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How Does Sport Team Identification Compare to Identification with Other Social Institutions?

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HOW DOES SPORT TEAM IDENTIFICATION COMPARE TO IDENTIFICATION WITH
OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS?

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

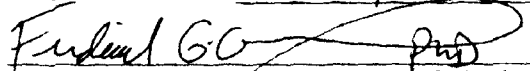
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Shelley Elizabeth Smith

December 2009

**HOW DOES SPORT TEAM IDENTIFICATION COMPARE TO
IDENTIFICATION WITH OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS?**

Date Recommended 10/16/09


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As social beings, people naturally form identifications with various social groups within their environment. Individuals gain benefits by forming identifications with groups, such as increased self-esteem and psychological support. Past research has examined the identification people form with various social groups, but no research has examined with which of these social groups people form the strongest identification. This study examines the strength of identification with various social groups within one's life. It is predicted that individuals will indicate a stronger identification with a sport team than with any other social group. Secondly, it is predicted that identification with a sport team will provide better psychological benefits than identification with another social group. The analysis of 226 participants' responses indicated that individuals form a stronger identification with a sport team than with a religious group, a school activity, or with a form of community involvement. A similar level of identification was found between identification with a sport team and a social activity as well as one's occupation. The study's results also indicated that identification with a sport team contributed slightly more to one's social psychological health than identification with another form of social group.

Literature Review

The human need to form a connection with other people has received a great deal of attention. According to Buunk, Nauta, and Molleman (2005), people “have a general need to affiliate with others, and they spend a considerable part of their life in the company of other people” (p. 69). Mael and Ashforth (2001) state that people desire to form an affiliation with others because “individuals classify themselves and others into social groups as a means of ordering the social environment and locating their place within it” (p. 198). Furthermore, Mael and Ashforth (2001) believe that people experience benefits such as an improved self-esteem, belongingness to something bigger than themselves and an increase in their ambitions by forming relationships, or identification, with other people and groups.

Group identification is defined as the perceived oneness and belongingness an individual feels within a group of persons (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Several researchers have examined identification within various facets of individuals’ social lives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Mael & Ashforth, 2001; Waters & Moore, 2002). Such areas include identification with a sports team (Wann, 2006a; Wann, 2006b; Wann, 2006c), religion (Diener & Clifton, 2002; Diener et al., 1999; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), occupation/employment (Haughey, 1993; Waters & Moore, 2002), and social group involvement (Argyle, 1999). Individuals value forming an identification within various social groups for the benefits it provides, such as gaining a resource for psychological support (Wann, 2006c), enhancing self-esteem, providing individuals with a sense of meaning in life, and possibly challenging individuals to aspire to better themselves in order to fit in with the other group members (Mael & Ashforth, 2001).

While several researchers have examined individuals' levels of identification within different groups, no research has been performed that compares the identification formed among different groups in one's life to one another. For example, the identification one forms with a sport team has not been previously compared with the same individual's identification with his or her place of employment. This study's purpose is to begin the research comparing individuals' levels of identification with one another in order to form a better understanding of the type of group with which individuals form the strongest identification. Furthermore, this study is performed in order to identify what area of one's social life has the most influence on the social belongingness one feels and to identify what group characteristics lead to a stronger sense of identification. The following is a review of the research that has been performed on each of the areas of identification that are of interest in this study: identification with a sport team, religious group, school activity, social activity, occupation, and community involvement.

Identification with a Sport Team

Sport team identification is defined by Wann (2006b) as "a fan's psychological connection to a team" (p. 332). According to Carroll (2005), a Gallup Poll released in 2005 found that 63% of Americans claim to be sports fans. Individuals form an identification with a sport team for a variety of reasons. Individuals identify with a sport team in order to become involved in something other than their own daily lives and to focus on something other than themselves, a process known as ennobling, according to Mael and Ashforth (2001). Additionally, individuals form an identification with a sport team in order to become part of a larger social group composed of other fans of the same

team. This association with a large social group provides “a buffer to loneliness, isolation, and so forth” (Wann, 2006b, p. 80). Individuals also identify with sport teams in order to achieve a sense of achievement by categorizing a team’s accomplishment as their own success (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Kolbe and James (2003) suggested that the relationship an individual forms with a sport team is dissimilar to other types of societal relationships because of qualities such as the depth of the relationship and the endurance of the positive feelings toward one’s team despite the fact that the team does not directly reciprocate the positive feelings an individual shows.

Individuals become sport fans and form an identification with a team in different ways. Individuals are influenced by family and friends who follow a particular team (Fredericksen, 2002; Kolbe & James, 2003; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996) or by other influences such as heavy exposure to a team through media venues (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). An individual then takes the next step in identification and internalizes his or her identification by such means as attending games regularly or by purchasing season tickets (Kolbe & James, 2003).

Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) reviewed past research and found that sport fans are predominately African American, male, have a high socioeconomic status, have participated in sports at some point in their lives, and show interest in active vocations such as business, physical education, and media. Past research has shown that identifying with a sport team has numerous benefits. Such benefits include social connectedness with other fans of the team (Wann, 2006b), higher levels of self-esteem (Wann, 1994), decreased levels of depression (Branscombe & Wann, 1991), better

psychological adjustment (Wann, 2006c), and a vicarious sense of achievement (Sloan, 1979).

