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While there is a plethora of literature on fan identification, specifically high or lowly identified fans, there is no literature on who these highly and lowly identified fans actually are. The goal of this research paper is to fill the void in that section of NFL fan literature and discover what demographics of fans are the most highly and lowly identified. In order to find out who is a highly or lowly identified fan, a survey must be administered that will effectively test the characteristics of each participant. This will make the respondents classifiable as either a highly or lowly identified fan. After the classification process is done, the demographics can be related to the highly or lowly identified fans to see which demographics are most likely to exhibit highly or lowly identified behavior.

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Highly and Lowly Identified Fans in the NFL

During the mid-1960's a major transformation occurred in the United States. Professional football had overtaken the once all powerful king of sports, professional baseball, to become the most popular sport in America (Harris Poll, 1965). The NFL has grown to such an extent that its goal of this year's (2013) revenue earned will be just over \$9 billion making it the most lucrative in the world. Even more impressive is the goal the NFL has set for themselves. The NFL has set out to reach \$25 billion in annual revenue by the year of 2027 (Kaplan, 2013).

One reason for the growth of the NFL are the fans. Based on previous findings, the beginnings of becoming a fan are developed mostly by the adult influence of sport consumption around them (Karastamatis, 2009). This means that many children may be swayed to grow into fans of specific teams because of adult influence. Another research article yielded results that showed sport fandom was seen as a highly social activity with very few negative consequences for interpersonal relations, and that sport fandom was extremely important to the participants (Wann & Friedman, 2003). This means that fandom plays an important role in many fan's lives.

There are many pieces of literature that explain why fans act in a particular way and describe varying degrees of fan loyalty, motivation and identification, specifically highly and lowly identified fans. However, there is no literature on who these highly and lowly identified fans actually are. We know that they exist but we don't know who they are. Which specific demographics (age, gender, marital status, income level) prove to be the most highly and lowly identified? The goal of this research paper is to fill the void in that section of NFL fan literature and discover what demographics of fans are the most highly and lowly identified.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to uncover whether Social Identity Theory is responsible for reasons why NFL fans cheer for their favorite team. Social Identity Theory helps understand the motivations that underpin intergroup behaviors in the realm of sports and to capture the consequences associated with these actions (Amiot, Sansfacon, Winnifred, 2013). The theory states individuals strive to join social categories which reflect positively on their self-concept (Lock, Taylor, Funk & Darcy, 2012). The self-concept has two main identities (Dhurup, 2012). First, is the personal identity is how one feels about themselves. Second are the social identities, which are the groups that one chooses to interact with. Social identification has proved to be an important aspect of the self-concept and allows for the association of vicarious achievement through their social group (Kowalski & Ware, 2012). In order to keep this positive self-concept, fans will join groups that they believe to be equal or slightly better than their own self-concept (Cialdini et al., 1976). However, once the fan notices that the associated group is reflecting poorly on the self, they choose to either leave or try and positively influence the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Thus, this theory suggests that fans choose teams that they perceive to be on the same level as them. For example, a higher income family may decide to identify with the Patriots due to the pretentious and smug attitudes of their fans while a lower income fan may choose to identify with the tough working class nature of the Buffalo Bills or Pittsburgh Steelers. The theory has also assisted researchers to understand how and why individuals select certain identities, given many alternatives (Dhurup, 2012). Another possible theory that could be

attributed to fans liking a specific NFL team is BIRGing. The term BIRGing simply means basking in reflective glory. Cialdini describe BIRGing as “behavior among sports fans that involves publicly displaying one's association with a successful team to enhance one's social image and self-evaluation” (1976). Cialdini went on to state certain BIRG characteristics such as saying “we” won, or wearing apparel from the team (1976).

Further studies went on to describe BIRGing as a person's attempt to associate a successful other with themselves (Bashaw, Bristol, Hunt, 1999). This allows for another's success to become their own which promotes a way of vicarious living. It was found that BIRGing has a strong correlation with how much a fan identifies with their favorite team (Bodet & Bernache-Assollant, 2011). However, a study in 2003 proved that those who BIRG are not perceived more positively by others in comparison to fans who do not BIRG (End & Dietz-Uhler, Demakakos, Grantz, and Biviano). This study makes states a point that BIRGing may be about one's own self esteem rather than an act to improve social standing.

High levels of team identification have been associated with BIRGing behaviors (Trail, Anderson & Fink, 2005). Therefore, from this research it is clear that BIRGing is directly correlated to the fans team identification. It is possible that fans choose their favorite team based on how they perceive themselves and how much they are able to BIRG. Based on the literature, these two theories support the notion that fans choose teams that allow for them to feel good about themselves. By choosing a favorite team, the fan joins a social group that they perceive is on the same social level as them. This helps fulfill the social identity aspect of the self-concept. After the social identity is fulfilled, the personal identity is then either satisfied or unsatisfied by the ability to BIRG. Thus, the combination of these two theories supports that fans choose teams based on how they perceive themselves and the need to be associated to a group that is winning.

Highly Identified Fans

According to leading researcher Daniel Wann, team identification has been defined as an individual's psychological connection to a team (2006). Team identification is important because it contributes to fan behaviors such as consumption, aggression and well-being (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008). According to Potter and Keene, highly identified fans are emotional in nature, with their social identity depending in part, on the team's performance (2012). These fans are much more likely to follow the team whenever and wherever they play (Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000).

