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TEAM IDENTITY THEORY

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Elaine: What is that?
Puddy: I painted my face.
Elaine (still in disbelief): You painted your face?
Puddy: Yeah.
Elaine: Why?
Puddy: You know, support the team.

(‘The Facepainter’ – Seinfeld, broadcast on May 11, 1995)

Introduction

The starting point for a theory is that single puzzling observation, one that challenges the observer towards a better understanding. Such an observation can be tiny, originated in daily life and so eloquently portrayed by the comedy of Jerry Seinfeld, yet sometimes it evolves from bigger issues that we encounter when we move outside of our own comfort zone and experience something with which we are not familiar. For me, that moment came when I moved to another country, and I realised that the way ‘we do things’ did not necessarily apply anymore. I am among those people who believe that every social scientist should at some point in her or his life live in a different nation, so as to gain an understanding and appreciation of the fact that many of the norms and values we have agreed upon as a society are negotiable and differ from nation to nation. It allows a researcher to quite literally ‘step outside the box’. Making such a move at first might blind a researcher because of all the differences, thus forcing the individual to focus exclusively on these differences. Yet, after a while the researcher does not notice only the differences, but more importantly, also starts noticing the similarities between the current and previous surroundings. It is my opinion that, in order to understand the world around us, we should not only understand the differences, but also the similarities. In my case, I needed both elements to develop my observations into something bigger: a theory.

My first observation came when I attended my first American sport event, during a trip to the United States back in 1999. I was visiting a friend in Orlando and went to an NBA basketball game, in which the rebuilding Magic were scheduled to play a very strong Trailblazers team. Despite the expected uneven match-up, the game went down to the wire and was won by a
Trailblazer buzzer beater (last second basket). It was one of the most entertaining sport events
I had witnessed until that day and made me realise that, unlike European football, American
sports were all about entertainment. The lights, the music, the dancers, the promotions – I was
enthralled by it all. I walked away with my first perception of the general difference between
the United States and Europe: professional sport teams in the United States provide entertainment
first and foremost, while professional sport teams in Europe are primarily about the sport
and the need to identify with your local community. In hindsight, this observation was too
straightforward, providing evidence to the statement that in order to make accurate observations
one should understand both the differences and similarities between occurrences. So, while
there was merit in the observation – and I would find empirical support for the American view
of sports in the work of Wann (1995) and his colleagues (Wann, Brewer and Royalty, 1999;
Wann, Schrader and Wilson, 1999) in which they demonstrated constructs such as entertainment
eustress were more salient than group affiliation and family (Wann et al., 2001) – it was
not as straightforward as I believed it to be. It would take me a few more years to gain a better
understanding of the similarities between European and American sport, which was essential
to proposing my theory.

In the fall of 2002 I started my doctoral training at Florida State University, and in my quest
to assimilate into American culture, I began to attend the college football and basketball games.
At first I was again taken by the differences between the American and the European game day
experience, yet after some time I started to see the similarities. First, people identified quite strongly
with the team and their performance and, to many, this identification meant that they would
endure a less entertaining game as long as their team was winning. This observation itself
was not a very innovative one. Cialdini et al. (1976) had discussed this phenomenon back in the
1970s and had coined the term ‘basking in reflected glory’, which was followed by the reverse,
‘cutting off reflected failure’ (Snyder, Lassegard and Ford, 1986). Wann (1995) also captured this
phenomenon in the motive of self-esteem. Moreover, Wann and Branscombe (1990, 1991) had
introduced the term ‘team identification’ to our field to discuss this phenomenon and they would
embark on a search to better understand this term. As such, my observation – that in the US,
sport was not just about entertainment but, similar to Europe, also offered people the opportunity
to identify with their sport team – did not offer anything unique.