Identification with a Religious Group

Another venue of one's social life with which individuals identify is religion. According to Mael and Ashforth (2001), individuals form a religious identification in two ways: by forming an identification with a religious deity and by forming a bond with a group of people who have similar value systems. Mael and Ashforth further state that, while a comparison can be made between one's identification with sports and war, "religious identification is the most compelling or understandable form of identification" (p. 208) because one's religious loyalty is believed to be stronger than any loyalty individuals can form with other people or their country. Newport (2007) stated that a recently conducted Gallup poll found that approximately eight of every ten Americans report that they identify with some form of religion. These numbers may be misleading, however, because responses on a separate question within the same poll indicated that only 44% of Americans attend church on a regular basis. This difference indicates that, while many Americans indicate that they belong to a religious group, they do not necessarily spend time involved in the activities within their religion. Of course, identification with a religious group affects the amount of involvement and attendance individuals have with their group. For example, Ryan et al. (1993) found that Christians who identified strongly with their religion were also more likely to have higher church attendance and were more conventional in their beliefs.

Involvement in a religious group has been found to provide individuals with a generally higher level of life satisfaction (Diener & Clifton, 2002), a method of

explaining the unknown elements of the world (Goodenough, 1986), and a meaning that extends beyond the individual self (Mael & Ashforth, 2001). Robert Putnam (2000) explains in his book, “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,” that involvement with a religious group also allows a place for people to form an identification with others and gain social skills and other life skills that they use throughout their lives.

Religious groups can also serve as a source of comfort and cohesiveness in a time of crisis (Funder, 2002), as exemplified by the large number of people who began or resumed attending worship services after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Zelizer (2002) reported that a Gallup poll indicated that worship attendance rose by approximately 25% after the attacks and found a 7% increase in Americans’ claims that religion was very important to them after September 11, 2001. The rise in religious involvement following September 11 returned to normal levels almost as quickly as it rose after the initial shock and fear subsided (Goodstein, 2001; Rosenberg, 2001).

Identification with a School Activity

A third source of identification found among individuals is involvement with a school activity. For the purposes of this study, school activity identification is defined as an individual’s feeling of belongingness with an organization based on a university campus. Organizations with which an individual may form an identification can include common interest groups (i.e., Gamers’ Guild), departmentally-based organizations (i.e., Psychology Club), national organizations with college-campus chapters (i.e., American Psychological Association of Graduate Students), and Greek organizations (i.e., Alpha Delta Pi sorority). The majority of research has found that involvement in a school

activity has positively affected students' social and academic lives. Socially, individuals gain a better sense of self-development (Bean & Creswell, 1980), have a higher self-esteem and personal psychological adjustment to the college experience (Cameron, 1999), and are more likely to interact with their peers (Pike & Askew, 1990).

Involvement in a school activity has a positive impact on individuals' academic pursuits in that these individuals are more likely than students who are less involved in school activities to achieve higher grades (Hartnett, 1965), put forth more effort when completing coursework (Pike & Askew, 1990), and are more likely to complete their bachelor's degree (Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfle, 1988). Participation in school activities is not without its costs, however. A limited amount of research has found that involvement in a school activity, particularly a Greek organization, has a negative effect on individuals by limiting their interaction with other students who are not involved in the organization and the possibility of increased alcohol consumption (Brand & Dodd, 1998).

Identification with a Social Activity

Another source of identification for some individuals is a social activity. Identification with a social activity is defined as an individual's feeling of belongingness within a social organization. Social activities with which people may form an identification include groups such as the Knights of Columbus, American Legion, Lions Club, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons (NAACP). According to Putnam (2000), Americans showed a strong affiliation with organizations around 1945. During the early years of social activity involvement, most groups had a local chapter of a national group

that people attended in person. Since the 1950s, however, the attendance at local chapter meetings of social groups has sharply declined. This decline in attendance has not given way to a decline in people's involvement in social organizations, but the type of participation has changed. Today, more people are members of organizations in which they do not personally know the other group members or meet on a regular basis to socialize. The popularity of these "faceless," nonprofit groups have caused the number of social organizations to expand from approximately 10,000 in 1968 to almost 23,000 in 1997 (Putnam, 2000).

Few researchers have examined the benefits individuals experience by forming an identification with a social activity. One can speculate that such an identification would provide individuals with a sense of commonality by being involved in a group of similar individuals with similar interests or beliefs. Another possible benefit could be a sense of community for an individual who is involved in a social group that meets locally. A third possible benefit an individual may experience by identifying with a social group could be that the individual feels valued within the group and is able to share personal opinions and beliefs without the fear of his or her feelings being rejected. Finally, an additional benefit one may gain is a heightened sense of self-worth as they perform services for others as a member of the groups with which they identify.

Identification with an Occupation

An individual's occupation has the potential to serve as a group with which he or she may form an identification. The definition for occupational identification for this study will borrow from the definition of organizational identification put forth by Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994). That is, occupational identification is "the degree to

which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define” (p. 239) his or her place of employment. Dutton et al. also state that individuals form an identification with their place of employment on two bases: how the individual views the values and beliefs of the company and how the individual believes other people not involved in the company view the values and beliefs of the company.