Highly identified fans are also much more likely experience post-game positive affect after a team win than lowly identified fans (Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002). This means that highly identified fans engage activities such as watching post-game interviews, and reading articles or listening to radio shows about the game. For example, highly identified fans are much more likely to call into radio shows and have their opinion be heard than lowly identified fans after a team win (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). This also means that when the team loses, the highly identified fans take the loss very seriously exhibiting increased levels of post-game negative affect after a team loss (Wann, 2001).

Many highly identified fans have also been known to perform pre-game, mid-game, and post-game rituals in order to manage anxiety that can be caused by the level of identification they exhibit (Cyr, Grieve, Mienaltowski, Ostrowski, Wilson, 2013). This anxiety is solely produced through the highly identified fan. Many people could be watching the same exact game and show no signs of anxiety. In fact, according to Wann and Branscombe participants of their study reporting zero superstitions indicated significantly lower scores of team identification levels

(1993). In addition, a study that used fans from the University of Florida found that highly identified fans are much more likely to wear blue and orange earrings, shoes, shirts, hats, and shorts-perhaps the entire week during football season-as a consequence of their identification with the team (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002).

It is clear from these sources the amount of anxiety and stress that comes with being a highly identified fan. Also, it is highly identified fans that stick through not only the good seasons, but the bad seasons as well. Highly identified fans are in every sense “long term” fans which means they have an emotional connection with the team, rather than just being a fan because the team is winning (Bizman & Yinon, 2002). In addition, a study from 2007 showed that the more one identifies with a specific team, the more likely they are invested in that team in various ways such as following the team through T.V/internet/radio, how many games they attend, and how many years they’ll remain a fan of that team (Afthinos, Nassis, Theodorakis, Vlachopoulos, 2007).

Low Identified Fans

Lowly identified fans have shown to be almost the exact opposite of their highly identified counterparts. Lowly identified fans are much more likely to distance themselves from their favorite team after a loss or losing season (Wann & Branscombe, 1992). Dolan and Wann (1994) went on to state that while highly identified fans develop strategies to maintain a positive self-concept in trying times, lowly identified fans are much less likely to develop self-concept saving strategies. This means that lowly identified fans are much more likely to “abandon ship” or leave when the team starts to do poorly. Wann and Branscombe found similar results in their

1993 study that showed highly identified fans are much more likely to stay loyal when the team is performing poorly while lowly identifies fans will engage in self-distancing tactics. It has also been shown that lowly identified fans are much more likely to CORF than highly identified fans. This then means that lowly identified fans are also less likely to BIRG (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Contrary to highly identified fans, fans that exhibit low identification are much less likely to display angry or violent behavior based on poor team performance (Dimmock & Grove, 2005).

Wann and Branscombe later conducted a study that showed lowly identified fans are much less likely to attend games, pay for tickets, buy team sponsored products, and purchase team merchandise (1993). They also found that fans that were highly identified had higher expectations for the team while lowly identified fans showed that little to no expectations at all (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In a study by Gwinner and Swanson, it was shown that lowly identified fans are much more likely to exhibit a passive relationship with their favorite team. Passive in this sense means that they have a favorite team but there are other factors that are attracting them to the game more. Some of these factors are social interaction opportunities, stress-relieving qualities, and entertainment value (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). In addition, Keenan, Page, and Wann found that being a lowly identified sports fan is actually not good for your self-concept (2009). They went on to say that in order for sports to improve the self-concept one must have a highly identified relationship with a specific team (Keenan, Page, Wann, 2009). Thus, lowly identified fans may exhibit low levels of self-concept.

Classifications of Fans

There are many pieces of literature that study the qualifications of what it means to be a fan. Bashaw, Bristol and Hunt state that there are five main types of sport fans (1999). The five fan types are temporary, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional. Fans that fit into the temporary and local fan categories would be considered low identified fans while the devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional fan would be classified under highly identified fans.

Temporary fans described as fans that are specifically attached to a single player (Bashaw, Bristol, Hunt, 1999). The article discusses many of the people who watched the National Basketball Association (NBA) in the late 80's and 90's were fans of Michael Jordan. This led those fans to become fans of the Chicago Bulls which made them fans of the NBA. However, these fans are time-bound seeing that the career of one player doesn't last forever. Once Jordan left, these types of fans left with him. So ultimately, this type of fan isn't concerned with the result of who wins and loses but how their favorite player on that team performs. The team winning is more of an added bonus. These temporary fans often end up becoming attached to multiple players at once with often allows them to identify with multiple teams at once.

The local fans are a fan of a specific team just because they are the "local team." In other words, this fan roots for their favorite team only because they are in the same geographic vicinity as them or because they're the hometown team, for example, a fan who likes the Buffalo Bills because they're from Buffalo. While we generally see more fans of the local team in any area in the NFL, there is one key distinction between the local fan and a highly identified fan that lives in the same area as their favorite team. Going back to the Bills fan from Buffalo, if the organization decided to move to Toronto, the local fan would not root for the Bills anymore.

While the highly identified fans would unquestionably be upset if the team left, they would still be a fan of the team. When a fan cheers for a team only because they are local is when they are lowly identifiable.

However, the fan does not have to live in that geographic vicinity. The fan just may identify highly with a specific city because they lived there at one point in their lives. Either way, the affiliation and identification is based solely on geography. Lastly, based on the characteristics it is clear that local and temporary fans use the identification with their team as a peripheral object for their self-identity. This means that these types of fans are only identifying for social reasons while the devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional fans use their identification for the personal identity of their self-concept.

