A qualitative examination of the social manifestations of participating in fantasy sports

By

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Abstract

As technology continues to infiltrate society, an increasing popularity of products like fantasy sports has become apparent. Fantasy sports are played yearly by millions of individuals across the world. This is a billion-dollar industry that does not appear to be slowing down anytime soon. Most scholarly attention has focused on participant's motivation for playing fantasy sports. This qualitative study expands upon prior research on motivation. Little research has been conducted regarding the social dynamics of fantasy participation and leagues. In this research, multiple social manifestations of playing fantasy sports was uncovered. To gather a deep understanding of the overarching social dimensions of fantasy leagues, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals who participate in annual leagues. The results of these interviews discovered that fantasy sports operate as a social tool to develop camaraderie between participants, keep them connected, and stimulate conversation. Additionally, both smack/bragging rights and nostalgia were significant aspects of the fantasy sport experience that subjects underscored. This study contributes to the fantasy sport literature as well as sport managers and marketers. The research is useful with such little examination done regarding fantasy sport leagues, and it compliments past research conducted on fantasy sport motivation. With research on fantasy sports in it's infancy, this study, the first of its type, will serve those interested in learning more about the industry and its consumers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sport has long been a platform that brings together people. Whether it is coincidentally running into a fellow jersey-wearing fan or spending quality time with friends and family every week for the big game, social interaction is a critical component of the sporting experience. People are afforded the opportunity to engage with sports through a variety of means: attending games, watching television or listening to radio broadcasts, participation, reading publications or the Internet. One engagement that has become tremendously popular is fantasy sports. While multiple studies have identified social benefits as a strong motive for fantasy sport participation, little to no research has been conducted as to how this dynamic is manifested (Raney, 2006; Roy & Goss, 2007; Ruihley & Harden, 2011). Gaining a deep understanding of the social benefits of fantasy sport participation is relevant to sport managers and marketers who strive to meet the needs and desires of sport consumers.

Often referred to as Rotisserie and Fanalytics, fantasy sports provide participants an opportunity to act as general manager or owner of their very own team (Dwyer & Kim, 2011). Available for nearly all professional sports, fantasy leagues are customizable, interactive and a tremendous space for friends and family to stay connected through a fun, competitive environment. Throughout the United States and Canada alone, fantasy sports participants have doubled over a seven-year period (Fantasy Sport Trade Association, 2014). With such rampant growth, it is challenging for sport managers and marketers to keep up with the industry and millions of people participating.

In taking the perspective of a consumer, fantasy sport is a unique blend of participatory sport and spectator sport (Lee et al., 2011). Thus, the fantasy sport experience is unparalleled in

the entire sports industry. Participants finally have the control and power (they have always desired as fans) to manipulate lineups as well as rosters. Each week they square off against a fellow owner—typically a friend or family member—and accumulate points based upon the real-life performances of the players they opt to put in their starting lineup. Fantasy engagement often occurs on a regular basis, to adjust starting lineups based upon matchups and bye weeks. Some owners participate daily and utilize the "waiver-wire" to add upward trending players, as well as to interact with fellow players through message boards.

The fantasy sport revolution has changed how fans consume sports. Relative to the general fan, fantasy participants attend more games and watch more televised sports (FSTA, 2006). This has benefited media outlets like ESPN, Yahoo and CBS profoundly. It was estimated that the total market impact of fantasy sports is somewhere between $40 billion to over $70 billion per year in tangible and intangible activity (Goff, 2013). These numbers continue to grow on an annual basis and do not appear to be slowing down anytime soon. As stated by Dwyer & Kim (2011), "Fantasy sport participants also represent corporate America's most highly-coveted group of consumers (Caucasian, Male, 18-45, Bachelor's Degree and $78,000 annual income)" (p. 71). This provides a huge opportunity for sports media and businesses to capitalize on.

As the industry grows rapidly, scholars have turned their attention to this burgeoning area of the sport industry. Studies have been conducted on the motivational dimensions of fantasy sport participation (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Spinda & Haridakis 2008; Indiana University Sports & Entertainment Academy, 2000; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Ruihley & Hardin, 2011; Lee et al., 2013). Fantasy leagues are like fan communities in that they are relationship-based associations revolving around a focal sport object. Recent research uncovered that social interaction is a strong influencer and at times the strongest influence on actual game attendance

(Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015; Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015). With social dynamics so influential in a person's decision to consume sports, it is important to better understand how they manifest themselves. Yet, there has been little research done on the inter-personal components of fantasy sports. A deeper understanding of fantasy sport leagues and the aspects that make them so desirable to participants is critical for academics and professionals working in this area. With millions of people using fantasy sports world-wide, it is imperative to understand their psychology behind playing as well as their perceived benefits. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the social benefits of fantasy sport participation for league members. This research examined the specific impact fantasy sports have on social groups and existing relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

By examining relevant content, this literature review will help to guide the direction of this study as well as the research questions. The author will focus on how social identity theory relates to individuals and groups, sport fan, participant as well as fantasy sport user motivations. These concepts will all be related to the social dynamic of participating in fantasy sports.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) was developed out of the early work of Henri Tajfel (1972), who sought to explain cognitions and behavior associated with belonging to social groups. The theory describes how social groups and categories people belong to have an impact on their self-concept. Social identity was defined by Tajfel (1972) as, "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership," (p. 292). SIT is a, "social psychology theory that sets out to explain group processes and inter-group relations" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 255). Social identity theory has since been widely recognized by mainstream psychology as one of the theories that most accurately explains the relationship between self and group (Hogg, 2006). An individual's perception of who they are is social identity. Upon meeting someone, our immediate response is to determine where they are in relation to our social map– or identify them (Jacobson, 2003). Social identity can also be described as one's social self. Tajfel & Turner (1986) described the personal self as distinctive, individual information about yourself, while the collective self entails information regarding the groups they belong to.

Social Identity related to individuals. The premise of social identity involves individuals and their involvement with groups. Social identity is an individual's perception that he or she belongs to a social group or category (Stets & Burke, 2000). One of the most prevalent ways in which individuals become associated with groups is through sports. This relationship between fan and team has been defined as team identification. Waan (2006) defined team identification as "the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team and the team's performance are viewed as self-relevant" (p. 332). These are the sports fans that often use the terms "we" and "they" when describing their favorite teams. They also view fellow fans of the same team as a part of their group.

With the ever-increasing popularity of sports, it comes as no surprise that fans are becoming more identified with their respective teams. A poll conducted by Sloan and Van Camp (2008) found that 92% of respondents were very interested in sports spectatorship and that 71% of respondents had purchased sports merchandise at some point in their lifetime. Wann (2006) found that highly identified fans of teams were more likely to consume sports media, purchase team apparel and attend sporting events. Billings & Ruihley (2013) note that highly identified fans are also more apt to participate in fantasy sports.

A few studies have been conducted to better understand why common sports fans are flocking to fantasy sports. In his research on fantasy sports, Levy (2005) noted that the men he interviewed:

> acknowledge luck but overall they see themselves as artful scientists who apply a causal model to the ongoing baseball season both real and fantasy. They value success, feel as though it does say something about them and attribute it to hard work, intelligence and competitiveness (p. 159).

The participants' perception of being "artful scientists" suggests that fantasy sports contribute to their overall identity. Furthermore, the participants value success and believe it says something about their self. This is like a fan of the University of Kansas whose self-esteem is contingent upon whether the Jayhawks win or lose. People behave ways to maintain or boost their self-esteem (Ervin & Stryker, 2000). Becoming a sports fan and participating in fantasy sports are two ways in which individuals conform to this characteristic of social identity theory.

A highly-identified fan can experience negative consequences (Wann, 2006). Sports fans can identify so much with their team that they perceive the team to be an extension of themselves and therefore when the team does not perform well, their self-esteem suffers (Basil & Brown, 2004). One way fans attempt to protect their self-esteem is by cutting off reflected failure (CORFing). This component of social identity theory was described by Trail et al. (2005), "…it measures the intentions to maintain a certain level of self-esteem by distancing oneself from an unsuccessful entity." These fans are often referred to as "fair weather" and receive grief from highly identified, loyal fans. Rather than let their self-esteem take a hit, fans who CORF drop their team-attachment and proclaim, "they lost."

Conversely, fans will flock towards a team or player that is performing well. Basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) involves the way sports can make fans feel positive emotions following a big play or win, despite contributing nothing to the actual performance of the team or player (Basil & Brown, 2004; Sloan and Van Camp 2008). While the glory is not earned, highly identified fans still experience a boost to their self-esteem. BIRGing can be seen in fans who celebrate and cheer "we won" after a thrilling victory. People who are unsatisfied with their personal lives will often associate with successful teams and players to fulfill this void.