Individuals identify strongly with an occupation when “a member’s self-concept has incorporated a large part of what he or she believes is distinctive, central, and enduring about the organization into what he or she believes in distinctive, central, and enduring about him or herself” (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 242). Research has found that individuals form a strong identification with employment when the values and beliefs of a company are similar to the values and beliefs that the individual already holds for him or herself (Dutton et al., 1994) and the type of employment allows the individual an outlet for self-expression (Shamir, 1991). Individuals’ identification with their employment also increases as time spent employed by the company increases (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

Individuals receive benefits from their forming a strong identification with their employment. Feelings of distinctiveness and superiority from other, similar companies arise from identifying with the company. Also, companies perceived to be appealing to people outside of the company cause an increase in an individual’s self-esteem and self-worth (Dutton et al., 1994). A strong identification also benefits the company in that strongly identified employees put forth more effort and pride into their work and increase their productivity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Identification within Community Involvement

A final source of identification examined in this study is that of identification gained by one's involvement within his or her community. For this study, identification with community will be defined as an individual's feeling of connectedness to a volunteer activity performed for the purpose of improving his or her community. Examples of volunteer activities that are performed for the improvement of the community include Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society, the American Red Cross, and community help centers for homeless people.

Past research has shown that certain people are more likely to participate in volunteer community activities than others. For example, older individuals are more likely to perform volunteer work due to having more leisure time after retirement and having the financial security to devote their time to volunteer activities rather than employment (Regnerus, Smith, & Sikkink, 1998). Individuals who earn higher financial incomes, have completed study in higher education, and have jobs that are thought of as prestigious are also more likely to volunteer their time within their community (Regnerus et al., 1998). Religious participation also serves as a predictor for volunteerism. Hodgkinson, Weitzman, and Kirsch (1990) found that people involved in a religious group are significantly more likely to volunteer their time and donate money to philanthropic efforts than are nonreligious people.

By participating in activities occurring within one's own community, an individual is given the opportunity to not only form connections with the other people, but to experience other benefits as well. According to Hughey, Speer, and Peterson (1999), individuals meet their neighbors and gain a better sense of their community by

participating in community organizations, but individuals also “take action...that may change other settings and institutions in their communities” (p. 99). Individuals are afforded the opportunity to form an emotional attachment to their community by investing their time and effort to better the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Finally, by participating in community activities, individuals are given the opportunity to socialize with people that they might not encounter in their everyday lives or in other social groups, thereby expanding their network of friends or connections around them.

Differences among Types of Identification

Among the types of identification examined within this study, several benefits of each type of identification overlap, such as providing a sense of belonging to something bigger than one's self, a heightened self-esteem, and an opportunity to spend time with like-minded individuals. Each of the areas of identification, however, also exhibit distinctions that serve as an influence of one's reasoning of forming identification. Kolbe and James (2003) argue that identification with a sport team is unlike that of any other social group for reasons that include that an individual is not directly taking part in the sport activity, but is instead forming an identification with the other followers of the sport team. Additionally, the team does not directly reciprocate the positive feelings an individual shows toward the team as part of the identification. When identifying with a religious group, one forms a connection with a deity, which possibly leads to a deeper “meaning of life” within one's self or a deeper sense of belongingness than can be formed within a different group of people. Forming an identification with a school or social activity can serve the primary function of meeting others in a new environment and forming relationships in order to cope in an unusual place. Occupational identification is

dissimilar to other social identifications in that it can directly and greatly affect one's daily productivity and overall happiness more so than the other social groups. Finally, individuals may choose to seek identification within community-related activities for the sole purpose of improving the world around them and not seek any personal gain.

Contributions of Identification to Social Psychological Health

One commonly found benefit individuals receive from identifying with one of the social groups discussed in this study is an improvement in their psychological well-being. This well-being, also known as social psychological health, is defined by Wann (2006c) as “feelings of identification with valued social organizations and groups” that “assist in the development of a social network that provides psychological support and, consequently, result in a more mentally healthy individual (p. 3). Wann (2006c) has found that, within sport team identification specifically, the level of identification one forms with a sport team is positively correlated with the amount of psychological benefit one experiences. Therefore, the stronger the identification with a sport team an individual forms, the more positive social psychological well-being he or she will experience. Wann has labeled his theory exploring the connection between sport team identification and improved well-being the Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model. This model explores how sport fans develop social well-being through identification with a sport team. The development of this well-being is based on factors such as the proximity to the team with which they identify and the relationship they have with fellow fans of the chosen team. An increase in psychological health is thought to be due to an increase in social support or connections. Additionally, this model examines how individuals

adapt to situations that threaten their social well-being gained through their identification with a sport team.

An additional purpose of this study is to examine if the theory purposed by Wann holds true when examining identification with other social groups. Within this study, it is expected that identifications with social groups other than a sport team will function in a similar manner as identification with a sport team. Moreover, this study is intended to examine if a strong identification with a social group other than a sport team contributes more strongly to one's social psychological health than sport team identification.

Limitations of Existing Research

The existing research examines, individually, people's identification with a sport team, a religious group, a school activity, a social activity, occupation, and community involvement. Research has been limited to comparing the effect of one's participation in one of the social groups has on one's involvement in another activity. For example, the effect that one's involvement in a religious group has on his or her involvement in community activities has been researched. Research comparing the strength of one's identification among multiple social groups is scarce. Additionally, research comparing one's identification with a sport team with one's identification with a religious group, a school activity, a social activity, occupation, or community involvement is nonexistent.