With a devoted fan, the boundaries of the first two types of fans (temporary and local) do not exist. The authors go on to relate the concept of ownership in consumer behavior literature to the concept of ownership in sport. They state that devoted “fans spend emotional capital in "acquiring" a sport, team, or personality as their own.” (Bashaw, Bristol, Hunt, 1999, p.445).

The fanatical fan is much like the devoted fan although the fanatical fan engages in behavior that is beyond the normal devoted fan. These fans are still socially accepted by friends family and other people one may encounter. However the main difference between fanatical and dysfunctional is that while the fanatical fan identifies highly with a specific team, there is still one aspect of their lives that they view as more important such as work or family or religion.

Lastly, the dysfunctional fan uses their favorite team as their primary form of identification. These types of fans often exhibit violent, aggressive behavior when the team is performing poorly. The authors describe dysfunctional fan behavior as “anti-social, disruptive,

and deviant.” (Bashaw, Bristol, Hunt, 1999, p. 446). Aggressive behavior directed at others in the form of verbal abuse is typical of those who are clinically diagnosed as socially dysfunctional (cf., Sjoestroem, Eder, Malm, & Beskow, 2001). Dysfunctional fans have been defined as abnormal or displaying impaired functioning as it relates to socialization and social groups in the sports context (Wann & Wakefield, 2006). Wann and Wakefield’s findings showed that dysfunctional fans are much more likely berate officials, believe alcohol consumption is a necessary game day activity, be frequent consumers of sports media, and complain to stadium services (2006). These fans literally let the success or failure of their favorite team dictate their mood every day of their lives. To lend even more insight into the psyche of these fans, the dysfunctional fan identifies himself or herself so strongly with being a fan, that this identification interferes with the ability to perform normal role behavior outside of the behavior as a fan.

Wann and Wadill studied how much of a fan someone is by knowing two things, who their favorite team is and how good that team is. For example, if a Jaguars fan identifies highly with the team during a season in which they’re bad such as the current one it shows the researcher that they most likely fall under the fan category of devoted, fanatical, or dysfunctional. However if someone that completes the survey has low identification with the team during a season where they are very good then the researcher knows that they will probably fall under the time bound or local fan category. Although sport fans may identify less when their team is bad, researchers Branscombe and Reysen studied how sport fans compare to other types of fans. Their findings suggest that sport fans and other fans are very much alike in regards to feeling a sense of belonging when identified with a specific group or team. For the sake of this study these selections of literature are all crucial in order to be able to classify sport fans correctly

Demographics

According to multiple studies demographics play a major role in the level of fan one is. Another important piece of literature regarding the influence of demographics studied fan identification and involvement among professional baseball in Taiwan. To do this it tested the relationship of demographic variables which were age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, parenthood status, and monthly income. From the survey, three results were gathered. Firstly there are significant differences of fans' marital status in Image Identification factor and Altitude Identification. Next there are significant differences of fans' parenthood status in Image Identification and Altitude Identification, there are significant differences of fans age in Identification which includes Image Identification factor, Altitude Identification factor, Team Identification factor, Team Involvement factor, and By-product Involvement factor. Lastly, there are significant differences in fans' educational attainment in identification and there are significant differences of fans' monthly incomes in identification. The study showed how many varying factors there are demographically that could contribute to why a fan either highly or lowly identifies with their favorite team.

According to researcher Beth Dietz-Uhler, gender can be a major determinant in the level of sport fan one is. In an article from the Journal of Sport Behavior Dietz-Uhler examined the relationship between male and female college students in regard to their sport fan behavior. The research was gathered through a questionnaire which was designed to figure out whether they considered themselves to be sport fans and why they considered themselves to be sports fans. Dietz-Uhler found that an equal number of males and females considered themselves to be sports fans (Dietz-Uhler, End, Harrick, Jacquemotte, 2000). However the data also suggested that males identified more strongly with being a fan than women did. Based on the research from Dietz-

Uhler, if only “dysfunctional” fans were to be tested, most of the sample will be men. In later research, Dietz-Uhler conducted further research that studied the correlation between sport involvement and being a sports fan among men and women and how it affects male and female popularity and found that it’s more popular for men to be a sports fan and participating in sports more so than it was for women. Also, in a later article Daniel Wann found conclusive evidence that being a fan is much more a male dominated environment. Wann states “males reported significantly higher levels of fandom and almost one half of female participants chose not to identify a favorite team, compared to only 25% of males” (Melnick & Wann, 2004, p. 7). Wann also went on to say among the men and women who did identify, males displayed significantly higher levels of team identification than females.

Further, Daniel Wann and Paul Wadill go in depth about certain demographics that make a good sports fan (2004). Wann and Wadill studied the relationship between gender role orientation and their involvement of being a sports fan. To do this, they had 336 college students complete a questionnaire packet which asked the participants level of sport fandom, masculinity, and femininity. Based off the results to the survey, Wann and Wadill discovered that the more masculine the fan the more likely the level of fan engagement to be heightened (2004). The anatomical sex does not matter. The authors also found that femininity was not related to sport fandom at all. From the aforementioned sources, it clear that demographics play a huge role in how highly or lowly a fan identifies. However, it is not known which demographics exhibit highly or lowly identified behavior. It is for this reason that demographics will be tested in the survey.

