

CHAPTER 3

Points of Attachment: Understanding Connections to Teams, Players, and Beyond

I love football!
I am a diehard Cowboys fans!
I am a huge Stephen Curry fan!
I love Wrigley Field!

The preceding statements each convey some type of psychological connection common among sport fans. In Chapter 2, we examined the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM; Funk & James, 2001, 2006) as a framework for understanding the strength of connections people form with sport objects and the processes through which these connections develop. At the Awareness stage, the connection entails knowledge that a particular team exists, but the attitude toward the team remains ambiguous. Remember the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp discussion from Chapter 2? You are now aware of this team, but likely have no particular connection to it. At the Attraction stage, the connection is likely a hedonic motive (e.g., a desire to have fun) or a social-situational factor (e.g., a desire to spend time with family or friends). At the Attachment stage, the team (or other sport object) has become a person's favorite, and the connection has become intrinsically important. This may involve viewing the team's values as symbolic of one's own, and the fan may be developing a sense of identification with the team. At the Allegiance stage, the connection reflects a strong association with the self-concept. A person no longer regards herself or himself as just a fan of the team but, rather, views himself or herself as part of the team. The strong association found at the Allegiance stage influences the fan's affect, behavior, and cognition (i.e., how he or she feels, acts, and thinks).

The quotes used to open this chapter express a strong connection. Words and phrases such as "love," "diehard," and "huge fan" reflect a powerful attachment to a sport object. Importantly though, taken together these quotes convey

something else as well. Sport fans may form connections to a variety of *different* sport objects. Although authors writing about the PCM typically use a sport team as the focal object, the reality is individuals form connections with many different components of the fan experience. The focus of the current chapter is on these different objects of connection.

It is also important to pay careful attention to the terms used in this chapter. Specifically, notice the phrase “points of attachment” in the chapter title. When they discuss the PCM, authors typically write about psychological connections. So, what is up with the phrase “points of attachment”? No, it is not simply the Attachment stage in the PCM (we agree that the use of the same term adds to the confusion). As explained, a *connection* with a sport object in the context of the PCM can range from simple awareness and knowledge to strong levels of allegiance. On the other hand, the phrase “points of attachment” typically refers to particular types of connections, namely, one’s identification with sport objects.

The phrase and concept of “points of attachment” traces back to work from Trail et al. (2003). Of particular note is their introduction of the Points of Attachment Index (PAI), a scale used to measure connections with seven different sport objects: team, coach, community, university, players, level of sport (i.e., competition), and sport. Thus, the work by Trail et al. (2003), and much of the PAI work that has followed, dealt with an individual’s strength of identification with different sport-related objects, whether it is a sport, team, player, or some other entity. In essence, research that includes the PAI involves measuring levels of identification with particular sport-related targets. This type of research aligns with some elements of, but is not as comprehensive as, the PCM, given that the PCM describes the process of connections rather than simply the type and magnitude of attachments.

Regardless of the nomenclature used, what is clear is that if we are going to better understand sport fans, we must pay attention to the sport objects with which they connect, how these connections form, and what influences the connections might have on fan affect, behavior, and cognition. In this chapter, we provide a review of the research involving points of attachment, then focus on the connections fans form with two particular objects: teams and players.

Points of Attachment

What are the sport-related objects to which people connect? As noted, a sport team is one such entity. By extension, fans may have an interest in one or more specific players on a favorite team. It is also possible fans have an interest in a particular player, but not a strong connection to the player’s team. For example, some fans of LeBron James are interested in his performance as a professional basketball player, regardless of whether he is playing for Cleveland, or Miami, or Cleveland again (and whatever the next team may be).

We can also think from team back to sport. That is, a person may have a favorite team, but preceding their interest in the team may have been their connection with a particular sport. Indeed, James (1997) found most children he interviewed indicated they had a favorite sport prior to selecting their favorite

team. The preceding highlights an important point: fans often identify with multiple sport objects. For example, it is hard to imagine someone announcing his or her love for a favorite basketball team but then claiming not to like the sport of basketball. Similarly, not everyone having a favorite team will have played that particular sport. Understanding that not all sport fans will have actively participated in a particular sport is important, especially for those interested in sport consumer behavior. Although many fans have participated in various sports (as noted in Chapter 1), having played a sport is not a necessary qualification for having a favorite sport or team. For example, consider that many women have a favorite NFL team. Although they may have played other sports, they likely had little to no opportunity to participate in organized football.

As the preceding paragraphs suggest, there are many sport objects with which fans can form an attachment. They can connect with sports, teams, players, and many other aspects of the sporting environment. Researchers have studied the extent to which fans connect with various sport-related objects. For example, Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, and Ellen (1988) studied connections with a university, players, and sport. Similarly, Murrell and Dietz (1992) also wrote about fans connecting with these same three sport objects. Matsuoka and Fujimoto (2002) proposed that fans may connect with players, coaches, other fans, or the hometown of a team (referred to as *place attachment*). Much of the previous work targeting points of attachment includes studying multiple objects (see Table 3.1 for examples of such work). Although that approach did not necessarily originate with Trail et al. (2003), it may have become the standard methodology in large part because of the development of the Points of Attachment Index.

Points of Attachment Research and the Sport Objects with Which Fans Form a Connection

As noted above, Trail et al. (2003) developed the Points of Attachment Index (PAI) to measure connections with different sport objects. In their work, five objects (team, coach, community, university, and players) were grouped as an assessment of organizational connection, while sport and level of sport were grouped as an indicator of overall sport connection. The organizational and sport connections were linked to various motives. For instance, vicarious achievement was associated with the organizational objects, while skill, aesthetics, drama, and knowledge were associated with the sport objects.

Shortly after the original work by Trail and his colleagues (2003), Robinson et al. (2004) continued work on points of attachment in their study of fans' connections to golf-related objects. Their work included testing connections with a specific golfer, the tour, one's community, the sport of golf, and a charity. Robinson et al. (2004) examined whether particular motives were associated with certain objects of connection, finding that vicarious achievement was significantly related to connections to a golfer and the tour. No other motive was strongly associated with a particular golf-related object.