The Present Study

The current study addresses the limitations of past research concerning the levels of identification one forms within various social groups. One's identification with a sport team will be compared to one's identification with a religious activity, school activity, social activity, occupation, and community activity. In addition, an individual's need for

affiliation and psychological well-being will be compared to the individual's reported level of identification with a sport team, religious activity, school activity, social activity, occupation, and community activity.

This study serves as an exploratory study examining the types of social identity on which individuals place the greatest importance. The primary focus of this study is to examine the level of identification individuals form with sport teams as compared to the identification they form with other social groups. The research performed within this study is collected in order to provide a definitive answer of whether individuals form a stronger identification with a sport team or if a stronger identification is found within another social area such as a religious group, a school activity, a social activity, an occupation, or a community-related activity. Additionally, this study examines the psychological benefits one receives from his or her social identifications. More specifically, this study examines if identification with a sport team more strongly contributes to one's psychological well-being than identifications with other social groups. For this study, the measurement of an individual's psychological well-being will be quantified by assessing his or her levels of social stress, self-concept, and need for affiliation.

Method

Participants

The study sample consisted of 226 participants. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 78. The mean age was 24.16 years ($SD = 11.57$). Of the 226 participants, 149 (65.6%) were female and 77 (33.9%) were male. In the study, there were 197 (86.8%) Caucasian participants, 15 (6.6%) African American, 4 (1.8%) Asian, 1 (0.4%) Hispanic/Latino, and 9 (4.0%) identified themselves as “other.” When asked to identify the population of their hometowns, 16 (7%) participants identified their hometowns are having a population of less than 999, 70 (30.8%) participants were from towns with populations between 1,000 and 9,999, 31 (13.7%) participants were from cities with populations between 10,000 and 49,999, 54 (23.8%) participants were from cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, and the remaining 55 (24.2%) participants were from cities with populations consisting of more than 100,000 people. The majority of the participants, 185 (81.5%), identified themselves as single, 34 (15%) were married, 1 (0.4%) was widowed, 5 (2.2%) were divorced, and 1 (0.4%) was separated. Finally, when asked to identify their level of education, 109 (48.7%) were college freshmen, 43 (19.2%) were college sophomores, 19 (8.5%) were college juniors, 13 (5.8%) were college seniors, 10 (4.5%) identified themselves as graduate students, 13 (5.8%) were college graduates, 12 (5.4%) had graduated from graduate school, and 5 (2.2%) had not attended college. Of the 5 participants that has not attended college, all 5 (100%) were high school graduates.

Measures

Demographics. Each participant completed a demographics questionnaire assessing their age, gender, race, education level, hometown, and marital status (see Appendix A).

Social Stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; see Appendix B) provides a measure of the stress an individual feels within the past month using a 14-item scale. Participants indicate their response to each item by circling either *never*, *almost never*, *sometimes*, *fairly often* or *very often*. An example of a PSS item is, “In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?.” The items on the scale were summed and a high score on the scale indicated a low level of perceived stress, whereas a low score indicated a high level of perceived stress. The PSS has exhibited good internal constancy, with a coefficient alpha of .85 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Cronbach’s Alpha for the PSS was .82 for this study.

Self-Concept. Individuals’ self concept was measured using a subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; see Appendix C). The identity subscale was used to assess the value individuals place on their social group memberships and how important the group memberships are to their self-concept. Participants responded to the four questions by circling one of seven responses presented in a Likert-type scale consisting of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *disagree somewhat*, *neutral*, *agree somewhat*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. An example of a question from the CSES identity subscale is, “The social groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am.” The four items were summed and high scores on the scale indicated that one’s

group memberships are important to one's self concept. The CSES identity subscale has high internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha within a range of .83 to .88 (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). For this study, Cronbach's Alpha for the CSE was .69.

Need for Affiliation. Individuals' need for affiliation was measured by a 16-item scale (Buunk, Nauta, & Molleman, 2005; see Appendix D). The items were divided into four areas measuring an individual's desire to spend time with others, a lack of desire to spend time with others, a desire to complete tasks alone, and a desire to work with others to complete tasks. Participants indicated their response to each item by circling either *strongly agree* (SA), *agree* (A), *disagree* (D), or *strongly disagree* (SD). Examples of the items include, "I prefer to go my own way alone," "In my leisure time, I prefer to do things together with others," and "I don't like to undertake something totally on my own." A higher score on the scale indicated a higher affiliation orientation. The need for affiliation scale has high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .84; Buunk et al., 2005). Cronbach's Alpha for the AOS was .83 within this study.

Identification. Individuals' identification with a sport team, religious group, school activity, social/community activity, occupation, or community involvement was measured using an identification scale consisting of three statements adapted for use by Crisp, Stone, and Hall (2006; See Appendix E) in research exploring intergroup bias exhibited by a group that had been reorganized into a larger group. For the purposes of this study, the items were modified to measure each area of identification, resulting in six sets of statements. Examples of the statements include "I identify strongly with other fans of this team," "Being a member of this religious group is an important part of who I am," and "I feel strong ties with other members of this social activity." Participants

indicated their response to each item by circling either *strongly agree* (SA), *agree* (A), *disagree* (D), or *strongly disagree* (SD). Each identification scale had a minimum score of 3 with a maximum score of 12. Each of the scales was summed separately, and a low total indicated that the individual did not identify strongly with the social group, whereas a high score indicated a strong identification with the social group. With a Cronbach's alpha of .91, the identification scales have high internal consistency reliability (Crisp et al., 2006). When Cronbach's Alpha was conducted for the identification scales, all were found to have good internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha for the Sport Team Identification scale was .85. Cronbach's Alpha for the Religion Identification scale was .89. Cronbach's Alpha for the School Activity Identification scale was .90. Cronbach's Alpha for the Social Activity Identification scale was .85. Cronbach's Alpha for Occupation Identification scale was .84. Cronbach's Alpha for the Community Involvement scale was .83.