Method

Sample Selection

In order to gather the 300 desired respondents, NFL fans older than 17 will be asked to complete the survey. The entire St. John Fisher College campus community will make up a majority of the responses. Among those being tested are freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. In addition to those students are fifth or sixth year students as well. The sample also includes faculty and staff members due to concern about response rate. Having responses from the faculty and staff is crucial for gaining data on the older demographics from 30-60.

In addition to the St. John Fisher community, the faculty from Bethlehem High School has agreed to take part in the survey. Since the average age of faculty member is 47.3 years old, Bethlehem will help gain more information on the older demographics that are needed. Also, the male to female ratio in the faculty is 34% to 64%. So, not only will this account for some of the older demographic, it will also allow for more women to take my survey. While some older demographic results are expected to come from the Fisher community, it would be risky to rely solely on those responses.

Lastly, the AAA branch located in Albany, New York has also agreed to distribute the survey. While this may seem like an odd place to give the survey because AAA has nothing to do with sports, it has a few perks. First, AAA is a melting pot of employees. There are people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds who work there so there's a possibility that many diverse responses are returned. Second, since a good contact has been made with the branch manager, all of the AAA Members (518 Area Code) email addresses will be available to distribute the survey. While a low response rate is expected from the members because they have no incentive to

complete the survey, it is still a resource that can make a big difference in gaining diverse respondents (See Appendix G for external contacts).

Variables of Interest

One of the most obvious confounding variables in this study is the idea of “in season” versus “out of season.” It has been shown that many fans will identify less with their team when that team is out of season (Wann, 2003). Unfortunately, the 2013-2014 NFL season has just been completed. So team identification may be lower since the season has just ended. Although not proven in prior research, one case in which identity may be higher when the season ends is when you team wins the championship. For example In addition, authors Bizman and Yinon studied the effect that winning and losing had on a fans willingness to identify with their favorite team.

To retrieve this data, they measured self-esteem and emotions when fans were exiting the arena. Half of the fans were given the opportunity to increase or decrease their association with the team before the measures of self-esteem and emotions; the remaining fans were given the opportunity after the measures. The results of the study show that fans tend to associate more with their team after a win than a loss. This could impact the study in two ways. Either the fan identifies more highly because the team had a good season or the fan is left with the lasting effect of a below average season in which case they may identify less. However, due to the scope of the project there is no way to control for this variable.

Another variable that can't be controlled for is which specific teams are received in the survey as the participants' favorite team. Although in a perfect world it would be very nice to analyze one team, this is just not possible for this project. So there will most likely be vast array of the 32 teams of the NFL. The goal is to receive enough participants that identify with certain

teams in order to have team oriented data as well. Some of the teams that are expected to account for a majority of the results are the Buffalo Bills, New York Giants, New York Jets, and possibly New England Patriots. This assumption is based on the close proximity of these team too where the surveys will be conducted.

Also, it was found that varying level of status of NFL teams effect the level to which one BIRG's or CORF's (Bernache-Assollant & Chantal, 2011). In that context status means how good the team is that current year. The authors found that middle status teams are more likely to BIRG than any other team status. To account for this, records will be compiled for every NFL team. After it is determined which teams are good or bad the BIRG and CORF theory discussed in the Bernache-Assollant and Chantal article can be addressed and accounted for. This can be done by figuring out who the participant's favorite team is and then making adjustments as needed. So a middle of the road team such as the New York Giants may have fans that are more prone to BIRGing behavior because they're a middle status team while a Denver Broncos fan may still be a highly identified team but just not BIRG as often because they are one of the better teams in the league. So while BIRGing and CORFing are unquestionably good predictors of how much a fan identifies the aforementioned points must be taken into account in order for the survey results to be valid.

Lastly, the main point of this research was to be able to fill the void in NFL fan literature in which we don't know who the highly and lowly identified fans are. However, all 32 NFL teams have the demographics of their season ticket holders so finding the data of a season ticket holder will be irrelevant since their demographic information is already known. Therefore, in the survey, the question will be asked if the participant is a season ticket holder or not. While their data will most likely still be used for the project because of the uncertain of the quantity of

respondents it's important to note that he or she is already accounted for by their favorite NFL team.

Data Collection Instrument

In order to conduct this study, an online survey was utilized. An online survey is the best option for data collection for this particular study for a few reasons. The first reason is time. Once the participant is finished with the survey their answers are instantly accessible and ready to be stored in the qualtrics software. That makes the online survey very time efficient in comparison to other survey methods such as postal or telephone surveys. Another reason this type of survey is effective is because the participants remain completely anonymous. While in telephone or face-to-face interviews the participants may give untruthful answers in order to satisfy the interviewer. In addition, the interviewer may also probe the respondent into the answer they want to hear which is known as rater error. Lastly, the online survey generated through Qualtrics is free so there is no cost affiliated with the survey. So the online survey was chosen based on time, cost and the validity of answers from participants.

The online survey is made up of specific questions to decipher whether the participant is a highly or lowly identified fan. To do this, the aforementioned classifications were used to help figure out who is highly or lowly identified. The survey is made up of three blocks. The first block consists of three questions which intended to figure team specific data out by asking who the participants favorite team is and why. The first question asked what the participant's favorite team is by the use of a drop down box that has all 32 teams available to select. However, there is also an option that allows a participant to select "No favorite team." This option is in place because previous research has shown that not everyone has a favorite team.