Similarly, my realisation that many people, as with European sport fans, primarily attended
games to spend time with their friends, family or colleagues was not new, and captured in the
same line of research as discussed by the authors mentioned before, as well as my own doctoral
advisor Jeffrey James, who had published several articles on this issue (Funk and James, 2001;
James, Kolbe and Trail, 2002; Trail and James, 2001). Yet, it was my third observation of a
‘similarity’ for which I could not find any supporting literature. I noticed people wearing
university-related merchandise but with no reference to the sports team, something I had noticed
at many different sport events. Fans at Green Bay Packers would wear foam cheeses as hats,
Dutch national team soccer fans would wear windmill hats, and Australian fans would burst out
in Waltzing Matilda in support of their sport teams. The focal point of these rituals and traditions
did not seem to be the team, but the associated community: the state of Wisconsin and the
nations of the Netherlands and Australia. It made me realise that for many people, the team
itself was not necessarily the focal point in their search for community; instead, it was seen as
an instrument to fulfill the need to express their belonging to a larger community. Anderson
(1983) described nations as imagined communities, too large and abstract to identify with directly;
thus, we use symbols and smaller sub-communities to help us with the identity process. While
Anderson limited his discussion to nations, it did not seem far-fetched to me that the same idea
applied to cities, states, universities and others; all communities that might be too large to identify
with directly. Sport teams are among the most powerful symbols that allow us to identify with the larger community. Thus, at Florida State University, the quest of spectators for group affiliation resulted in a community of people whose focal point of identity was not necessarily the football team, but the university itself. Many of these fans did not even care about football; the team was an instrument to identify with the university. Interestingly, this similarity between the United States and Europe helped me to clarify my view on the European fan experience. Until then, I had not realised that this was a distinguished feature of European football: we support our team because it represents our community, whether that is our neighbourhood (e.g., FC Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspurs), our city (e.g., Feyenoord Rotterdam, FC Liverpool, Club Brugge), our region (e.g., FC Barcelona, FC Napoli, FC Twente) or our nation (e.g., the Dutch National football team – the Orange). It was this realisation that pushed me to gain a stronger understanding of team identity, and set me on my path as a researcher.

**Defining team identity**

Terminology to study the phenomenon of the psychological connection between an individual and a sports team has been diverse and has included terms such as social identity, commitment, attachment, awareness, loyalty and, more recently, engagement (Funk and James, 2001; Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa and Biscaia, 2014). To confuse matters even more, this terminology is grounded in different fields, which often uses multi-dimensional models that incorporate some of the other terminology. For instance, loyalty researchers have discussed identity and awareness as dimensions within loyalty (Pritchard, Havitz and Howard, 1999), while social identity researchers propose the opposite, and incorporate attachment and commitment as dimensions within social identity (Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Neither approach is necessarily invalid, yet the different terminology does complicate and hinder the understanding of people who study the psychological connection between individuals and sport teams. Even within the spectrum of social identity research in sports, several different terms have been used, sometimes seemingly interchangeably, such as fan identity, team identity and team identification (in addition to the different terminology within social psychology, which includes social identity, community identity, collective, organisational identity and group identity).

I prefer the term team identity because of my background in social psychology and my perception that the grounded theory in this field, built over the last half century, serves the purposes of sport marketers quite well. Moreover, the terminology introduced in the field of marketing is ultimately derived from the same line of research in social psychology. In essence, all the other terms imply identity, while the other is not necessarily the case. I identity with the Dutch National football team; thus, I have a commitment to them, I am aware of them, I have developed an attachment to them, I am loyal to them and I am engaged with the team. This is not necessarily the case if you would reverse the connection between the different terms. I am committed to my students, yet I do not have a shared identity with them; I am attached to my favourite television shows, yet lack identification with them; and so on.

Lastly, I have used the term team identity over fan identity, as my focus has always been on the team and team-related outcomes (e.g., attendance, media consumption, merchandise), rather than fan-related outcomes. While the difference between these two terms might be primarily semantic, I believe that fan identity refers to the role we play as a fan, while team identity refers to the group, which forms the object of that identification process (see Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier (1995) for a good discussion on role versus group). Thus if the purpose of the study is to examine the fan and what that role means to them, fan identity might be appropriate,
while team identity is a better term if one is trying to understand organisational outcomes, such as attendance, merchandise sales and media consumption.

Over the last decade I have defined team identity by adapting the social identity theory definition of Tajfel (1978, 1981), yet I still find it somewhat lacking. Thus, for the purpose of this chapter, I would like to propose a new definition, based on the work my colleagues and I have been conducting:

Team identity is that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from membership into a community anchored around a sports team, based on the emotional value attached to that membership, and the knowledge of, engagement with, and evaluation of the community itself.