TABLE 3.1 Points of Attachment Research

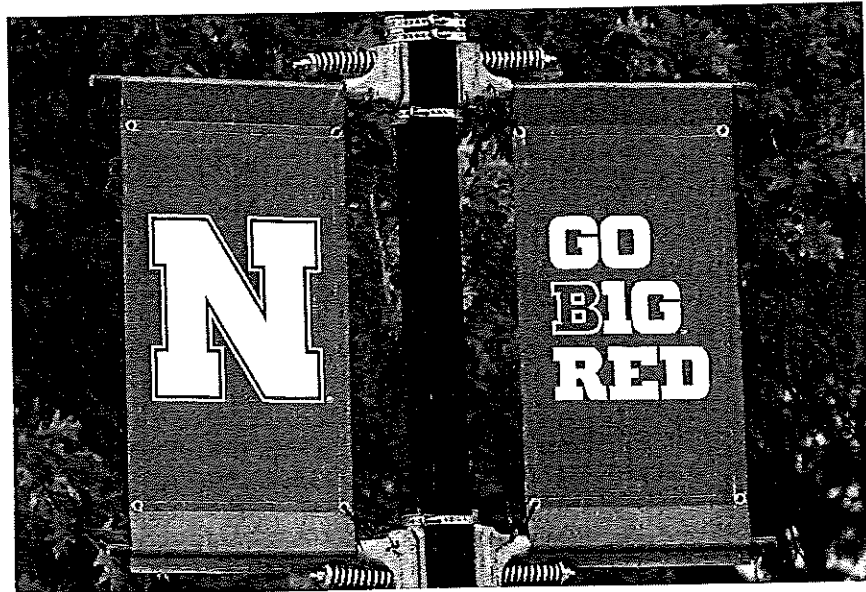
Citation	Points of Attachment
Ballouli, Trial, Koesters, and Bernthal (2016)	Team, Athlete, Place, Sport, Level of Competition, Community
Tokmak and Aksov (2016)	Team, Athlete, Coach, Level of Sport
Spinda, Wann, and Hardin (2016)	Team, Sport, University, Athlete, Level of Competition, Coach, Conference
Dwyer, Mudrick, Greenhalgh, LeCrom, and Drayer (2015)	Team
Keaton, Watanabe, and Gearhart (2015)	Team, Athlete
Reams, Eddy, and Cork (2015)	Sport, Level of Competition, Athlete, Sponsors
Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, and James (2015)	Community
Zembura and Zysko (2015)	Athlete, Organization, Sport
Shapiro, Drayer, and Dwyer (2014)	Sport, Team, Athlete, Community
Cottingham, Chatfield, Gearity, Allen, and Hall (2012)	Athlete, Sport, Community
Gencer, Kiremitci, and Boyacioglu (2011)	Team, Sport, Level of Competition, Community
Karg and McDonald (2011)	Sport, Team, League, Athlete, Coach
Woo, Trail, Kwon, and Anderson (2009)	Team, Coach, University, Athlete, Sport, Level of Competition
Dittmore, Stodt, and Greenwell (2008)	Team, Sport, Athlete
Robinson and Trail (2005)	Athlete, Team, Coach, Sport, Level of Competition, Community, University
Robinson, Trail, and Kwon (2004)	Athlete, Coach, Community, Team, Sport, Level of Competition, University
Murrell and Dietz (1992)	University, Athlete, Sport
Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, and Ellen (1988)	University, Athlete, Sport

The study of multiple points of attachment continued beyond the work by Trail and his colleagues. For example, Dittmore, Stodt, and Greenwell (2008) measured connections with team, sport, and player among consumers of a weblog for a Major League Baseball team. They found that connections with the team was strongest, followed by sport, and then player. Karg and McDonald (2011) examined differences in connections to five sport objects among fantasy sport participants and non-participants. Specifically, they investigated connections to sport, league, team, players, and coach. They found that fantasy sport players reported a stronger connection with each object compared to persons not playing fantasy sport. The strongest connections were with team, sport, and

players, respectively. Cottingham et al. (2012) studied points of attachment for wheelchair rugby. The objects of connection included player, sport, and disability community. Connection to sport and disability community were each significant predictors of future attendance intentions.

Although research on points of attachment typically targets sport, level of sport, team, player, university/school, and community, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that fans can connect to any sport-related object. For example, a fan could feel a connection to a particular piece of sporting equipment, such as a favorite football or baseball. Or maybe an autographed basketball from a favorite player has particular importance to the fan. Individuals may well go to extreme measures to take care of these items because of the strong connections they feel for the memorabilia. Likewise, a person could have a strong connection with a particular piece of sport apparel, such as a favorite jersey. Other sport-related objects to which individuals connect include sport conference (Spinda et al., 2016) and team sponsors (Reams et al., 2015).

A final sport object with which fans form a connection is a particular place (i.e., place attachment). For example, a major component of the attachment Nebraska Cornhusker fans feel for their football team centers on their connection with the state of Nebraska (Aden, 2008). Although place attachment is often a general locale such as a city or state, at other times the connection is with a specific facility. For some fans, a stadium, arena, or other sport venue is an object to which they form a strong connection. And we mean *really strong* connection. Remillard (2015) writes about sport venues that people consider sacred,



Sport Fans Often Become Attached to a Location, Such as the Strong Connection Fans of the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers Often Have With the State of Nebraska

viewing a place with a type of religious reverence (the link between sport fandom and religion is discussed in Chapter 11). For example, Remillard refers to an exhibit at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, titled “Sacred Ground” that highlights noteworthy ballparks in the United States. We could write for several pages about college sport venues and the history and tradition associated with them. For instance, Delia and James (in press) document the importance of the Carrier Dome, a venue that is an integral point of connection for many Syracuse University fans.

Thus, fans may connect with any number of objects; no one is limited to having an interest in just one sport, one team, one player, or one anything sport-related. Fans can and often do connect with multiple sports, teams, players, and other sport-related objects. For example, Grieve and his colleagues (2009) found that fans averaged greater than a half dozen attachments just with different teams. Think again about our LeBron James example. Some people may have become Cleveland Cavalier fans simply because James was part of the team. When he left to play for Miami, some of these fans may have formed a new allegiance, becoming supporters of the Miami Heat. At the same time, other individuals may have been Cavaliers’ fans prior to James becoming a member of the team. As a result of his playing for their favorite team, they could have become fans of James. When James changed teams, some may have continued to support him while also remaining fans of the Cavaliers. Clearly, fans can be complicated people.