The second question intended to figure out why the participants like that team and only appears if a favorite team is selected from the first question. If no team is selected in question one then skip-logic is used and the participant is moved to the second block of questions. However, if the participant chooses a favorite team as planned, they are given five options to pick from. These options were chosen from numerous selections of literature and seem to be the most likely reasons why a fan would choose to like a team. The five options are the “local team,” “family tradition,” “favorite player,” “friends like them,” and “they are a winning team.” However, it is known that there are other reasons why fans identify so an “other box” is available for fans to type an answer into. The final question of the first block asked if they participant is a season ticket holder of their favorite team and only appears if the respondent has selected a team from the first question. This question is in place because it has been shown that when a fan owns season tickets that they identify more with their team than those who do not own season tickets (Wann, 1990).

The second block of questions is designed to figure out the specific fan characteristics of the participant taking the survey. This block consists of 8 questions that were designed based on results from numerous studies on fan identity (Wann & Branscombe, 1990, Karastamatis, 2009, Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008, Branscombe & Reysen, 2010). To understand and categorize fans as highly or lowly identified, a Likert Scale was used for the questions about characteristics (See Appendix A). The 1-5 Likert scale was used instead of the 1-7. The main reason for this is to reduce the gray area between a 5 and a 6 or a 3 and a 4. Also, previous research has shown to use 1-5 Likert scales rather than 1-7. With that being said the 1-5 scale will be used. The scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. If the participants answer with an agree (4) or a strongly agree (5) they will be given 1 point towards that specific characteristic which then leads

them into certain classifications which then leads to either high or low identification. Based on their point totals toward each characteristic, it will be apparent which classification they belong in. Ultimately the intention of the questions is to be able to place the respondents into these five classifications which then categorizes them as either highly or lowly identified fans.

The last block of the survey is designed figure out certain demographics. The four demographics that will be tested are age, gender, marital status, and income level. Based on prior research, these four in particular are very important for many reasons (Dietz-Uhler, End, Harrick, Jacquemotte, 2000). Firstly, based on certain results the sport marketer can start beginning to see which ages are most likely to be a highly or lowly identified fan. Also, the relationship between why fans identify and their age can be tested. For example, do most 22 year olds mainly identify with their team because their favorite player is on that team? When the data is collected, singular relationships can be tested between each demographic used and if they're highly or lowly identified fans like the example that was just mentioned with age.

Data Collection Procedure

The survey was first designed in early January of 2014 and was pilot tested with the assistance of Dr. Dane-Staples. This ensured that the survey would be absolutely perfect before it was sent out. Since the pilot testing, numerous revisions have been made. Some revisions were small such as capitalization or grammar issues while some questions needed to be entirely reworded. The first survey that was turned in had issues with how vague some of the questions were. For example, the word violent was used in a question but it wasn't articulated to the reader what they were or weren't being violent towards. In addition, the word distance was used in a

question but it wasn't clear what that actually meant. The survey is currently going through a final evaluation to make sure that it is perfect before being sent out.

Once the final evaluation was completed the survey was emailed to the St. John Fisher College community, faculty and staff. In addition, the Bethlehem high school faculty and AAA Motor club and leisure travel organization also took part in the survey to represent much of the older demographic. Once the respondents finished the survey, the data was collected through the Qualtrics software which is the online survey generator being used. When participants complete their survey it is crucial that their specific answers be analyzed right away since each one must be identified as a highly or lowly identified fan.

A reminder email was not sent out to the St, John Fisher College Community, Bethlehem High School or AAA of Albany because the target sample was collected the first time the survey was sent out.

Data Analysis Plan

The survey consists of a total of 16 questions. Each of these questions has a specific role in determining certain aspects for each participant. Question one asks if the participant has a favorite team. This question is in place to figure out descriptive statistics for each team. When an individual picks a team their certain demographics can be assessed for that specific team. Question 2 was designed to figure out the root cause as to why they are a fan or their favorite team. To analyze this question, the answers will be coded as follows, local team =1, family tradition=5, favorite player=3, friends like them=4, they are a winning team=2. The answers are coded like this in order to be able to interpret which fans are more highly identified fans. From

the literature we know that someone who likes a team because it is family tradition is more highly identified than someone who likes a team because they are local.

The more highly identified answer the participant chooses, the higher the point score they'll receive. Question three asks if the participant is a season ticket holder which is another attempt to figure out identity. The respondent will receive a 1 for answering yes and a 0 for answering no. There was a total of 9 Likert scale questions on the survey. Each Likert scale question gave the respondent the ability to gain 5 points at the very most and 1 at the very least. So the total amount of points that could be received for the 9 Likert scale questions was 45. However, due to the wording of four of the questions, some of the Likert scale questions had to be coded differently into SPSS. What this means is based on the way some questions were asked, "Strongly Agree" was sometimes a good thing while in other cases "Strongly Agree" was a bad thing. For example, one question stated "It is "cool" to like my favorite team." In this case, strongly agree earned participants a score of 1 because it implies they watch the games not because they want to themselves, but because it's a social activity. While another question stated "I act violently towards objects after my favorite team loses." In this case, an answer of "Strongly Agree" gave the respondent a full 5 points.

The total number a participant can have is 50 points which would be as highly identified as possible. Any participant that scored a 30 or above was considered a highly identified fan while 19 and lower was considered a lowly identified fan. Any total above 19 and below 30 was considered "middle identified." This means that they tend to have characters of both highly and lowly identified fans but do not completely fit into either level of identifications. After that, the relationship between highly and lowly identified fans can be measured between all tested demographics. An example of this would be findings that conclude that a 30 year old male,

married and middle income are the most highly identifiable NFL fans. Also, the demographics which exhibit the lowest identifiable behavior will also be known. Lastly, since the participants check what their favorite team is, specific team information will be compiled. This will show which demographics are most highly and lowly identified for each specific team.