The dual-process of CORFing and BIRGing can be explained by SIT, which states that people are attracted to successful groups and their self-esteem can be boosted through this attachment (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the realm of fantasy sports, CORFing and BIRGing are unique in that participants have control over the success and failures of their team(s). While their ultimate success is dependent upon real-world athlete performances, fantasy sport managers have complete control over their rosters and who is in the starting lineup.

Social Identity related to groups. People are motivated to behave in ways that boost their self-esteem and self-concept. The process of doing so through membership in a group is directly related to social identity theory. Social identity theory constitutes a group as three or more people who evaluate themselves based upon shared attributes that distinguish them from other groups of people (Hogg, 2006). The link between the psychology of an individual and the structure and function of social groups is social identity (Brewer, 2001). Clearly, how an individual's sense of self relates to others in a group is a critical component of SIT. "Social identity theory focuses on prejudice, discrimination, and conditions that promote different types of intergroup behavior—for example, conflict, cooperation, social change, and social stasis" (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p. 9).

Individuals strive to maintain their positive social identities, which are created through favorable comparisons to group members and outsiders (Jacobson, 2003, p. 4). A key motive for people to associate with a group is to sustain their positive social identity as well as to maintain their positive self-esteem. "It is not necessary for the individual to actually participate as a member of a group, rather the individual can perceive oneness with or belonging to it instead. They simply have to perceive that they are a part of the group" (Corrigan, 2007). Therefore, a group must provide individuals with perceived benefits for them not only to join, but also to

continue associating with the group. This study will seek to explore an academic gap as to what social benefits fantasy sport users experience through their participation.

Motivation

Sport Fan Motives. There are two distinct ways to classify motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motives exist within an individual and entails genuine interest and pleasure associated with a task. Conversely, extrinsic motivation deals with the benefits and rewards an individual receives after completing a task (Wann, et al., 2001).

As technology advances, the ways in which sport is consumed will continue to look profoundly different than it has in the past. The times have changed for sports viewership and crowds are no longer solely comprised of people with a unique bond or affinity to a team or athlete (i.e. local sports fans), but now consist of consumers seeking an extraordinary experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Bodet and Bernache-Assollant (2012) discussed spectators in their Routledge Handbook of Sport Management:

> Sport fans represent a particular type of emotionally committed and strongly identified spectators for whom the issue of the game or the competition is of a high importance, although "sport spectators" designates all viewers of live and mediate sport (p. 254).

While sport fans' emotional commitment and strong identity help to explain their overall consumption of sport, there are many spectators who do not exhibit the same intrinsic motivational factors. Research in this area has taken off in this area over the past two decades.

Wann (1995) was the pioneer of studying sport fan motivation. Wann developed the original comprehensive sport fan motivation instrument coined the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS). The SFMS tested eight categories of sport fandom: eustress (i.e., positive arousal and stress relief), escape or diversion (i.e., artistic), aesthetic value, self-esteem benefits or personal

enhancement, entertainment, economic factors (i.e., gambling), group affiliation and family ties (p. 377). Wann examined a homogenous sample of college students and discovered that males typically scored higher in levels of eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, and aesthetic motivation, whereas female fans only scored high in regards to family motivation. There were no gender differences found in the economic or group affiliation subareas.

A plethora of studies on fan motives have since been conducted and ultimately confirm the original findings of Wann (Lee et al., 2013, p. 168). Rainey (2006) broke down the sport fan motivations into three main categories: emotional, cognitive and behavioral/social. Although these measures were created to gauge sport spectator motives, a multitude of the characteristics that comprise these well researched motivations can also be found in fantasy sport participation (Dwyer & Kim, 2011).

Emotional Motives. Through observing a live sporting event, one takeaway would likely entail how the action and outcome of the game impacted spectators. Raney (2006) eloquently described the emotional dynamic of sport fandom:

> People view mediated sports because they expect positive emotional impacts from their viewing. These emotional reactions…are assumed to be dependent upon and governed by the affiliations—or affective dispositions—that viewers have towards one (or both) the competing teams (p. 315).

These emotional motives fall into the intrinsic motivation category, as they associate with an individual's attachment to a team or player and their desire to feel good. Overall, there are four subgroups of emotional motivation: (a) entertainment, (b) eustress, (c) self-esteem, and (d) escape (Raney 2006).

Wann's (1995) initial research found entertainment to play a critical role in fan motivation. This explains why so many people are willing to spend hundreds of dollars and devote countless hours to support their respective team or player. The entertainment these teams and players provide produces emotional satisfaction for fans. In Wann's (1995) study, 85% of respondents agreed that they enjoy sports because of the entertainment value (p. 382). It is important to note that the game itself is not the only entertainment fans experience. Many also partake in tailgates and various rituals that contribute to their emotional satisfaction (Smith & Stewart, 2007).