Attachments to Teams: Team Identification

Identification with sport teams and the implications of these connections are one of the most oft studied topics among scholars of sport fandom since the 1990s. A literature search that utilized team identification as a primary variable of interest found over 100 journal articles published between 1980 and 2018. Furthermore, the topic of team identification has been cited in hundreds of additional articles. The study of team identification has been largely influenced by and generally originated with Wann and Branscombe’s (1993) publication of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). However, the topic of identification among sport fans predates the work of Wann and Branscombe. As noted in Chapter 1, two of the earliest mentions of team identification come from the work of Brill (1929) and Griffith (1938). However, for all intents and purposes the “modern day” study of team identification began with the work of Wann and his colleagues.

In Chapter 1, we defined team identification as the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team. The impact of that connection is what has likely driven the interest in team identification as a topic of research. As we explained in Chapter 1, sport scholars usually study the strength of identification, ranging from low to high. Many scholars have examined the impact of “low” and “high” team identification on attitude, behavior, and cognition. A strong connection (i.e., high identification) is expected to result in consistent and enduring behaviors and attitudes towards a team (James et al., 2002). Such

behaviors include purchasing event tickets (Wann, Bayens, & Driver, 2004), merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Lee & Ferreira, 2011), and team apparel (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007), and positive word of mouth (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003). In addition to marketing benefits, Wann (2006c) has discussed social psychological benefits of team identification, including enhancement of social well-being.

The range—not just the magnitude—of scholarly activity on team identification is indicative of its appeal to those who study sport fandom. It is somewhat ironic to note, however, that more than 25 years after the initial work by Wann and Branscombe (1993), sport scholars are just now giving proper attention to the theoretical underpinnings of team identification. Indeed, Lock and Heere (2017) point out that in the 1990s and early 2000s, the study of team identification often failed to include strong theoretical foundations. The authors did acknowledge that scholars had discussed team identification as a type of social identification (cf., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Heere & James, 2007; Kwon et al., 2007; Madrigal, 1995), grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Fink et al. (2002) noted explicitly that “Team identification is based on social identity theory” (p. 196). There have also been some scholars (Trail, Anderson, & Lee, 2016; Trail & James, 2015) that have endeavored to study team identification using Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968) as a theoretical framework. Lock and Heere offer several insightful suggestions for improving the theoretical study of team identification.

According to the PCM, connections to a sport team progress from awareness, to attraction, to attachment, to allegiance. Where does identification fit in to such a progression? The Awareness stage simply involves knowledge that teams exist and learning about different teams, players, and coaches. The Attraction stage reflects an interest in attending a game played by a particular team. However, the connection is likely based on some social-situational (e.g., attending with family or friends) or hedonic (seeking a fun experience) factor. Thus, it is likely that identification with a team has not yet developed in either the Awareness or Attraction stages. Funk and James (2016) explain that as a team takes on intrinsic importance and meaning for a person, she or he has advanced to the stage of Attachment. Thus, identification is associated with this stage. Tajfel’s (1978) definition that social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 63). Identification involves associating the team with one’s self-concept or forming an attachment.

The Origins of Team Identification

Think for a moment about when you first started supporting your favorite team. Do you remember the reasons for your initial decision to follow this team? Now imagine asking your friends and family members who also support this team to recall the reasons they originally started following the team. In all likelihood, their explanations would not be the same as yours. In fact, you may be surprised to learn the factors leading to their support. Indeed, researchers have found

there is a wide range of reasons that underlie fan's initial identification with a team (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). And some of the reasons seem to lack reason. For instance, consider how actor Matthew McConaughey became a fan of the Washington Redskins even though he was born and raised in Texas, home of the rival Dallas Cowboys. When asked why he began to support the Redskins, McConaughey noted that his favorite food at that time was hamburgers and the Redskins had a player named Chris Hanburger (Steinberg, 2013). In a more personally relevant example, consider the experiences of the first author of your text. I am a diehard Cubs fan, a devotion that dates back to the late 1960s. Did I grow up in Chicago? Nope, not even in Illinois. Did my family follow the Cubs? Nope, and quite to the contrary, my father was a fan of the rival St. Louis Cardinals, having grown up in southeast Missouri. So why did I become a fan of the Cubs? Because my older brother decided to follow in our father's footsteps and also support the Cardinals (sport fan socialization in action). Consequently, in an attempt to drive my older sibling crazy, I decided to support a rival of the Cardinals and, hence, became a Cubs fan.

Many fans have similar stories of the strange circumstances that ignited their passion for a team. Listening to fans tell these stories may lead to the impression that the origin of team identification is a purely random process. However, this is not the case. Rather, a number of informative studies have been undertaken that shed light on the most common origins (also referred to as causes or antecedents) of identification. For instance, Wann and his colleagues (1996) asked 91 college students to state why they originally began to follow their favorite team. Participants generated a list of over 300 reasons, and one person reported 16 reasons for originally following a team! And to make matters even more complex, there was not a great deal of agreement among the participants. For example, no single factor was listed by more than 13 percent of the sample, and only two causes (characteristics of the players and one's family followed the team) were listed by as many as 10 percent of the respondents (Wann et al., 1996).

Because fans list such a wide variety of reasons for originally following a team, to describe them without some form or structure would be a logistical nightmare. Thankfully, a typology has been proposed to assist in our understanding of the variety of factors impacting the origination of team identification (Wann, 2006a). According to this perspective, the wide range of reasons fans originally begin supporting a team can be grouped into one of three categories: psychological, environmental, and team-related.

Psychological Origins of Team Identification Wann (2006a) lists two critical psychological origins of team identification: the need to belong and the need for distinctiveness. You may recall that these innate psychological drives were discussed at length in Chapter 1 and that sport fandom has the potential to assist individuals in meeting these needs (Goldman et al., 2016; Groeneman, 2017; Theodorakis et al., 2012).

As for the need to belong, individuals can satisfy their desire to gain connections to others by rooting for a sport team, particularly if that team has a strong local following. By supporting the local team, one can gain a sense of unity and

cohesion with others (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Watkins, 2014). In fact, Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997) contend that a desire for “affiliation is the most significant correlate of fan identification” (p. 18). Wann et al. (1996) found that the desire to spend time with others was a fairly common antecedent for team identification, as this factor was listed third-most frequently. The need to belong may be a particularly powerful driver for identification with new teams because other potential links (e.g., players and team success) may not yet be in place (James et al., 2002; Lock, Taylor, & Darcy, 2011).