The value of this new definition is that it acknowledges several findings on team identity since we started examining it (Heere and James, 2007b; Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and James, 2011; Heere, Walker, Gibson, Thapa, Geldenhuyse and Coetzee, 2013). First, it recognises that the concept of social identity is directly related to the sociological concept of community, and that the sport team merely functions as an anchoring point (Clopton and Finch, 2011). Social identity is a process that inherently describes the bond between an individual and a community. When I started this line of research, this linkage was so apparent and logical to me that I never thought about writing about it in depth, explaining why I believed that team identity was an indicator for how one identified with a community. After years of fighting with reviewers, I started to realise that this was a mistake and that the linkage between team identity and community needed elaboration. The connection between team identity and community moves this construct very closely to the related construct of ‘sense of community’ (see also Warner’s work in this area, Chapter 16), yet conceptually I believe them to be different. Community identity might describe a much stronger connection between individual and community than sense of community, which does not include the notion of membership. Social identity theory includes the notion of self-categorisation (Henderson-King and Stewart, 1994), which means that people need to identify themselves first as a member of the community before they are asked to evaluate their social identity. In all my data collections, I rigorously implemented such an approach and deleted anyone who did not self-identify as a community member (Heere and James, 2007b; Heere and Katz, 2014; Heere et al., 2013; Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and James, 2011). Empirical assessments of sense of community do not incorporate self-categorisation as a way to eliminate non-group members and includes responses from people who do, and people who do not, identify with the team (Warner, Kerwin and Walker, 2013).

Second, the definition implies that there is nothing unique about our identification process with the team compared with other communities and that we can examine it through the same measures we use to measure our social identity with other communities, such as universities, nations, cities and organisations. Reviewing the first team identity scale proposed by Wann and Branscombe (1993) supports such a view, as some of their items are directly related to constructs grounded in social identity theory, such as importance, evaluation and behavioural involvement (see Ashmore et al., 2004 for an overview of social identity constructs). Other researchers have made use of Mael’s (1988) organisational identity instrument to measure team identity, which was also grounded in social identity theory. Both approaches support the view that the term ‘team identity’ merely serves to indicate an anchoring point for community identity, and that our psychological connection with the team is best measured if we use social identity theory to do so. Again, this separates community identity from sense of community, as Warner and
colleagues (2013) propose to measure sense of community through constructs that are specific to the field of sport management and might not necessarily transcend beyond the boundaries of a sport team. I also deemed the choice to measure team identity through social identity theory as beneficial since it allowed me to measure team identity through the same instrumentation as the measurement of university, city and state identity. This decision increased the validity evidence of testing relationships between different community identities, which ultimately I set out to do when I started my journey into team identity.

Third, this definition emphasises that team identity is a multi-dimensional construct that is best captured through the measurement of different processes. Grounding the team identity scale I developed for my dissertation in social identity theory (Heere and James, 2007b) allowed for a more in-depth perspective on what team identity truly means and what constructs drive the identity process. While doing so delayed my quest to find empirical evidence for the linkages between different community identities (since I needed to develop the multi-dimensional team identity scale first), it did allow me to gain a strong understanding of team identity as a focal point for social identity formation.

Grounding team identity in social identity: a multi-dimensional view on team identity

Early on in my search for a valid team identity scale, I realised that the concept of social identity had become so many things to so many different people that it might be almost impossible to capture it accurately through a one-dimensional scale. The best example I have for these limitations is when I would ask someone how strongly they identified with the United States of America – invariably they would answer ‘very strongly’ (e.g., 7 on a 7-point Likert scale). Similarly, if you would ask me how strongly I identify with the Netherlands, I would give a similar response. However, how Dutch people identify with their nation is entirely different from how Americans identify with their nation. Whereas in the United States patriotism is encouraged and citizens have maintained deference to the national anthem and flag, Dutch people in general showcase discomfort doing so. Even the Dutch national sport teams demonstrate this reluctance to embrace the national flag as the fans have embraced the colour orange (symbolic of the Royal house rather than the Dutch nation), instead of the red, white and blue of the national flag (despite the fact that this flag is one of the oldest in the world and precedes any other flag using these colours). The fact that the Dutch national anthem contains references to German origin and Spanish royalty does not help either. The differences do not limit themselves to symbolism, as the Dutch are comfortable paying high taxes to maintain the welfare state, while Americans do not show similar attitudes towards the support of their nation and their fellow citizens.