Eustress was described by Smith & Stewart (2007) as "the human need for positive stress and psychological arousal" (p. 158). This is associated with motivation as it is a biological need within the human body. Anxiety and pleasure are each a part of what goes into being a sports fan, (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Wann et al. (2001) noted that often individuals do not experience enough excitement and stimulation in their lives. This leads to people seeking thrills through other avenues. Through viewing and attending sporting events, individual's brains may secrete the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, which can lead to an emotional high. Positive affect and motivation were found to be positively correlated after an event, (Wann, Royalty & Rochelle, 2002). Eustress was found to be a contributing factor and is evidence of its motivating affect on fans involvement with a team or player.

The self-esteem motivation relates to how a fan's identity impacts their emotions. Essentially, a fan's self-esteem is boosted following a good performance by their team or player, (Wann, 1995). This motivation can also work against a fan's self-esteem if the team or player they identify with does not perform well. Many fans ride a roller coaster of emotions like the players in the game. These fans' identity is attached to performance regardless of outcome

(Smith & Stewart, 2007) Conversely, there are many fans who only jump aboard when a team or player is performing well. This group of fans is commonly referred to as "fair-weather fans" as their identity is contingent upon results of the team or player (Smith & Stewart, 2007).

The daily stress of life leads many people to seek an outlet where they can escape. This escape motivation involves a fan associating their self-identity with a team or player (Wann, 1995). By attending or viewing a game, fans are provided an opportunity to allude the social, financial or mental issues they battle in life. It is common for a fan to engage in cheering, chants among other rituals, (Smith & Stewart, 2007). This research discovered a positive relationship between escape and distance from home. An opportunity to travel long distances for a game or get together enhances escapism (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Fans utilize this motivation to find peace amidst their otherwise stressful lives. Escaping their struggles has been found to have a profound impact on sports fans' emotional state and well-being.

All the emotional motives can easily be applied to fantasy sport participants. Fantasy sports "allow us to take charge of our destiny, to ignore matters we can't control" (Leitch, 2009, p. 10). This growing platform has given sports fans a new way to interact with the teams and players they have such a strong affinity for. Participation in fantasy sports has the potential to play a critical role in the lives of those who cannot suit up and play.

Cognitive Motives. The two types of cognitive motivations have been identified as knowledge and aesthetic (Raney, 2006). Many fans are motivated to learn about the teams and players they identify with. They desire to know the history of teams and backgrounds of individual athletes. Additionally, many fans find pleasure in learning sports statistics and find pleasure in being knowledgeable in these areas. Learning leads to a higher intellect which ultimately allows fans to more easily connect to one another. This motivation will be discussed further in the following section.

Aesthetic pleasure that is associated with attending or viewing a game was also found to be a motivation for fans (Wann, 1995). Sporting events often provide fans with lasting memories that they can keep with them for a lifetime. In their research, Wann, Schrader & Wilson (1999) found that fans with a preference of individual sports as well as fans who prefer nonaggressive sports scored higher on the aesthetic subscale. The aesthetic pleasure derives from many sources. It can be found through the artistic beauty of the game, star athletes, attractive players (ex: tennis player Anna Kournikova), an event's atmosphere (ex: the crowd) and venues where the event takes place. Fan's do not just seek aesthetic pleasure through the game alone, but also all the components that go into the sporting experience (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Even the in-between inning of halftime promotions adds to the overall aesthetic experience that many fans hold near and dear to their hearts. From tailgating to postgame ceremonies and entertainment, sporting events truly are a beautiful work of art.

Behavioral and Social Motives. The final category entails the behavior and social motivations of becoming a fan. Raney (2006) identified five areas in which this motivation can be seen: release, companionship, group affiliation, family and economics. Sports provide fans with an opportunity to let their guard down. Like the escape motive, fans can release stress and emotions through supporting a team or player. According to Raney (2006), a key component of this motivation involves the presence of friends. The same can be said for many participants in fantasy sports.

Fans are also motivated by the companionship often associated with consuming sports. Wann et al. (2001) said:

> Sport fandom and sport spectating can help fulfill the human need for social interaction by providing a sense of belongingness. The fact that most spectators consume sport as a member of a social group suggests that fans do indeed use sport to satisfy social interaction needs (p. 32).

Perhaps it is not the sport that most strongly influences fans, but the opportunity to spend quality time with others and build relationships to satisfy their social needs.