Procedure

Participants, both in person or online, first read the informed consent document (See Appendix F) and showed their consent to participation by providing responses to the questionnaire packet. After reading the informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire packet containing a demographics form, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Collective Self-Esteem: Identity Subscale, the Need for Affiliation Scale and the Identification Scales modified to measure sports team identification, religious group identification, identification with a school activity, identification with a social activity, occupational identification, and identification with a community-related activity. After

completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed on the purpose of the study (See Appendix G).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

To begin the analysis, the items from scales used within the study were summed to create total scores for each measure. The 14-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was summed, resulting in a single measure of stress experienced by the participant in the past month's time. Next, the four items of the Importance to Own Self-Concept subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem (CSE) Scale were summed to assess the importance of one's social group memberships to one's self-concept. Next, the 16 items of the Affiliation Orientation Scale (AOS) were summed to assess the participants' affiliation orientation. Finally, each of the identification scales measuring identification with a sport team, religious group, school group, social group, occupation, and community activity were summed separately to assess the participants' level of identification with each of the groups. Descriptive information for all measures is shown in Table 1.

Research Questions

The first research question addressed by this study was to examine the level of identification individuals form with sport teams as compared to the identification they form with other social groups. To evaluate the participants' levels of identification, a series of paired *t*-tests were performed. Table 2 includes the means and standard deviations of each of the areas of identification.

Table 1

Minimum score, maximum score, mean score, and standard deviation for each scale

Scale	Number of Participants	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Perceived Stress Scale	226	8	46	25.51	6.91
Collective Self- Esteem Scale	226	4	28	18.51	4.56
Affiliation Orientation Scale	226	18	64	45.25	6.29
Sport Team Identification	186	3	12	6.66	2.09
Religion Identification	208	3	12	5.63	2.15
School Activity Identification	124	3	12	5.63	2.27
Social Activity Identification	77	3	12	6.04	2.04
Occupation Identification	166	3	12	6.30	2.06
Community Involvement	95	3	12	5.56	1.65

Table 2

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Areas of Identification

Type of Identification	Level of Identification	Hours per week spent on activity
Sport ID	6.23 (2.17)	3.09 (3.09)
Religion ID	5.13 (1.84)	2.89 (2.98)
School Activity ID	5.94 (2.28)	7.30 (9.79)
Social Activity ID	6.10 (2.26)	2.61 (4.60)
Occupation ID	5.52 (1.73)	2.13 ^a (4.76)
Community Activity ID	5.42 (1.71)	2.15 (2.09)

Notes: Standard deviations appear in parentheses beside each mean.

^aMean of hours spent at occupation above and beyond what is required of job.

In order to avoid probability pyramiding, Bonferroni's correction (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1989) was used with a critical alpha of .0017. Among the comparisons of social identification groups, there was a significant difference between sport team identification and religious identification, $t(175) = 4.20, p < .001$. Additionally, there was a significant difference between sport team identification and school activity identification, $t(112) = 3.31, p = .0012$. Finally, there was a significant difference between sport team identification and community activity identification, $t(80) = 4.51, p < .00$. Sport team identification was higher than identification with the other activities.

No significant difference was found between sport team identification and social activity identification, $t(68) = .92, p = .36$, or between sport team identification and occupation identification, $t(140) = 2.18, p = .03$.

Analyses were also performed on the amount of hours the participants indicated that they spend in their involvement with each of the social groups. There was a significant difference in the hours dedicated to a sport team and a school activity, $t(114) = -4.58, p < .001$, with more hours being spent involved in the school activity. There was also a significant difference between the time devoted to a sport team and a social activity, $t(116) = 2.44, p < .05$, with more hours being spent on a sport team. Finally, there was a significant difference between time devoted to a sport team and a community activity, $t(112) = 2.20, p < .05$. More hours were spent involved in the activities associated with a sport team than with a community activity. There was not a significant difference in the time spent on a sport team and religion $t(191) = -.67, p = .501$ and time spent on a sport team and occupation, $t(44) = -1.18, p = .24$.

An additional purpose of this study was to examine the psychological benefits individuals receive from their social identifications. More specifically, this study examined if identification with a sport team more strongly contributed to participants' psychological health than identifications with other social groups. To assess this contribution, a two-step linear regression analysis was performed. In the first step, the affiliation scores for all of areas of identification, except for sport team identification, were entered into the analysis. In the second step, sport team identification was included in the analysis performed in the first regression. The dependent variables for each of the analyses were the scores from the perceived stress scale and the self-esteem scale

completed by the participants. Table 3 shows the betas of the two regression analyses and the change in R^2 as well as the t -values and p -values of the social group identifications effect on psychological well-being.

Table 3

Beta, change in R^2 , t -values and p -values of group identification (ID) effects on psychological well-being for sport team identification.