Results

The following results indicate how the St. John Fisher College Campus Community (students, faculty, and staff), the Bethlehem High School faculty, and the AAA branch of Albany New York responded to the “Fan Identity” survey. 429 people participated in the survey, however only 386 answered had a 90% completion rate. For the sake of consistent results, the 386 participants with a 90% completion rate were used. Of the 386 respondents, 172 qualified as highly identified while 198 qualified as middle identified. Surprisingly, only 16 participants qualified as lowly identified. So while a combined 96 percent of people fell under the classification of either highly or middle identified, a minuscule 4 percent fell under the lowly identified classification. The following subsections will specifically uncover how demographics relate to whether a fan is lowly or highly identified.

Age

Of the 386 responses being used, 380 responded to the demographic question concerning age. As seen in Appendix B, there was a total of 221 respondents who answered “18-24,” 74 who answered “25-40,” 64 who answered “41-59,” and 21 who answered “60+.” For the 221 responses for “18-24,” 129 were highly identified, 88 were middle identified, and 4 were lowly identified. As for the 74 respondents who answered “25-40,” 26 were highly identified, 42 were middle identified, and 6 were lowly identified. Moving on to the participants who selected “41-

59,” 14 reported as highly identified, 47 reported as middle identified, and 3 reported as lowly identified. Lastly, for those who answered “60+,” 3 qualified as highly identified, 18 as middle identified, and 0 for lowly identified. The Chi Squared test proved a .001 result. This means that there is a significant difference between age and if one is highly or lowly identified.

Gender

A total of 377 of the 386 respondents answered the question of which gender they are (see Appendix C). 114 males turned out to be highly identified in comparison to only 58 females. However, 114 females proved to be middle identified while only 78 males had the same distinction. Lastly, 10 females proved to be lowly identified compared to only 3 males. The Chi Square test proved that there is a significant difference between gender and being highly or lowly identified.

Income Level

As shown in Appendix D, only 368 participants answered the question pertaining to income level. The most frequent answer selected was “still in school” which was selected 118 times. From these 118 results, 68 were highly identified, 48 were middle identified, and 2 were lowly identified. The next most frequent answer was “\$10,000-\$29,999” which 104 people selected. Of those 104 people, 56 were highly identified, 45 were middle identified, and 3 were lowly identified. Next, the answer of \$100,000 received 49 total results. 19 of those 49 constituted as highly identified while 30 qualified as middle identified. However, there were 0 respondents who selected \$100,000 that qualified for being lowly identified.

From there, the choices of “\$30,000-\$49,000” and “\$70,000-\$99,999” both had a total of 34 responses. For the answer of “\$30,000- \$49,000,” there proved to be 13 highly identified, 19

lowly identified, and 2 lowly identified while for “\$70,000-\$99,999” there was 6 highly identified, 26 middle identified, and 2 lowly identified. The least selected answer was \$50,000-\$69,999 with only 29 responses. For this answer, 6 responded as highly identified, 22 were middle identified, and 1 was lowly identified. The Chi Square test deciphered that there are significant differences between income level and being highly and lowly identified by yielding a result of .001.

Marital Status

The last demographic tested was marital status, in which 376 participants responded. A whopping 252 of these 376 participants reported being single, or never married. Of the 252, 136 reported being highly identified, 109 middle identified, and 7 lowly identified. 113 participants then responded that they were married or in a domestic partnership. Out of these responses, 31 reported to be highly identified, 76 were middle identified, and 6 qualified as being lowly identified. Between divorced and widowed there was only a total of 11 responses. 2 of the 8 divorce responders report high levels of identification while one of the 3 widow responses qualified as highly identified. The Chi Square test proved that there is a significant difference between one’s marital status and their level of fan identification by yielding a .001 result.

Most Highly and Lowly Identified Fan

According to the results, the most highly identifiable fan of the NFL is a male who is 18-24, single or never married and still in school. This means that highly identified fans will most likely be a male who is 18-24, single or never married and still in school. The most lowly identifiable fan is a female from 25-40, who makes \$10,000-\$29,999 that is single or never married. These results do not mean that all fans that fit this demographic mold will definitely be

highly or lowly identified. However, the results show what the most likely fan identification level would be. Specific team information was able to be gathered for the Buffalo due to the amount of results that were recorded for each team. 128 results proved that the Buffalo Bills most highly identified fan is an 18-24 year old male, who is single/never married with an income level of \$10,000-\$29,999 (See Appendix F).

Conclusions

It's clear from this study and from previous works that all NFL fans exhibit different levels of fan identification. However through the use of the NFL Fan Identity Survey it was uncovered that demographics play a huge role in determining how highly or lowly identified one will be. It was discovered that the most highly identifiable fan is a male who is 18-24, single or never married and still in school. This result makes sense for many reasons. First, it can be assumed that many of the fans that fall into the 18-24 age demographic category have more of an ability to be highly identifiable. This is because many people at this point of their life don't have the constraints of work, kids and paying bills. Thus, they have the extra ability to be highly identified due to certain freedoms that one who is older may have.