The group affiliation motive is tied closely to the previously mentioned companionship. Wann's (1995) study found that highly identified fans use sport as a platform to associate with a social group. Fans of specific teams or players often seek a sense of belonging shared by other like-minded fans. When these similar fans unite to support the same team or player, a perceived togetherness arises within the group (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). These groups build comradery by wearing similar apparel as well as engaging in rituals and cheering. In doing so, fans feel affiliated with the group and ultimately more connected to the community (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Many people are motivated to become a part of these exclusive groups because they do

not otherwise have that social need met in their life. Sports can help to bring together schools, communities, cities, and even nations (Smith, 1988). Likewise, fantasy sports are also a medium that brings together communities and provide a social platform for groups.

Family was the only motive in which females scored higher in than males (Wann, 1995). Whether it be attending a game or watching in the living room, sports have been a way in which families spend quality time together for decades. "Sporting events provide an opportunity for families to spend time together, and in this respect, a sport experience is a vehicle for fulfilling family needs in much the same way as a vacation or weekend outing" (Smith & Stewart, 2007, p. 161). While overall team identification may be lower, the desire to fulfill family needs plays a strong role in this category. Wann et al. (2001) noted that family motives are far more common in individuals who are married and/or have children. Sport fans family motives also coincide with other social motivations. Smith and Stewart's (2007) research shows that spending time with family may also increase the group affiliation motive, which is further proof of the importance of social relationships. It all boils down to humans' natural "desire to belong to something bigger than oneself" (Smith & Stewart, 2007 p. 161). It is common for a highly-identified fan to include their family in the sporting experience. This situation allows them to fulfill their family and social needs all while maintaining their fandom. Fantasy sports have been shown to be utilized in similar ways by sports fans and families.

Participant Motivation. Like sport fans, motives for sport participants can provide a basic understanding of why individuals participate in fantasy sports. Based on prior research, the motivation to participate in sports is strikingly similar to the motives associated with fandom (Sloan, 1989). In a study of motivational factors that influence sport participation, 13 motives were uncovered: physical fitness, risk taking, reduced stress, aggression, affiliation, social facilitation, self-esteem, competition, achievement, skill mastery, aesthetics, value development and self-actualization comprise the 13 participation motives (McDonald et al., 2002). These factors have since been broken down into three main motivation categories: achievement, social and mastery (Green & Costa 2010). These categories are closely related to McClelland's Theory of Needs, which states that three motivational needs influence each human: achievement, affiliation, and power.

Achievement motivation involves one's desire to be successful, break barriers and find solace in the outcome (Butler, 1997). Obviously, sport is very achievement-oriented. Only one team wins in each game or match. Sport consumers may find their desire to compete and win is satiated through participation in fantasy sport. The competition associated with fantasy sports allows participants to achieve both intrinsic goals (ex: increased self-esteem) and extrinsic goals (ex: rewards for performance) by accomplishing something perceived to be difficult.

Human are social beings. Therefore, the social motivation of participating in sports is very strong. Developing and maintaining connections or relations with others is referred to as affiliation (Handy, 1993). People are motivated to participate in sports as it provides them a social environment in which they can interact with friends, family and other like-minded individuals. Fantasy sports also provide an opportunity for social engagement with other competitors, in addition to bonding with friends and family (Smith et al., 2010). Many fantasy

sport participants may play simply for the social interactions associated with owning a team and competing with friends and family. The pre-season draft also tends to be a very popular event where the participants gather and socialize while selecting the players for their team.

The desire to develop skills and performance at a sport to a level of excellence is referred to as mastery (Singer, Hausenblas & Janelle, 2001). Mastery of a sport requires the utmost devotion and focus on developing one's skill and abilities. A more intrinsically motivated individual is likely to find more success in obtaining mastery in sports. Per Lee et al. (2013), "Since fantasy sport provides participants a chance to test their skills and apply their knowledge of the game, mastery would likely be a strong motivator for fantasy sport participation" (p. 169). Participants can gauge their progress towards mastery by comparing their teams' record and statistics relative to competitors. As an athlete perceives an improvement in their physical ability, their mastery motivation increases (Ryckman & Hamel, 1993). This cause and effect is likely transferable to fantasy sports participants. As a player's knowledge and skill improves, they would likely be motivated to pursue excellent and ultimately mastery of fantasy sports.