Psychological Well-being Scale	β	t -value	p -value
Analysis One			
Perceived Stress Scale			
Religion ID	.24	1.32	.20
School ID	-.16	-.83	.42
Social ID	.21	1.10	.30
Occupational ID	-.11	-.56	.58
Community ID	-.39	-2.13	.04
Self-Esteem Scale			
Religion ID	-.17	-.95	.35
School ID	-.06	-.31	.76
Social ID	-.04	-.19	.85
Occupational ID	-.29	-1.67	.11
Community ID	-.15	-.79	.44

Table 3, Con't.

Psychological Well-being Scale	β	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> - value
<hr/>			
Analysis Two			
<hr/>			
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS $\Delta R^2=.076, p=.116$)	-.38	-1.63	
Self-Esteem Scale (CSES $\Delta R^2=.027, p=.387$)	-.22	-.88	
<hr/>			

After controlling for affiliation and other forms of identification, sport team identification only approached significance in predicting participants' perceived stress levels ($R^2 = .34$), $F(7,30) = 1.72, p = .15$ and no significance in predicting participants' self-esteem ($R^2 = .20$), $F(7,30) = .84, p = .56$. The overall change in R^2 for the second regression analysis was .08, which was not significant, $F(1,23) = 2.68, p = .12$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of identification individuals form with sport teams as compared to the identification they form with other social groups. Additionally, this research examined how much sport team identification contributes to an individual's psychological well-being.

The research performed within this study was collected in order to provide an answer to whether individuals form a stronger identification with a sport team or another social area such as a religious group, a school activity, a social activity, an occupation, or a community-related activity. Additionally, this study examined the psychological benefits individuals receive from their social identifications. More specifically, this study examined if identification with a sport team more strongly contributes to psychological health than identifications with other social groups.

The first research question examined in this study was what social group individuals identify with most among sport teams, religious groups, school activities, social activities, occupations, and community activities. This question was evaluated by performing a series of paired *t*-tests. The results of the analysis showed that individuals more highly identify with sport teams than with a religion, school activity, or community-related activity. Individuals form similar levels of identification, however, with social activities and occupations as they do with sport teams.

The results that individuals more highly identify with a sport team than with a religion, school activity, or community-related activity indicate that sports have surpassed the allure of some of the other social groups within college students' lives. This increase

could be due to this era's ease of access to information regarding sport teams on television, on the Internet, and in publications devoted to the sports world.

These results support recent research concerning American's decreasing identification with religious activities. According to the United States Religious Landscape Survey (The Pew Forum, 2008), 16% of American adults are not currently involved in a religious group. This number has doubled since the 1980s. Although religious groups saw an increase in attendance following the September 11, 2001, attacks, most of those people have since discontinued their involvement. According to interviews conducted by Goodstein (2001), religious leaders felt that the cause of the influx of parishioners after September 11, 2001, was to be around other people in a time of crisis. Once the crisis' effect receded, however, people stopped attending the services.

The decreased involvement with school groups could be explained by the increase of social networking on the Internet. College students may be spending more of their time online, chatting with friends or making social connections on social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, than attending meetings in person on campuses. Research by Wellman, Haase, Witte, and Hampton (2001) found that individuals are more rapidly replacing in-person communication with online communication. This may be due to the breadth of online interactions offered by today's social sites and the existence of social groups that are similar to the groups that one would find on the campus to which they can belong without having to adjust one's schedule for a meeting time.

One of the reasons people may have become more involved in online social networking is the freedom it allows to present only the characteristics that individuals choose to reveal about themselves to other individuals within the network. According to

Bargh and McKenna (2004), individuals are allowed a certain sense of anonymity online where they are allowed to be whoever they wish to present to the other people within the network and they are allowed to discuss topics that might be difficult to discuss in person. This easier form of communication may be an appealing factor that is leading individuals to socialize online rather than in person.

The lessened identification with community involvement activities may be due to the hectic schedules individuals maintain on a daily basis, and making time to participate in a community activity may not be possible or not an appealing enough activity for which to make time (Hummon, 1986). Additionally, according to Putnam (2000), individuals may fulfill their sense of community involvement by providing money to a charitable group or a community cause instead of devoting time to the activity. Furthermore, Putnam adds that community activity is a common action among religious groups. Therefore, as religious involvement decreases, community activity also decreases.

Results from the present study also indicated that individuals form similar levels of identification with social activities and occupations as they do with a sport team. Individuals may have a higher identification with social groups because of the increased availability of social groups both in their community and through the Internet. People can now go online and find groups of people with whom they can communicate and form friendships with relative ease. According to Bargh and McKenna (2004), individuals can find groups of supportive people for numerous interests when there may not be a similar group available in their surrounding community. Because of the unique quality of these online groups, an individual may form a strong identity with these groups and consider

these groups a strong part of who he or she is. Due to social networking sites and search engines online, finding a group of like-minded people with which to discuss one's feelings and thoughts has been made much more convenient than in the past and may account for a share of the high identification found in this study. Also, this idea may be particularly relevant within this study considering the majority of the participants were college students and therefore more likely to use the internet regularly and be involved in online social networking than older members of the general population.