Thus, my main concern was that the one-dimensional scale would not pick up on these differences and that if I asked them about how strongly they identified with the university or team, they would respond with ‘very strongly’ regardless. This does not mean I believe that our current one-dimensional team identity scales (Kwon and Armstrong, 2002; Wann and Branscombe, 1993) lack evidence of validity. For many purposes, particularly in those instances where team identity merely functions as a mediator or outcome, the use of a one-dimensional scale might be preferential since they are so much more practical to use. Yet, for those instances where we would like to gain an in-depth understanding of team identity, we need to incorporate a more complex measure of team identity.

My intuitive concern that a one-dimensional scale of team identity was insufficient for my purposes was confirmed when I started to review the existing work on social identity theory.
I came to realise that scholars in this field had been viewing social identity as a multi-dimensional construct existing of many different processes. One of the most instrumental articles that helped me review the diversity in this field was Ashmore et al.’s (2004) previously noted work. They published a review of the decades of work in this field and listed the following elements as part of social identity: self-categorisation, evaluation, importance, attachment and sense of interdependence, social embeddedness, behavioural involvement, and content and meaning. To complicate matters further, many of these elements consisted of several dimensions (e.g., evaluation included both a private and public element).

Most of my dissertation was then focused on developing a multi-dimensional scale based on the conceptual work of Ashmore and colleagues (2004). Ultimately, we proposed a seven-dimensional scale, consisting of six Likert-based scales and one open-ended question that allowed people to self-categorise themselves as members of the community. The first dimension proposed was the element of private evaluation (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992) in which the respondent would indicate how they felt about their membership to the group. While instinctively one might think that this is always positive, this is not necessarily the case. For example, sport fans of unsuccessful sport teams (in my own case: Feyenoord Rotterdam) are not always happy about their membership to the community yet remain identified with the team, resisting the lure of CORFing (cutting off reflected failure). A second evaluative element within social identity is public evaluation (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992), which describes how we think non-members (out-group) feel about our community. In general, people care about how others feel about them, and team identity is no exception to this rule. A negative public evaluation can bring us to suppress or hide our identity with the team, or vice versa, to increase our tendency to act upon that identity as we feel threatened in our identity and thus try to defend it.

The third dimension is the interconnection we feel with the community. To some extent, I have come to understand this dimension to be at the core of social identity, and it shows the most overlap with the more traditional one-dimensional team identity scales (Mael and Tetrick, 1992). Ultimately, interconnection measures to what extent we accept the group membership to be a part of ourselves. The fourth element, sense of interdependence to the group, is one of the most debated dimensions of team identity. Sense of interdependence measures to what extent we believe that our own faith is intertwined with the faith of the team (Gurin and Townsend, 1986). In our first article on team identity (Heere and James, 2007a), we noted the lack of discriminant validity evidence between this construct and the construct of interconnection of self with group. Ashmore and colleagues (2004) also discussed these two concepts as being highly related. Lock, Funk, Doyle and McDonald (2014) argued that sense of interdependence should not be part of the team identity model, and they proposed a five-dimensional scale without it. Yet to me, conceptually these two dimensions do indicate a difference, particularly in the context of a sport team, as it is one of the few settings in which we acknowledge one without the other. When we measured group identity for university, city or state (Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011) we noticed that people rated their sense of interdependence as high, if not higher, than their interconnection of self with group. However, in the context of the sport team, sense of interdependence was the only construct that consistently received average scores below 3.0, indicating that while people might feel a connection to the team, they lacked a sense of interdependence. I believe this makes our identification process with a sport team somewhat unique (thus validating the dimension of sense of interdependence), and perhaps even explains why sport fandom is so popular. When the team performs well, we identify strongly with it (see BIRGing in Cialdini et al., 1976), yet when they perform poorly, we quite easily cut off our identity with the sport team (e.g., CORFing; Snyder et al., 1986), as we do not feel a sense...
of interdependence to the team community. This is unlike our identification with other communities, such as the ones measured in our 2011 study (Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and James, 2011), as we realise that it is much harder to cut off those ties, since we work or live there, and the costs of giving up that membership is much harder.

