements in terms of your favorite college team's rivals. Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (Havard et al., 2013) – 5-point scale

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

14. I would support my favorite team's rival in a championship game.

15. I would support my favorite team's rival in out-of-conference play.

16. I want my favorite team's rival to win all games except when they play my favorite team.

17. The academic prestige of my favorite team's rival is poor.

18. I feel people that attended school where my favorite team's rival plays missed out on a good education.

19. I feel that academics where my favorite team's rival plays is not very prestigious.

20. Fans of my favorite team's rival demonstrate poor sportsmanship at games.

21. Fans of my favorite team's rival are not well behaved at games.

22. Fans of my favorite team's rival do not show respect for others.

23. I feel a sense of belonging when my favorite team beats my favorite team's rival.

24. I feel a sense of accomplishment when my favorite team beats my favorite team's rival.

25. I feel I have bragging rights when my favorite team beats my favorite team's rival.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

(Strongly disagree) (Strongly agree)  
1 2 3 4 5

26. The closer you live to a team, the bigger fan you are.

27. I enjoy watching my favorite college team play MORE when I am with other people who are fans of the same team.

28. I make every effort to watch my team play.

29. I like to follow current, former, or future players on social media.

30. I like to follow current, former, or future coaches and/or staff members on social media.
31. Not having a major league professional sports team in my state makes my fandom for my favorite college team stronger.
32. In my state, there is an 'unwritten' rule that citizens must be a fan of one the two major schools in the state (e.g., Alabama or Auburn, Clemson or South Carolina, etc.).
33. Typically, I receive enjoyment when my favorite team's rival loses a game.
34. College rivalry is important in my state.
35. I had a positive experience that drew me closer to my favorite college team.
36. Positive experiences made my fandom for my favorite college team stronger.
37. I am more likely to surround myself with fans of my favorite college team.
38. I feel connected to other fans of my favorite college team, even if I have not met them before.
39. The college team that my family (or someone in my family) followed had a positive influence on the origination of my favorite college team fandom.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

*STATE PRIDE* Kosterman & Feshbach (1989)

(Strongly disagree) (Strongly agree)

1 2 3 4 5

40. I love my state.
41. I am proud to be from my state.
42. In a sense, I am emotionally attached to my state and emotionally affected by its actions.
43. Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to my state always remains strong.
44. I feel a great pride in that land that is our state.
45. It is not that important for me to serve my state.
46. When I see my state's flag flying, I feel great.
47. The fact that I am from my state is an important part of my identity.
48. In general, I have very little respect for the citizens of my state.
49. My state is really just an institution, big and powerful yes, but just an institution.

Please answer the following questions in reference to your favorite college teams' rivals.

GORF (adapted from Billings, Qiao, Brown, & Devlin, 2017)

(Not at all) (Very much)

1 2 3 4 5

50. Do you feel happy if your rival is defeated by another opponent?
51. Do you feel satisfied if your rival is defeated by another opponent?
52. Do you feel relieved if your rival is defeated by another opponent?
53. Do you feel pride if your rival is defeated by another opponent?
54. Do you feel sad if your rival is defeated by another opponent?
55. Do you feel sympathy if your rival defeated by another opponent?

Please answer the following question in reference to your favorite college teams' rival.

56. Choose the most important outcome to you.
  - a. Lose only to your rival, but you win a national championship.
  - b. Beat your rival, but have a losing record.

Please answer the following questions in reference to after your favorite college team wins a game. BIRGing, adapted from Kwon et al. (2008)

(Never) (Always)

1 2 3 4 5

57. I would like to let others know about my association with my favorite college team.

58. I would like to publicize my connection with my favorite college team.

59. I would like to tell others about my association with my favorite college team,

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

60. Have you ever had a physical interaction with a current, former, or future athlete, coach, or athletic staff member of your favorite college team?

a. Yes, No, unsure

61. Have you ever had a physical interaction with a family member of a current, former, or future athlete, coach, or athletic staff member of your favorite college team?

a. Yes, No, unsure

62. Please enter your age in numerical form (e.g., 27) \_\_\_\_\_

63. Please identify your sex.

a. Male, Female, Identify as other

64. Please identify your race.

a. White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, from multiple races, Some other race (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

65. Please identify your household income

a. Less than \$10,000, \$10,000 - \$49,999, \$50,000 - \$99,999, \$100,000 - \$149,000, More than \$150,000

66. Please identify your education level

a. Less than a high school diploma, High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED), Some college with no degree, Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS), Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS), Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd), Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM), Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)

67. Did/do you attend the school that you are a fan of?

a. Yes, No

68. Did you graduate from the school that you are a fan of?

a. Yes, No

69. Did/does someone in your family (e.g., son, mother, grandfather, etc.) attend the school that you are a fan of?

a. Yes, No, unsure

70. Was someone in your family (e.g., son, mother, grandfather, etc.) a fan of your favorite college team before you were?

a. Yes, No, unsure

71. Please identify your employment status

a. Employed full time (40+ hours a week), Employed part-time (less than 40 hours a week), Unemployed (looking for work), Unemployed (not looking for work), Student, Retired, Self-employed, unable to work

72. Please identify your marital status?
- Single, Married, Divorced, Widowed
73. Do you have children?
- No
  - Yes
74. Do you consider yourself a fan of a **professional** sports team?
- Yes, No
  - If yes, please identify the team I which you most identify \_\_\_\_\_
75. I live within the metropolitan area of a professional sports team (MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL)
- Yes, No, Unsure
76. I live within 100 miles of a major University that has an athletics program (e.g., I live within 100 miles of The University of Alabama)
- Yes, No, Unsure
77. Please enter the name of the city and state that you currently live in.
- \_\_\_\_\_
78. Please enter your ZIP code.
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of the Vice President for  
Research & Economic Development  
Office for Research Compliance

April 7, 2020

Nathan Towery  
Journalism and Creative Media  
Box 870172

Re: IRB # EX-20-CM-099: "Motivations for Fan Behaviors"

Dear Mr. Towery,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under exempt review category 2(i) as outlined below:

*(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if: (i) the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.*

The approval for your application will lapse on April 6, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP  
Director & Research Compliance Officer

cc: Dr. Andrew Billings

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