Second, someone who is single also may have more freedom to live their life the way they want to. This could allow them the time and money to be able to check team related social media posts, attend games and buy apparel. As for income level, fans who are still in school are able to focus more on their favorite sports teams rather than having to concern themselves with certain household issues such as paying bills and accommodating to a spouse. Also, reaffirming the study of Dietz Uhler and company, a male is more likely to be highly identified than a female. This may be because females have shown in the past to use sporting events as a social

event by watching it with friends, rather than following the team for their own self-concept (Dietz-Uhler, End, Harrick, Jacquemotte, 2000) .

Another trend, based off the results, is that level of identification seems to drop as life goes on (Reference Appendix B). This is not to say that a particular fan has lost interest or has gotten sick of their favorite team. It's very possible that life duties become so overwhelming that the fan unintentionally begins to distance themselves from the team. One missed game turns two, turns into three, three turns into four, etc. This process can go on until they miss a whole season.

However, an interesting note is that fans who have reported middle levels of identification seem to keep the same levels of identification as they age rather than decrease as highly identified fans do. So from these results, it seems as if only the highly identifiable characteristics tend to wear away over time. This can be directly related to the aforementioned self-concept. As individuals get older they need to search less and less for things which reflect positively on their self-concept because of work, kids and other duties they may have as they get older. Although this may be an unconscious act, the fan may stop following a team simply because it doesn't have any benefit to their self-concept anymore. In other words, as one gets older, other ideas, activities and duties can replace their sport team in their self-concept.

Implications For The Field

The main reason it is important to know who highly and lowly identified fans are is for marketing uses. By knowing who the most highly identified fans are, you can cater to them and market to them more easily. Also, it costs 5% more to go out and try to attract new fans than try to retain current fans. For example, since it's been established from this research that a male who is 18-24, single or never married and still in school an NFL team can now easily market to them.

In this specific example, a team would know that if they wanted to market to their highly identified fans, that the best way to reach them is by social media posts. They also would not only know where to market to them but what to market to them as well.

Perhaps more importantly, by figuring out your highly identified fans are, an NFL team also deciphers their lowly identified fans. Knowing who these fans are is very important because these fans have a basic interest in the team but are not invested in the team. However, by figuring out who they are, the NFL team now has the means by which to engage them for specific marketing techniques. Engaging these fans and moving them onto the escalator has the potential to drastically increase an organizations fan base.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations in this study. However, the most significant limitation was the sample which was used. Since many of the results came from the St. John Fisher College undergraduates, there was a disproportionate amount of 18-24 year olds that took the survey in relation to any other demographic. This also means that the income level demographic question had a disproportionate response rate for the answer “still in school.” As previously mentioned, the Bethlehem High School faculty and the AAA branch in Albany, New York were used solely for the purpose of trying to even out the numbers between age and income level. One way a researcher could improve upon this flaw is by surveying a more diverse population. However, in this particular case, this was not an attainable goal for this project. Another limitation regarding the sample was that the survey was only given in New York State. This led to many Buffalo Bills and New York Giants fans responding. Thus, there was not a big enough sample of the 30 other NFL teams.

An additional limitation occurred during the data collection. After the survey had been sent out to the three populations, it was discovered that the question concerning income level was not fully working on the mobile version of the survey. The question was not displaying the answer “still in school.” So it can be believed that the already great response rate for “still in school” could’ve been even greater.

Lastly, the point system created to determine highly and lowly identified fans was solely based on personal opinion of what a highly and lowly identified fan is based on the sources used for this research paper. Another researcher may have been less strict or more strict based on how they interpreted the previous literature regarding fan identity. This could cause the number of highly and lowly identified fans to immensely change depending on how much the point qualifications change.

Further Research

One thing that future research could elaborate on is studying different demographics. Some demographics that could yield interesting results are education level, ethnicity, location of residence, Religion. Each of these could certainly play a factor on varying levels of fan identification. In addition, future research could also use a more proportionate sample. This will greatly add to the validity of the results. Another interesting study regarding fan identity could look specifically at the fan behaviors of season ticket holders. Yes, previous research believes that they almost automatically qualify for being a highly identified fan, but what other behaviors do they exhibit? How many season ticket holders “fell into” the tickets from a relative and really isn’t that invested in the team?

Also, a further study could only study a specific team's fan base. This way, they could gain the largest amount of results possible for a specific team. It would also be interesting to be able to compare all 32 NFL to see who has the largest number of highly identified fans. The team with the largest highly identified fan base would almost have bragging rights in a sense. Conversely, it would be interesting to study which team had the most lowly identifiable fans.

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Appendix A

Fan Identity Survey

Q1 What is your favorite NFL team?

- No Favorite Team
- Arizona Cardinals
- Atlanta Falcons
- Baltimore Ravens
- Buffalo Bills
- Carolina Panthers
- Chicago Bears
- Cincinnati Bengals
- Cleveland Browns
- Dallas Cowboys
- Denver Broncos
- Detroit Lions
- Green Bay Packers
- Houston Texans
- Indianapolis Colts
- Jacksonville Jaguars
- Kansas City Chiefs
- Miami Dolphins
- Minnesota Vikings
- New England Patriots
- New Orleans Saints
- New York Giants

- New York Jets
- Oakland Raiders
- Philadelphia Eagles
- Pittsburgh Steelers
- San Diego Chargers
- San Francisco 49ers
- Seattle Seahawks
- St. Louis Rams
- Tampa Bay Buccaneers
- Tennessee Titans
- Washington Redskins

Q2 They are my favorite team because...

- They are the local team
- Family tradition
- Favorite player
- My friends like them
- They are a winning team
- Other _____

Q3 Are you a season ticket holder of your favorite team?