Occupation was found to be another source of high identification. This increased identification could be the result of people spending a higher level of time and effort in their work environments. According to Napsha (2008), in an article reviewing the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, Americans worked an average of 42.5 hours a week in 2006, an increase of five hours per week from 2003. Due to the increased time and effort they expend, people may become more invested in their job environments and, in turn, form an identification with their occupations. In addition, individuals may have a higher level of identification with their occupation because (Van Dick, 2004) occupations provide more than one possible source of identification. Occupations, unlike other social groups, provide identification opportunities on three levels: a personal level, a group level, and an organizational level. Thus, an employee may have an increased level of identification in the workplace due to their increased identification with each of these groups present at work.

The average amount of time participants spend on activities related to each social group was examined along with the level of identification the participants indicated they had formed with each of the social groups. The amount of hours devoted to each activity

seems low considering the strength of the identification formed with each social group. For example, participants indicated that they spend an average of only 3.09 hours per week involved in activities related to a sport team. The participants also indicated an identification level of 6.23 (out of a possible 12 points) on the identification survey. For a social group that received a lower identification rating, such as community involvement, participants indicated that they still spent an average of 2.15 hours involved in activities related to the group. Therefore, judging by the results of this study, the time spent on each social group does not greatly influence the identification formed with each social group. Conversely, because of the correlation, identification with a social group does not strongly influence the time one spends involved in the social group's activities.

The second research question, addressing if identification with a sport team more strongly contributed to one's psychological health than identifications with other social groups, was evaluated by performing a two-step regression analysis. During the first step, all of the social groups other than sport team identification were included in the analysis along with the scores acquired from the psychological health scales included in the study. In the second step, sport team identification was included to evaluate the difference in variance accounted for by the presence of identification with a sport team. The results indicated that the relationship between identification with a sport team and positive social psychological well-being was in the expected direction, but were inconclusive for the model. One possible explanation for this result could be that, in this study, individuals were not asked to list a sport team with which they identify that is within close proximity to them. This information is important because Wann's Team Identification-Social Psychological Health Model (2006c) indicates that identification with a team that is

geographically far away does not result in the same positive social psychological health benefits that identification with a geographically close team can provide. In a future study, it may be beneficial to ask participants to indicate a geographically close team to better examine the social psychological health benefits that the identification provides as compared to the benefits received by identifying with other social groups.

After completing this research, some limitations and possible additions to this study were found that, upon correction, would strengthen and enhance the present results and any research completed stemming from this initial study. First, the ability to generalize this study's results to the general population is restricted due to the majority of the participants being college-age individuals. Furthermore, the participants were quite similar in age, ethnicity, and marital status. In future studies, it would be beneficial to collect data from throughout the community rather than on a college campus. Secondly, this study was conducted using participants generally from the same geographical region of the United States. To further strengthen the results, this study could be conducted in other regions in order to compare the identifications of people from across the nation. In order to advance this line of research, a possible future study would involve comparing levels of identification between sport teams and each of the social groups individually as opposed to examining all of the social groups within one study, as was performed in this research.

This research found that, overall, sport teams are a valuable part of people's lives and are considered more important than some social groups that have previously been viewed as playing a substantial role in people's lives. Because the majority of the study's participants are college-age individuals, these results could reflect that young adults are

just beginning to form their own identifications in their lives and they tend to choose to identify with sport teams rather than other social groups such as religion and social activities. These identifications could change when the population from which responses are drawn changes. In addition, identification with a sport team appears to have a more positive effect on one's social psychological health than identification with other social groups. This study demonstrates the value that involvement in social groups adds to an individual's life aside from purely entertainment purposes. This study also set the groundwork for further studies of individuals' identification levels and the psychological well-being they glean from their participation.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions: Please answer each of the following demographic questions, being completely honest in your responses.

Age: _____

Gender: Male Female

Race: Caucasian African-American Asian American Indian
 Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Hispanic/Latino Other

Education: Freshman Sophomore Junior
 Senior Graduate Student College Graduate
 Graduate School Graduate Did Not Attend College

If No College: High School Graduate Did Not Complete High School

Hometown (city and state): _____

Marital Status: Single Married Widowed
 Divorced Separated

APPENDIX B
PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

- 0 Never
- 1 Almost Never
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 Fairly Often
- 4 Very Often

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
1 In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3	4
2 In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
3 In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	0	1	2	3	4
4 In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?	0	1	2	3	4
5 In the last month, how often have you felt you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
6 In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	0	1	2	3	4
7 In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	0	1	2	3	4
8 In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	0	1	2	3	4
9 In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	0	1	2	3	4
10 In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	0	1	2	3	4
11 In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	0	1	2	3	4

12	In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?	0	1	2	3	4
13	In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?	0	1	2	3	4
14	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX C
SELF-ESTEEM SCALE

We are all members of different social groups or social categories. When answering the following questions, please consider your membership in those particular groups or categories. And respond to the following statements on the basis of how you feel about those groups and your memberships in them. There are no right or wrong answers to the statements. Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale:

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Disagree Somewhat
- 4 Neutral
- 5 Agree Somewhat
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neutral	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1 Overall my group memberships have very little to do with how I feel about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 The social groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 The social groups I belong to are unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX D
NEED FOR AFFILIATION SCALE