In addition, researchers suggest that the need to belong may be especially common among female fans (Aiken & Koch, 2009; Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). For instance, consider a recent study by Koch and Wann (2016). In this research, fans completed a questionnaire assessing the extent to which the origin of their identification for a favorite team was based on a desire to establish relationships with others (e.g., “I became a fan of my favorite team to bond with family, friends, and/or peers”). They found that females were significantly more likely than males to originally identify with a team for relationship-based reasons.

In terms of the need for distinctiveness, one way for individuals to feel unique is to identify with groups that separate them from the mainstream. As it relates to fandom, persons may choose to support a team because the team is different in some way. For instance, one (albeit dangerous) way for persons in New York City to stand out and feel unique would be to begin supporting the Boston Red Sox.

The needs for belongingness and distinctiveness were the focus of recent work by DeRossett and Wann (2018). These authors asked United States college students to read a vignette describing a pair of equally successful Australian Professional Cricket teams (both teams were fictional). One team was described as being very popular and having a large fan base; the other was said to be less popular and had more of a cult-type following. Subsequent to reading the vignette, participants selected the team they would be most likely to support. Lastly, they completed scales assessing their need for belongingness and distinctiveness. The results indicated that persons who chose the more unique (less mainstream) team had higher levels of need for distinctiveness than those selecting the popular team. And which team did participants higher in need for belonging prefer? As you may have guessed, these persons were more likely to place their allegiance with the popular team.

For a third psychological origin of team identification, we need to return to the Koch and Wann (2016) project. In addition to investigating relationship-based origins of identification, this work also examined recognition-based antecedents (e.g., “I became a fan of my favorite team to be known as a fan of that team”). The authors found that participants were more likely to have begun following a team due to a desire to be recognized as a fan of the team than to establish relationships with others. It warrants mention that the desire to support a team to be viewed as a fan of that team is distinct from the desire to gain a sense of belonging. That is, belonging as an antecedent of identification involves using the team to establish social relationships. However, recognition-based origins involve a desire to manage one’s impression by being perceived as

a supporter of the team, a common practice among fans (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann, 2006a).

A fourth psychological cause was noted by Dimmock and Grove (2006) in their research on uncertainty reduction. **Subjective Uncertainty Reduction Theory** (Hogg & Abrams, 1993) proposes that individuals possess a fundamental need for certainty because it provides meaning in life and an understanding of acceptable forms of behavior. One method of gaining certainty is via shared group membership (Grieve & Hogg, 1999). Given this, Dimmock and Grove hypothesized that team identification may assist in the need to reduce uncertainty. Consistent with expectations, they found that persons higher in the need for a structured life had higher levels of identification with their favorite team, leading the authors to surmise that “the desire for subjective certainty might influence the development of team identification” (p. 1209).

Environmental Origins of Team Identification One of the most critical environmental origins of team identification is the sport fan socialization process (Wann, 2006a). As was detailed in the previous chapter, socialization begins during the Awareness stage of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001) and involves exposure to a team via socialization agents. For example, if an individual’s friends and/or family actively root for a team, this person may also begin to develop an affinity for the team (Crawford, 2003; Greenwood, Kanters, & Casper, 2006; Groeneman, 2017; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Keaton & Gearhart, 2014; Wann et al., 1996). Often, fans who are socialized to follow a team do so out of a sense of obligation to their family and friends (Koch & Wann, 2013). Your first author’s youngest son, Kevin, witnessed firsthand a family’s socialization of a child to support a specific team. While working at an arcade-style game room, Kevin was approached by a mother and her young child. The child had several hundred tickets he had won playing various games. The boy eyed a University of Louisville basketball and was overjoyed to learn that he had enough tickets to purchase the item. The joy quickly turned to sorrow (and many tears) when his mother refused to allow him to select the item, stating that they were University of Kentucky fans and definitely not supporters of Louisville. The child was informed that because they did not have a Kentucky basketball, he was not getting a basketball.

James (2001) noted the potential for socialization agents to have a combined impact on identification with a favorite team. For instance, although a person’s father may have a strong influence on identification (particularly for younger fans, see Kolbe & James, 2000), it is likely there is a community influence as well, particularly if a fan grows up in the hometown of the favorite team (more about the impact of geography below). In essence, the importance of the team is reinforced through messages at home, interactions with peers, and messages through various media outlets. Additionally, the team is likely engaging in promotional activities to foster a positive connection with fans. Thus, fans are most likely socialized to follow a team by multiple sources.

Another environmental origin, and one that is likely related to socialization, involves geographical nearness to a team. Research suggests that growing up

and/or living near a team can be a powerful force in facilitating team identification (Aiken & Koch, 2009; Greenwood et al., 2006; Kolbe & James, 2000), particularly for fans whose allegiance to the team was developed earlier in life (Popp, Barrett, & Weight, 2016). Although Wann and his colleagues (1996) found that a fair percentage (10 percent) of respondents listed geographical reasons for originally identifying with a team, subsequent work provides evidence this is more common than previously believed (e.g., Uemukai, Takenouchi, Okuda, Matsumoto, & Yamanaka, 1995). For example, in his work with English soccer fans, Jones (1997) found that over 60 percent of his sample listed geography as an antecedent. Likewise, Groeneman (2017) found that geography was listed by over 50 percent of fans of United States professional sports, the most frequent factor influencing the origin of identification. Interestingly, the impact of geography may be related to the type of sport in question. Specifically, Keaton et al. (2015) found that geography was more critical as an antecedent to identification with a team sport (i.e., college football) than to an individual sport (i.e., NASCAR).

Three additional environmental causes are interactions with players, the salience of rival teams, and a team's stadium (Wann, 2006a). As for player contact, the logic here is that exposure to and interactions with players leads to interest in the team (think Awareness and Attraction stages from the PCM) and such interest can facilitate the development of team identification. Direct contact with players via autograph sessions and other team events could be particularly influential.