The fifth dimension is behavioural involvement (Phinney, 1992), in which we examine the extent to which people act within the community. This dimension has been viewed as controversial as sense of interdependence, as many scholars have discussed some elements of behavioural involvement as an outcome of social identity, rather than an element within the social identity process (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). Yet, there is a difference between behaviour as an outcome of the identity process and behavioural involvement with the community as an element of the team identity process. What we measured within this dimension is not how people act upon their identity, which is what Schau and colleagues discussed under the label brand practices, but rather how involved they are with the community, other group members and how often they interact with them. The emphasis in behavioural involvement is not on consumer behaviour, but on the involvement part. Ultimately, when we tested our final model (Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011), we included both the behavioural involvement items to measure team identity, as well as behavioural outcomes, such as attendance, merchandise purchases and media consumption. Despite the overlap between the two components, we do believe that behavioural involvement is a crucial part of the social identity process, and more than just an outcome. A study I did with Matthew Katz among college football fans (Katz and Heere, 2013) confirmed that idea, as many people who were part of the tailgate did not initially identify with the team, but were there to socialise with other people; yet, their behavioural involvement with the tailgate event allowed them to develop a sense of team identity.

The sixth and final element is cognitive awareness, which measures the cognitive part of our identity process and asks respondents how much they know about the community, their traditions and history, and their successes and failures. Ashmore and colleagues (2004) did not offer any existing measures to examine this concept and described qualitative work to review the dimension. However, we included this construct based on attitudinal research that acknowledges that cognition is a crucial element of an attitude (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993), and the items developed were based on some of the characteristics of community as proposed by Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001).

Since then, we have used this six-dimensional scale many times to measure not only team identity, but also other social identities, such as city identity, state identity, university identity (Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and James, 2011; Heere and Katz, 2014), national identity (Heere et al., 2013; Bogdanov, 2011), ethnic identity (Heere et al., 2013) and gender identity (Heere and Newland, 2013), and found evidence of scale reliability and validity in the different contexts. This work allowed us to finally test the theory with which I started: To what extent do our identity processes with the larger communities to which we belong (e.g. city, state, nation, university, gender, etc.) affect our identity with the sport team? Examining this question would allow us to better understand if the team itself is a goal for community fulfillment, or whether people see the sport team simply as an instrument to identify with a larger community.

**Leaving the vacuum: empirical support for the associated group identity model**

Seven years after I first proposed the theory that how we identify with the larger, associated communities of the team affects our identity process with the team, we were able to publish it in the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice (JMTP)* (Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and
James, 2011). In between, we had been able to publish the conceptual work that outlined this model (Heere and James, 2007a), and the aforementioned articles that discussed the psychometrics of the group identity scale (Heere and James, 2007b; Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011). Additionally, we were already in the midst of setting up several other studies that used the multi-dimensional group identity scale to gain an indication of the strength of the community. I perceived the publication in *JMTP* as a culmination of the work we had been doing all those years, and I was excited about the extent to which our model confirmed our conceptual thinking on this issue. The data that we had collected from students at universities with the three most prominent college football programmes \( n = 872 \) in the state of Florida demonstrated how strong the linkage was between the different identity processes, with correlations between the second order constructs of team, university, city and state identity ranging from \( .41 \) to \( .80 \). Moreover, the three combined associated group identities explained 60 per cent of the variance in team identity, emphasising the importance of the associated communities to how people identified with the team. Finally, it underpinned the importance of these identity processes to consumer behaviour as, combined, these identity processes were able to explain 84 per cent of the variance in reported merchandise buying, 89 per cent of the variance in media consumption, and 56 per cent of the variance in reported attendance. It provided very powerful empirical support for the theory that our team identity processes do not operate in a vacuum and are strongly affected by how we identify with the larger communities we perceive the team to be representative of.

**Directions moving forward**

Most of the work reviewed in this chapter is based on cross-sectional survey research, which limits our understanding of how predictive team identity is of consumer behaviour. Ultimately, cross-sectional research can only provide insight on correlations between team identity and other related constructs. Multiple regression analysis and structural equation modelling can give some indication of the direction and importance of the relationship, yet they fail to provide a true indication of the predictive value of team identity, as both methods are ultimately still correlational in nature. Thus, there is a need for studies that either incorporate a (quasi–) experimental approach to the examination of team identity, which would allow for a better understanding of what drives team identity, or a longitudinal approach. It is time to move beyond the basic cross-sectional survey approach as by now we have demonstrated the importance and centrality of team identity to the field of consumer behaviour.

A good example of a quasi-experimental approach is our study on the effect of the World Cup 2010 on the national identity of South African citizens (Heere *et al.*, 2013), which measured national identity prior to and after the World Cup. Yet, this study did not incorporate an assessment of team identity, and instead focused on the effect of a sport event on national identity. Our study on the effect of a triathlon event on the organisational identity with a charity also incorporated such an approach (Woolf, Heere and Walker, 2013) but, again, it did not incorporate team identity itself as a construct.