Directions: Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

1. I like to go to places and settings with lots of people.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
2. I would never want to live completely on my own.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
3. In my leisure time, I prefer to do things together with others.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
4. I cannot stand being alone.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
5. I prefer to go my own way alone.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
6. I really prefer to stay as short a time as possible at occasions where there are lots of people.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
7. When on vacation, I avoid contacts with other vacationers as much as possible.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
8. It is not my thing to undertake something with a group of people	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
9. It sounds awful to have a job in which you are alone in a room the whole day.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
10. I find it stressful to have people around me constantly.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
11. I like to talk to others.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
12. Even when I am in a relationship, I still have a strong need to be alone.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
13. The ideal way to spend my leisure time is to do something on my own.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
14. I like to be alone.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
15. I love teamwork.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4
16. I don't like to undertake something totally on my own.	SA 1	A 2	D 3	SD 4

APPENDIX E
IDENTIFICATION SCALES

Please indicate the team from any sport at any level which you follow very closely (Please be as specific as possible): _____

How many hours per week, on average, do you spend watching the team listed above on television, talking about them with others, reading about them in newspapers or magazines, or researching them on the internet?

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the sports team you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|----|
| 1. I identify strongly with other fans of this team. | SA | A | D | SD |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Being a fan of this team is an important part of who I am. | SA | A | D | SD |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I feel strong ties with other fans of this team. | SA | A | D | SD |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Please indicate your religious denomination (Please be as specific as possible): _____

How many hours per week, on average, do you spend in religious services or activities, talking about your religious denomination with others, reading about your denomination in newspapers or magazines, or researching your denomination on the internet?

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the religious denomination you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|---|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 4. I identify strongly with other members of this religious group. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 5. Being a member of this religious group is an important part of who I am. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 6. I feel strong ties with other members of this religious group. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |

Please indicate a school activity, if any, in which you are involved (For example: Greek organization, Debate Team, Academic-related club such as Psychology Club, Intramural team). Please be as specific as possible: _____

How many hours per week, on average, do you spend attending this organization's meetings, talking about the school activity with others, reading about the activity in newspapers or magazines, or researching the activity on the internet?

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the school activity you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|---|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 7. I identify strongly with other members of this school activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 8. Being a member of this school activity is an important part of who I am. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 9. I feel strong ties with other members of this school activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |

Please indicate a social/community activity, if any, in which you are involved (For example: Lions Club, Rotary Club, Knights of Columbus). Please be as specific as possible:

How many hours per week, on average, do you spend attending this organization's meetings, talking about the school activity with others, reading about the activity in newspapers or magazines, or researching the activity on the internet?

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the social/community activity you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 10. I identify strongly with other members of this social activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 11. Being a member of this social activity is an important part of who I am. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 12. I feel strong ties with other members of this social activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |

Please indicate your occupation/employment, if any. Please be as specific as possible:

How many hours per week do you work at this job? _____

Do you work full time or part time? _____

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the occupation you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 13. I identify strongly with other employees of this place of employment. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 14. Being an employee of this organization is an important part of who I am. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 15. I feel strong ties with other employees of this place of employment. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |

Please indicate a type of community involvement, if any, in which you are involved (For example: Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life, community clean-up project, charity organizations). Please be as specific as possible: _____

How many hours per week, on average, do you spend engaged in activities of this organization, talking about the community organization with others, reading about the organization in newspapers or magazines, or researching the organization on the internet?

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings for the community involvement you mentioned above. Please answer whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) with each of the following statements. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

- | | | | | |
|---|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 16. I identify strongly with other members of this community activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 17. Being a member of this community activity is an important part of who I am. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |
| 18. I feel strong ties with other members of this community activity. | SA
1 | A
2 | D
3 | SD
4 |

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project. As such, we would like you to have an understanding of the following:

1. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. In addition, you may discontinue your participation at any time.
2. All of your responses will remain anonymous. Therefore, do not write your name or any other identifying information on this or any other form.
3. You must be 18 years old to participate. If you are not 18, please return the forms to the examiner or exit from the website.
4. Although your individual responses will not be made public (they will remain anonymous), your data will be combined with the data of others and submitted for presentations at conventions and/or for publication in scholarly journals.
5. Your completion of these forms indicates your consent to participate.

The faculty sponsor for this research project is Rick Grieve, Ph.D. He can be contacted at 1-270-745-4417, Monday through Friday from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm or by email: rick.grieve@wku.edu. His office is at Western Kentucky University in Tate Page Hall, room 258. He is willing to answer any questions that may arise. Questions about research participants' rights can be directed to the Human Subjects Review Board, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101, 1-270-745-2129.

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS
PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN
KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD.

Sean Rubino, Compliance Manager, TELEPHONE 1-270-745-4652
sean.rubino@wku.edu

APPENDIX G
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for taking part in this study. This study examines individuals' levels of identification with social groups including sport teams, religion, school groups, social groups, occupation, and a community-related activity. You first completed a questionnaire which provided us with basic information about yourself. Next, you completed a questionnaire used to measure your social psychological health. You also completed a questionnaire measuring your need for affiliation, or connection, with other people. You were then asked to identify and rate your identification within six areas of social involvement: a sport team, a religious group, a school group, a social group, an occupation, and a community-related activity. The results of this study will be used to examine the social activity with which individuals identify most strongly. I want to remind you that your responses in this study will remain anonymous. If you have any questions regarding your participation, you may contact the primary investigator, Shelley Smith, at wkusmith@gmail.com, or my supervising professor, Dr. Rick Grieve, at (270) 745-4417.