In terms of rival salience, increasing awareness of a rival should result in greater levels of identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bass, Gordon, & Kim, 2013). This was the pattern of effects found by Luellen and Wann (2010). In their research, college sport fans completed a questionnaire assessing their level



A Stadium or Arena Can Be an Antecedent of Team Identification

of identification with the University of Kentucky men's basketball team. Participants completed the identification measure both before and after watching a rival team's highlight video or, for those in the control group, a generic sport highlight video (the rival team was not depicted in the control film). As expected, those exposed to the rival team video reported an increase in identification with the Kentucky team, a pattern of effects absent from those watching the control video.

Finally, fans may begin to identify with a team because of the team's stadium (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001; Watkins, 2014). Specifically, fans may develop a sense of pride for and attachment to a unique or historically relevant arena (e.g., Wrigley Field and Fenway Park in Major League Baseball). Lee, Heere, and Chung (2013) investigated how a fan's sensory experience at a stadium can impact team identification. They found that four stadium-related sensory experiences (sight, sound, touch, and smell) influenced team identification, with the visual sense having the greatest impact. The authors concluded that the "sport venue experience through consumers' senses can be an antecedent of team identity" (p. 209).

Team-Related Origins of Team Identification The third category contained in Wann's (2006a) typology involves team-related origins of identification, that is, issues directly related to the team itself. Wann further separates team-related causes into three categories: organizational characteristics, team performance, and player attributes. According to Sutton and his colleagues (1997), organizational characteristics involve "the 'off-field' image of ownership, decision making, and tradition of the franchise" (p. 15). This would include the team's history and rituals (Aiken & Koch, 2009; Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Underwood et al., 2001), such as chanting "Rock Chalk, Jayhawk" at Kansas University basketball games and dotting the "i" in "Ohio" at The Ohio State University football contests.

As for team performance, it should come as no surprise that fans frequently begin to identify with a team due to the success of the franchise (Bass et al., 2013; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Wann et al. 1996). In fact, some work has found this to be the most influential factor (Aiken & Koch, 2009). End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, and Jacquemotte (2002) asked participants to list the teams with which they felt some level of identification and to rank the list from most preferred to least preferred. The authors then examined the success of these teams (e.g., winning percentage, Top 25 national ranking) and found that the teams listed were significantly more successful than one would have expected. For example, the teams listed had winning percentages far greater than .500. Additionally, those teams ranked higher in preference were more successful than those with a lower ranking. The authors concluded that fans utilize a team's past success as a criterion for determining which team (or teams) they choose to support. It warrants mention that non-performance factors can also serve as antecedents to team identification. For example, researchers report that trust in a team (e.g., belief that a team keeps its promises, Wu, Tsai, & Hung, 2012) and perceptions of a team's values (Groeneman, 2017) are also significant facilitators of identification.

In terms of player attributes, several investigators have found this to be a common antecedent of identification (Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996; Wu et al., 2012). Although player skill and ability are important (Aiken & Koch, 2009), non-performance characteristics matter as well (Nelson, 2004; Pritchard, Stinson, & Patton, 2010). For instance, it has been suggested that fans often begin to identify with teams composed of players that are attractive or similar to the fan (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). However, in a direct comparison of these two traits, Fisher (1998) found that similarity was of greater importance than attractiveness in the development of identification.

Summary of the Origins of Team Identification Individuals may form a connection with a team at any point in time, and that connection may strengthen over the years. It is important to note that until a team takes on personal importance and becomes an element of one's self-concept, although the individual may have an attraction to the team, he or she likely does not feel a sense of identification. Rather, team identification is expected to form as individuals reach the Attachment stage of the PCM. For those interested in sport marketing and sport consumer behavior, we have to recognize that those at the Attraction stage are seeking satisfaction or fulfillment of particular needs (e.g., social-situational, hedonic), but the connection does not yet involve identification. Team identification concerns aligning the team with one's self-concept and, in so doing, engaging in behaviors such as buying tickets, buying merchandise, and attending games in a manner that is more easily predicted. These points matter, because those that study team identification "in the field," that is, in actual sport settings, must be careful about reporting whether fans are identified. As we explain in the next section, there have been some problems with the interpretation of whether people do or do not identify with a team.

Measurement of Team Identification

To aid in the assessment of team identification, Wann and Branscombe (1993) developed the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). Investigators from several countries have successfully translated and used the SSIS in their work, including researchers in the United States (Gayton, Coffin, & Hearn, 1998), Germany (Straub, 1995), and Japan (Uemukai et al., 1995). Sample items from the SSIS are shown in Table 3.2.

Trail and James (2001) published a second measure of team identification that has had frequent use. Although the original work did not include a name for the scale, it has since been labeled the Team Identification Index (TII). The TII includes three items: (1) I already consider myself a fan of the [team name]; (2) I would feel a loss if I had to give up being a [team name] fan; and (3) Others recognize that I am a big [team name] fan. People typically have responded to the items on a seven-point scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" and "Strongly Agree."

We have written specifically about the SSIS and TII because they have been utilized most frequently by sport scholars. This is particularly true for the SSIS. In fact, as of early 2018, Wann and Branscombe's (1993) article introducing the

TABLE 3-2 Sample Items From the Sport Spectator Identification Scale

1. How important is it to you that the [team name] wins?										
Not Important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Very Important	
2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the [team name]?										
Not at All a Fan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Very Much a Fan	
3. How important is being a fan of the [team name] to you?										
Not Important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Very Important	

Note: Wann and Branscombe (1993).

SSIS had been cited more than 1,000 times. In a review of more than 100 articles utilizing team identification as a focal variable, we found the SSIS was included in over half of the studies. However, there are other measures of team identification besides the SSIS and the TII. For example, Fisher (1998) reported use of an eight-item scale that was also included in Kim and Kim's (2009) work. Swanson and colleagues (2003) included a seven-item scale modeled on a measure of organizational identification originally published by Mael and Ashforth (2001) and similar in design to the scale reported by Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn (1995).