Lock and colleagues (2014) did collect longitudinal data on team identity, yet their approach only used two data points, which hinders the usage of longitudinal data analysis methods, requiring three data points at a minimum. As that study was part of a larger research project, it is hopefully only a matter of time before these scholars publish data based on more than two time points, allowing them to conduct growth curve analyses and similar methods. Similar to their work, we have been collecting team identity data over a period of three years with a large Southwestern university in the United States, and published our baseline data of the first year (Heere and
Katz, 2014), with the goal of publishing our longitudinal data in the years to come. In a longitudinal study among spectators of a J-League soccer team (Yoshida, Heere and Gordon, in press), we found that team identity was not directly predictive of continued attendance, which countered our cross-sectional findings previously (Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan and James, 2011). Whether this was because the study implemented a one-dimensional team identity scale or whether this was a first sign that we might overestimate the importance of team identity is uncertain. The same study also found game satisfaction, service satisfaction and behavioural intentions to be insignificant, which might indicate the limitations of relying on a single source data collection and suggests additional data collections into this issue are necessary. Regardless, this study did signify that the time to rely on cross-sectional survey research to measure attitudinal constructs such as team identity has come to an end. We need more rigorous methods to gain a better understanding of the importance of team identity to consumer behaviour.

Note
1 This chapter is a reflection on Heere and James (2007a) and the work related to it.

References

Bob Heere


Applying team identity theory

Daniel Lock

I became aware of the conceptual thrust of Heere and James’ (2007) work after reading Heere’s (2005) doctoral study in 2006 while I was undertaking my PhD at the University of Technology, Sydney. During my PhD, it became evident that team identification researchers painted a simplistic view of sport consumer identity processes. I was observing more complex identity processes, which consisted of multiple groups and pre-existing identities that shaped consumption – beyond the team identity. This drew me to Heere and James’ (2007) work, which explored how organisations could align with external group identities to increase resonance beyond the team identity (e.g., ethnic, religious, gender, etc.). This theoretical process aligned closely with the process of social identification I was observing in Australia at the time (Lock, Taylor and Darcy, 2011; Lock, 2009).

In my research since, the major application of Heere and James’ (2007) contribution concerns the ways in which consumers use multiple social groups to structure and supplement their consumption experiences. Existing research on team identification (e.g., Boyle and Magnusson, 2007; Branscombe and Wann, 1991) focuses on one-group membership. This work illustrates that team identification influences a range of consumption behaviours. However, it does not provide an explanation of other groups that shape sport consumption.

Heere and James (2007) applied social complexity theory to elaborate on this mono-group perspective. While focusing on external group memberships in their published work (Heere, James, Yoshida and Scremin, 2011; Heere and James, 2007), Heere and James (2007) illustrated that multiple group memberships can shape consumption behaviours. Acknowledging this conceptual point, they intimated that groups within and beyond the team identification may shape behaviour, which underpins the current attention dedicated to the role of subgroups (i.e., groups that exist within a team identity) on consumption behaviour (Bernache-Assollant, Bouchet, Auvergne and Lacassagne, 2011; Tyler, 2013). In this vein, I am currently using Heere and James’ (2007) study to develop understanding of how sport consumers use subgroups to supplement team identification.

Moving forward, I foresee three cogent areas to apply and elaborate this work. First, there is a need to develop understanding of how and why consumers use different identity groups. Advancement in this area will inform organisational efforts to design marketing activities that capitalise on the complex nature of consumer identities. Second, there is a need to understand how different group memberships interact and influence one another. While Heere et al. (2011) provide initial data on this topic, there is scope for additional explorations to forge understanding of the structure (cf. Roccas and Brewer, 2002) and interactions between group memberships. Third, the multiple-group perspective invokes complex methodological challenges in terms of how best to develop understanding of the complex relationships between consumer identities. While qualitative (Tyler, 2013) and quantitative work (Heere et al., 2011) exists, there is a need to develop and utilise new and innovative methodological approaches to explore multiple group memberships in sport.

In summary, Heere and James (2007) broadened the landscape of team identification research, opening sport management research to the reality that multiple-group memberships influence...
team identification. This approach provides a rich arena to advance understanding of consumer behaviour from inside and outside of team identities in the future.

Note

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References