- Yes
- No

Q4 If money was no issue, how many games of your favorite team would you attend per season?

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-10
- 10 or more

Q5 Aside from watching games, how many hours per week would you say you spend consuming information on your favorite team (following team on social media, listening to radio shows, or reading the team magazine, etc.)?

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-10
- 10 or more

Q6 I am more likely to wear team apparel when my favorite team is doing well.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q7 If my favorite player on my favorite team was not playing due to injury I would be less likely to watch the game.

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q8 I act violently towards others and objects after my favorite team loses.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q9 It is "cool" to like my favorite team.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q10 I distance myself from my favorite team when they lose games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q11 I would attend a game for my favorite team even through extreme conditions (snow, rain, very cold, very hot).

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q12 I have more fun watching my favorite team when I am with my friends.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q14 Gender

- Male
- Female

Q13 How old are you?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31
- 32
- 33
- 34
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- 66
- 67
- 68
- 69
- 70
- 71
- 72
- 73
- 74
- 75+

Q15 What is your Marital Status?

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Divorced
- Widow

Q16 What is your income level

- \$10,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$69,999
- \$70,000-\$99,999

- \$100,000+
- Still in School

Appendix B

Age Identification Chart

Age Identification		How old are you?				Total
		18-24	25-40	41-59	60+	
High/Low Identification	Lowly identified	4	6	3	0	13
	Middle identified	88	42	47	18	195
	Highly identified	129	26	14	3	172
Total		221	74	64	21	380

Age Identification Chi Square Test			
Age Chi Squared Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.765 ^a	6	.001
N of Valid Cases	380		

Appendix C

Gender Identification Chart

Gender Identification		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
high low identified	Lowly identified	3	10	13
	Middle identified	78	114	192
	Highly identified	114	58	172
Total		195	182	377

Gender Identification Chi Square Test			
Gender Chi Squared Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.337 ^a	2	.000
N of Valid Cases	377		

Appendix D

Income Level Identification Chart

Income Level Identification		What is your income level per year?						Total
		\$10,000 - \$29,999	\$30,000- \$49,999	\$50,000 - \$69,999	\$70,000- \$99,999	\$100,000+	Still in School	
high low identified	Lowly identified	3	2	1	2	0	2	10
	Mid identified	45	19	22	26	30	48	190
	Highly identified	56	13	6	6	19	68	168
Total		104	34	29	34	49	118	368

Income Level Chi-Square Tests			
Income Level Chi Square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.816 ^a	10	.000
N of Valid Cases	368		

Appendix E

Marital Status Chart

Marital Status		What is your Marital Status?				Total
		Single, never married	Married or domestic partnership	Divorced	Widow	
high low identified	lowly identified	7	6	0	0	13
	mid identified	109	76	6	2	193
	highly identified	136	31	2	1	170
Total		252	113	8	3	376

Marital Status Chi-Square Tests			
Marital Status Chi Square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.625 ^a	6	.000
N of Valid Cases	376		

Appendix F

Buffalo Bills Highly Identified Fans Breakdown

Appendix F1- Total of Bills Fans

Buffalo Bills Fan Highly and Lowly Identified Fans	Total
Low	7
Mid	68
High	53

Appendix F2- Buffalo Bills Fan Identity by Age

Buffalo Bills Age Identification				
Identification Level	18-24	25-40	41-59	60+
Low	16	2	2	6
Mid	27	22	11	2
High	33	2	3	0

Appendix F3- Buffalo Bills Fan Identity by Marital Status

Buffalo Bills Marital Status Identification				
Identification Level	Single, Never married	Married or Domestic Partnership	Divorced	Widowed
Low	4	0	3	0
Mid	36	30	2	0
High	51	2	0	0

Appendix F4- Buffalo Bills Fan Identity by Income Level

Buffalo Bills Age Income Level						
Identification Level	Still in School	\$10,000- \$29,999	\$30,000- 49,999	\$50,000- \$69,999	\$70,000- \$99,999	\$100,000+
Low	1	3	0	0	0	3
Mid	19	20	6	3	8	6
High	17	18	7	7	2	5

Appendix F5- Buffalo Bills Fan Identity by Gender

Buffalo Bills Gender Identification		
Identification Level	Male	Female
Low	4	3
Mid	19	49
High	38	15

Appendix G

Contacts of external population – Personal Contacts

Victor Cusato- Manager of AAA branch of Albany New York

Phone- 518-779-5593

Email- vcusato@nycap.rr.com

Cathy Cusato- Teacher at Bethlehem High School

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Appendix H

Survey Cover Letter

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study that examines fan identification levels in the NFL. In its simplest form, fan identification refers to the degree one is a fan of their favorite team. Knowing levels of fan identification for specific demographics will help predict fan behavior. This then allows the sport marketer the ability to tailor specific promotions to certain fans.

As a member of the St. John Fisher College community, your experiences and background are of great importance to the successful completion of this study. We request your assistance by completing the survey: Fan Identity in the NFL. The survey consists of three sections. Section I asks for responses regarding their favorite NFL team. Section II asks for response that test level of fanhood. Section III asks simple demographic information. It is estimated that the survey will take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

There are no known physical or psychological risks associated with completing the survey. You may refuse to answer any questions, and may withdraw from completing the survey at any time. By completing this survey, you consent to participate. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses in any published and reported results of this study.

It would be greatly appreciated if you would complete the survey by February 21st, 2014. Feel free to contact either myself or my professor, Emily Dane-Staples. Thank you very much for your assistance

Sincerely,

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