Regardless of whether researchers have used the SSIS, the TII, or some other measure of identification, one of the challenges with previous work is the lack of consistency in characterizing levels of identification. Those studying team identification often use some technique to place respondents into high, moderate, or low team-identification groups (James, Delia, & Wann, in press). Some common methods used include a median split (e.g., Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Wann et al., 2004; Wann, Ensor, & Bilyeu, 2001; Wann & Schrader, 1997), upper and lower percentiles (e.g., Dimmock & Grove, 2005; Parker & Fink, 2010), a midpoint scale split (e.g., Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009), and, in some instances, grouping individuals somewhat arbitrarily (e.g., Wann & Grieve, 2005). However, because different researchers have used different points along the identification continuum to divide fans into various groups, it can be difficult to compare across studies. For example, utilizing the SSIS, Wann and Schrader (1997) averaged the item scores and characterized an individual scoring 5.1–7.0 as high identification; low identification included those scoring 1.0–5.0. However, in the work done by Madrigal and Chen (2008), those scoring 3.4–6.8 were characterized as high identification, with those scoring 1.0–3.2 as low identification. In another example, Lee and Ferreira (2011) characterized those averaging 6.0 or 7.0 as high identification, and those averaging 1.0 or 2.0 as low identification.

Assessing Team Identification as a Unidimensional Versus Multidimensional Construct A common characteristic of most team identification measures is that they assess identification as a unidimensional construct. As you

might guess from the prefix “uni,” unidimensional means one. In this sense, team identification is just a single concept or component, a person’s psychological connection to a team. However, think back to Tajfel’s (1978) vision of social identity: “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 63). Given this, Dimmock, Grove, and Eklund (2005) proposed that social identifications such as sport team identification include three elements: cognitive (knowledge of group membership), evaluative (value of group membership), and affective (emotional significance of group membership).

As a multi-dimensional construct, team identification would be composed of multiple elements. Heere and James (2007) proposed that a unidimensional measure of team identification, such as the SSIS, provides a measure of an individual’s sense of belonging (or connection) to a team. In other words, an assessment of whether a person feels a sense of connection with the team and the strength of that connection. Heere and James suggest further that a multi-dimensional measure of team identification allows for assessment of an individual’s self-concept, knowledge, and value of membership in a group and the emotional significance attached to the membership. That is, viewed as a multi-dimensional construct, team identification would include different components and may provide a more complete picture of the basis for one’s identification with a team.

Drawing from the work of Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), Heere and James (2007) reported their efforts to test a multi-dimensional measure of team identification they labeled the TEAM*ID. Following the standard scale development process established by Churchill (1999), Heere and James provided evidence of a six-dimension scale: public evaluation, private evaluation, interconnection to self, sense of interdependence, behavioral involvement, and cognitive awareness. Descriptions of these dimensions can be found in Table 3.3. Research conducted with the TEAM*ID scale has provided evidence of the reliability and validity of the scale (Heere & Katz, 2014; Katz & Heere, 2016; Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). Thus, the TEAM*ID scale is a viable option for researchers interested in assessing team identification as a multi-dimensional construct.

The choice to measure team identification with a uni- or multi-dimensional scale should be based on the goal(s) of the particular research project. Both scales provide a measure of whether an individual has a psychological connection with a sport team. By extension, it is possible to characterize the strength of an individual’s identification with a team. A unidimensional scale provides a simple, parsimonious measure of team identification. A multi-dimensional scale provides us with some understanding of what composes an individual’s identification with a team. Thus, if the research goal is to better understand why a person identifies with a team (i.e., what drives team identification), then a multi-dimensional scale is likely the proper choice. On the other hand, if the goal is to capture whether there is a psychological connection (and the strength of that connection), a unidimensional scale is more than sufficient.

TABLE 3.3 Dimensions Comprising the TEAM*ID Scale

Dimension	Description
Public Evaluation	How favorably others are perceived to regard a particular social identity.
Private Evaluation	How favorably others are perceived to regard one's own identity.
Interconnection to Self	The cognitive merging of a sense of self and an ingroup.
Sense of Interdependence	An individual's recognition that he or she is treated the same as other group members.
Behavioral Involvement	The degree to which a person engages in actions that directly implicate the focal social identity.
Cognitive Awareness	The degree of knowledge a person has of a group that directly implicates his or her identity with the group as a whole.

Note: From Heere and James (2007).

Misinterpreting Team Identification

James and his associates (in press) noted that through the first three decades of team identification research, much of the work included an interpretation problem (your authors are included in the group of researchers responsible for the misinterpretation). To understand the misinterpretation, it will be helpful to refer back to the sample items from the SSIS listed in Table 3.2 (we will focus on the SSIS, but the problem with misinterpretation can occur with any measure of team identification). As researchers, we typically average or sum scores to the items and report a team identification score. Once we have a set of team identification scores, we generally categorize them as high or low identification via one of the methods mentioned above. However, whether we use a midpoint split, a median split, or a tripartite split or treat the responses as continuous data, we have misinterpreted participant responses by incorrectly labeling "not identified" individuals as those with "low" identification.

Here is how the misinterpretation happens. The SSIS (and likely all team identification scales) includes positive and negative anchors. Individuals who score all team identification items as "1" are disagreeing with the items and reporting they do not identify with the focal team. Yet we have consistently characterized these participants as having a low level of team identification (and remember, your authors are a part of this "we"). As James et al. (in press) explain, there is a fundamental problem when researchers use anchors that purport a "not," "never," or "strongly disagree" condition, yet they interpret this "no" condition as "low" identification. Consider item 2 in the SSIS, which is

worded “How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the [team]?” The anchors for the item are “Not at all a fan” and “Very much a fan.” The individuals who read the anchors and choose “Not at all a fan” are reporting they do not identify with a focal team. Yet we have classified such individuals as having low team identification.

Consider the following examples presented by James et al. (in press).

Example 1: In their research on spectating enjoyment, Wann and Schrader (1997) explained “A median split of 5.1 on the subjects’ identification scores was used to divide the subjects into high ($n = 58$; $M = 6.1$, $SD = 0.7$, range = 5.1 to 7.9) and low ($n = 56$; $M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.1$, range = 1.0 to 5.0) groups” (p. 954). Notice the range for the low identification group, from 1 to 5.

Example 2: Investigating individuals’ causal attributions of game outcome, Madrigal and Chen (2008) noted “As expected, those in the high-identification group scored significantly higher on team identification ($n = 61$; $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.12$, range = 3.4–6.80) than did those in the low identification group ($n = 60$; $M = 2.08$, $SD = .67$, range = 1–3.20), $t(119) = -17.33$, $p < .001$ ” (p. 725). Thus, in this study, the range for the low identification group was from 1 to 3.20.

Example 3: Levin, Beasley, and Gilson (2008) studied the relationship between identification with NASCAR and intention to purchase products of NASCAR sponsors. They wrote “Total scores ranged from a low of 6 to a high of 42, with a mean of 32.4” (p. 199). The authors used a modified 6-item SSIS with scale range 1 to 7. Thus, some of those in the low identification group scored a 1 on each of the six items.

You may be thinking “So what? Why does this matter? Is this really just a problem of labeling?” Although some people might not think there is a problem here, or that it is a trivial concern at most, we believe the misinterpretation is much more than just a minor issue. Researchers have been reporting comparisons of high and low identified individuals which have in fact been comparisons of highly identified individuals and some combination of individuals with low and no identification. At the very least, our research has been plagued by a failure to recognize the not identified group.

Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R)

Assuming that we have sufficiently convinced you that the misinterpretation issue is a problem worth addressing, you may now be wondering if there is anything that can be done to remedy the situation. Thankfully, the answer is a resounding “YES!” Because the problem of misinterpretation has arisen from how team identification is assessed, a reasonable solution is to revise the measurement tool. James and his colleagues (in press) reported on their effort to revise the SSIS (the new scale is referred to as the SSIS-R) in an attempt to eliminate the misinterpretation of team identification scores.

The screening question and sample items from the SSIS-R are shown in Table 3.4. The first portion of the SSIS-R is designed to determine whether or not a person is identified with a focal team. This is accomplished via a screening item asking, "Do you identify yourself as a fan of the [team name], even if just a little bit?" The purpose of the screening question is to determine whether there is any level of identification (that is, psychological connection) with a target team. If a person does not identify as a fan, she or he would be directed to the next section of the questionnaire. If a person does identify with the team, even if just a little bit, she or he would respond to the items in the SSIS-R.

Along with the addition of the screening item, the anchors with the SSIS-R are different from the original SSIS. Individuals responding to the SSIS-R items should have some level of connection with the team, given their affirmative response to the screening item. Accordingly, they should not disagree with any item. Thus, the anchors were revised to reflect the fact that participants should have at least a minimal connection with the target team (a comparison of Tables 3.2 and 3.4 will highlight the changes in anchoring). Preliminary work using the SSIS-R is quite encouraging (James et al., in press). It appears that with the SSIS-R, we seem to be able to capture those that are not identified and separate them from those that do identify with a team.

To close out this section, we return once more to the question of whether "low identification" versus "not identified" really matters. We wholeheartedly believe it does. For sport scholars, it does matter that we are performing research correctly, that we are accurately reporting results, and that we serve our peers in the industry without misleading them. And, it does matter that we do our science well and to the best of our ability. Misinterpreting data and mislabeling participants is simply not the best science available. Scholars interested in sport fandom can and must do better. We believe the SSIS-R (or another scale with similar modifications) can assist in this matter.

TABLE 3.4 Sample Items From the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised

- Do you identify yourself as a fan of the [team name], even if just a little bit?
Please circle the appropriate letter: A. Yes B. No
- How important is it to you that the [team name] wins?
A Little Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very Important
 - How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the [team name]?
Slightly a Fan 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very Much a Fan
 - How important is being a fan of the [team name] to you?
A Little Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very Important

Note: James, Delia, and Wann (in press).

Athletes and Players as Points of Attachment

In the previous sections, we have examined the strong connections sport fans develop and maintain with teams. However, if you were to wander into a sporting goods store and happen upon the team apparel section, another form of attachment would become apparent. Specifically, many of the team jerseys for sale would contain the names and numbers of popular local and national sport figures. This reveals the fact that fans frequently become attached to specific players (Robinson & Trail, 2005; Robinson et al., 2004) and often imagine having social encounters with them (Keaton, Gearhart, & Honeycutt, 2014). In many cases, these players become heroes to fans (Bain-Selbo & Sapp, 2016; Griggs et al., 2012; Mandelbaum, 2004; Peetz, Parks, & Spencer, 2004). In the paragraphs that follow, we review the process of attachment to athletes and the hero worship of these public figures by examining the prevalence of sport heroes, the process of selecting a sport hero, and the consequences of when sport heroes fall from grace.

The Sports World as a Source of Heroes: The Prevalence of Sport Heroes

Research suggests that the sports world is a fairly consistent source of heroes for children, although parents and other family members are more likely to be listed as a hero (Stevens, Lathrop, & Bradish, 2003; Wallis, 1999). Sport heroes were nonexistent among 12- to 14-year-old Americans prior to the 1900s, but by mid-century it had emerged as an important category, accounting for 23 percent of choices (Averill, 1950; Darrah, 1898). More recent data provide evidence to confirm that sport figures serve as a relatively common exemplar category for children, at least among those residing in North America (Giuliano, Turner, Lundquist, & Knight, 2007). Although percentages vary across studies, most suggest that between 15 and 25 percent of children list a sport figure as their greatest hero (Foundation for Child Development, 1977; Harris, 1994; Stevens et al., 2003; Wallis, 1999). However, much higher percentages have been found (Parry, 2009). As for adults, interviews with older respondents revealed that these persons seldom have sport heroes (Smith, 1976). Thus, it appears that the relationship between age and sport hero worship is nonlinear, specifically, the inverted-U curve depicted in Figure 3.1 (Harris, 1986).

Selecting a Sport Hero: The Importance of Similarity

Social psychologists have established that individuals tend to be attracted to others with whom they share traits, characteristics, backgrounds, and so forth (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Byrne et al., 1986). Consequently, it should not be surprising that sport fans tend to resemble their sport heroes on both sport-related and unrelated dimensions. As for sport-related dimensions, researchers have found



FIGURE 3.1 Hypothesized Relationship Between Age and the Number of Sport Heroes

that among children who identified an athlete as their hero, 59 percent chose a sport figure excelling at the youngster's favorite sport (Cooper, Livingood, & Kurz, 1981). Additionally, children tend to select a sport hero who plays a similar position within a sport (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Russell, 1979). Research on non-sport traits has typically focused on race and gender. This literature indicates that individuals often adopt sport heroes with whom they share a race and/or gender (Castine & Roberts, 1974; Parry, 2009; Vander Velden, 1986), although female children often choose male sport figures as well (Balswick & Ingoldsbey, 1982; Harris, 1994). Of course, there are other important resemblance factors in addition to those noted above (e.g., nationality, see Parry, 2009). Because youngsters assign different levels of importance to the various components of the self (Harter, 1993), they may desire sport heroes who resemble themselves on a variety of traits and characteristics. One might speculate, for example, that left-handers tend to select other lefties, while disabled persons disproportionately select physically challenged athletes as their personal heroes.

When Sport Heroes Fall: The Impact of Athlete Transgressions

In the past few decades, a wide range of athlete transgressions have become public knowledge. These incidents have included a seemingly limitless variety of wrongdoings including marital infidelity, the use of performance enhancing drugs, and violent off-field actions involving rape and murder. For example, an archival investigation by Benedict and Yaeger (1998) revealed that 21 percent of players on NFL rosters had been charged with serious criminal offenses ranging from resisting arrest and armed robbery to kidnapping and homicide. And many of these players had multiple charges.

How do fans react when their heroes fall from grace? This is an important question given that athletes frequently serve as spokespersons (Ruhley, Runyan, & Lear, 2010), and athletes have the ability to develop their own brand

image (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Furthermore, given that trust in an athlete is a critical predictor of purchase intentions of the products he or she endorses (Tzoumaka, Tsiotsou, & Siomkos, 2016), an athlete's negative actions could potentially undermine his or her effectiveness as an endorser.

Although a variety of factors influence responses to athlete misdeeds, including intentionality (Sato, Ko, Park, & Tao, 2015) and locale (i.e., off-field versus on-field, see Sassenberg, 2015), research by Lee and his colleagues reveals that fans' moral reasoning strategies play a particularly important role (Lee, Kwak, & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016; Lee, Kwak, & Moore, 2015). Specifically, responses are impacted by the type of moral reasoning strategy utilized in response to the athlete's problematic behavior. Three moral reasoning strategies employed by fans are: moral rationalization, moral decoupling, and moral coupling (Bhattacharjee, Berman, & Reed, 2013). Descriptions of these strategies are found in Table 3.5.

Lee et al. (2015) primed participants in a manner consistent with one of the moral reasoning strategies. Respondents then read and reacted to a scenario describing a successful athlete whose career had been tainted by a tax-evasion scandal. The athlete was rated on a variety of dimensions such as attractiveness and trustworthiness. The results indicated that the moral reasoning strategies had a powerful impact on the participants' evaluations of the athlete. Specifically, ratings of the athlete were particularly negative when participants had adopted (via priming) a moral coupling approach. That is, when participants were less able to separate the athlete from the transgression, they were more critical of

TABLE 3.5 Moral Reasoning Strategies That May Be Used in Response to Athlete Transgressions

Strategy	Description	Sport Example
Moral rationalization	Evaluating immoral actions as less immoral; often involves justifying the actions or placing the blame on others	"Athletes can sometimes be excused from their immoral actions because they are under a great deal of pressure."
Moral decoupling	Separating the act from the actor; often involves criticizing the immoral behavior while simultaneously praising performance	"Fans should separate an athlete's off-field behaviors when judging his or her performance; rating should be based solely on how he or she plays."
Moral coupling	Difficulty in the justification (i.e., moral rationalization) or separation (i.e., moral coupling) of immoral act; likely results in attitudes toward transgressor	"Fans should consider an athlete's off-field actions when assessing their value and performance."

this person. In a second study, Lee et al. (2015) allowed participants to select their own moral reasoning strategy. The findings indicated that when an athlete's transgression was not related to his or her on-field performance, people tend to choose a decoupling (i.e., separating) moral approach to understanding the situation. Conversely, when the transgression was relevant to the athlete's on-field actions, individuals tended to choose either a moral coupling or rationalization strategy.

Lee and his associates further extended our understating of the impact of one's moral reasoning strategy in responses to athlete transgressions by examining the role of athlete identification (Lee et al., 2016). In this investigation, the authors utilized a real-life scandal involving NFL player Ray Rice (Rice had physically assaulted his fiancée). Participants completed an assessment of their estimated identification with Rice prior to the incident and were then exposed to a videotape of the assault. They then reported their emotional reactions to the images shown, their moral reasoning strategies, and their attitudes toward the transgressor. The results indicated that higher levels of identification with Rice were associated with fewer negative emotions about the event as "sport fans' identification functions as a suppressor in avoiding the expression of negative moral emotions" (Lee et al., 2016, p. 186). As a result, highly identified persons were able to select moral reasoning strategies that separated the athlete from the action (i.e., decoupling and rationalization). These strategies, in turn, helped fans with a strong attachment to the player to be more forgiving of the player's transgression and maintain a positive evaluation of the athlete.

Some Final Thoughts

One of the important takeaway points from this chapter is that sport fans can and do connect with a variety of sport objects. Although we are not quite sure which object may have the most influence on sport fans, if we had to choose, team identification would get both of our votes. But the truth is, we are still just learning about fans' attachment to all things sport, and, as a result, there are many interesting questions left to answer. For example, what is the impact of having connections with multiple objects? That is, are there differences between fans who simply connect with a team and those who feel an attachment to both a team and a star player on that team? What about connections to multiple teams in the same league? Or connections to players who perform for a rival team? Also, does forming a connection with one sport object lead to connections with other objects? For example, team identification may impact the other connections fans form. Heere and James (2007) address this idea in their work on group identification, explaining how attachment with a group such as a sport team may influence identification with other groups (e.g., university identification, city identification). As you can see, researchers should remain quite busy over the next few decades uncovering the impact of sport connections on fan affect, behavior, and cognition.

And finally, it warrants mention that forming attachments with a player can be risky in today's sport landscape given the large amount of player movement from team to team. That is, fans who establish a strong connection with a player for a favorite team may soon find that player on a different team. In fact, it is

not unheard of for players to sign a new contract with a rival team (e.g., members of the Boston Red Sox who have chosen to play for the New York Yankees, and vice versa). Perhaps fans will eventually tire of identifying with a player only to have to root against that person in subsequent seasons. Ultimately, as the classic Jerry Seinfeld joke states, fans may end up cheering for uniforms rather than players in them. Research on player attachment should continue to investigate fan connections to athletes and, in particular, examine how player movement impacts the processes of connections and hero worship among fans.