Fantasy Sport Motivation. Differing from the engagement associated with being a fan, spectator or participant, fantasy sports allow consumers to take the general manager role of their team. This dynamic gives fans an opportunity to manage games and players, a role many believe they could perform better in than the professionals sitting in corporate suites (Schlossberg, 1996). While the need for power certainly has an impact on individuals' decision to participate in fantasy sports, there are a plethora of other motives. The motivating factors of why people participate in fantasy sports has received a wealth of attention from researchers throughout the past decade.

A survey conducted by the Indiana Sports and Entertainment Academy (2000) initiated the exploration of motivations and demographics of fantasy sport participants. This study found that 90% of respondents indicated their primary reason for playing fantasy sports was friendship. The next closest motivation, "playing for fun" was cited by just 60% of the respondents. These findings exhibit the critical social component of fantasy sports. It is plausible that fantasy sports are utilized for social interaction more so than to fill a competitive void. The author of this study hopes to expand upon ISEA's findings and to determine in what specific ways fantasy sports impact relationships and social groups.

More recently, Farquhar and Meeds (2007) incorporated a uses and gratifications framework—a notion that consumers fulfill their needs using media—to identify common motivational factors for fantasy sport participants. Utilizing a Q-Methodology, the pair discovered five different types of motives for fantasy sport users (FSUs): surveillance, arousal, entertainment, escape and social interaction. Furthermore, their research revealed a profound difference between FSU's motivated by surveillance (ex: monitoring stats and player information) and arousal (ex: feel positive emotions after a player scores). The difference

between these two involves the perceived element of chance in fantasy sports. Participants

motivated by surveillance, are more apt to perceive fantasy sports as a game of skill. Conversely,

those who are driven by arousal see the game as chance. Per Farquhar and Meeds (2007), the

more engaged fantasy participants believe they "get more out of fantasy sports when they put in

more time and money" (p. 1217). Fantasy sports work as a unique blend of gamesmanship and

spectatorship. The ultimate outcomes of fantasy sports very well may be in the participants'

hands (Shipman, 2001). In trying to explain the media usage tendencies of fantasy sport

participants, this study focused primarily on intrinsic motivations. The social motive was indeed

verified but not expanded upon.

Spinda and Haridakas (2008) advanced the work on fantasy sport motivation through

their comprehensive study. They incorporated past work revolving around media use, sports fan

motivation and interpersonal to develop a six-factor solution for fantasy sport participation

involving: ownership, achievement//self-esteem, escape/pass time, socialization, bragging rights

and amusement. One unique motive to this study and fantasy football is the "ownership" factor.

This derives from FSU's desire for control over the outcome of their fantasy sport experience.

Ownership is not a recognized motive for sports fans as they have no control over the players

and teams playing. Billings and Ruihley (2013) highlighted the notion of ownership:

If a fantasy participant is frustrated with the performance of his or her shortstop, the

owner can waive or trade that player; meanwhile the traditional sport fan must wait for

management to make a decision regarding possible remedies to the shortstop position. (p. 10)

This study also introduced bragging-rights, a fantasy sport-specific motivation. Most leagues

have at least one participant who makes a point to gloat about victories via social media. These

individuals are a prime example of the bragging-rights motive. Some people are driven not only to outperform others, but also to rub it in once they have done so.

Dwyer & Kim (2011) suggested that "a gratification approach could serve as a starting point in understanding audience experiences with fantasy football leagues" (p. 73). The pair developed a motivational scale in the context of fantasy football. This Motivation Scale for Fantasy Football Participation (MSFFP) was based on the Uses and Gratification theory and ultimately determined three dimensions of motivation on fantasy football participation: entertainment/escape, competition, and social interaction. This examination of what psychological needs are satiated through fantasy football participation aligns with prior research (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007).

Most recently, Lee et al. (2013) created the Fantasy Sport Motivation Inventory (FanSMI). The FanSMI was created through two phases: a preliminary qualitative phase and an iterative quantitative phase (p. 171). Their instrument ultimately determined 12 dimensions for analysis, some of which were motivations previously covered (entertainment and escape) while other motives were novel (hedonic experience and substitute for losing team). Billings and Ruihley (2014) worked off this study to create a series of composite scales for analyzing these 10 motivations: arousal, camaraderie, competition, control/ownership, escape, fandom, pass time, self-esteem, social sport and surveillance.

Conceptual framework for understanding fantasy sport participants was created by Roy and Goss (2007). They suggested that there are psychological and social needs that are met through the participation of fantasy sports. Sometimes the fulfillment of these needs is unexpected for participants, "…a player may be drawn to fantasy sport for the competitive aspects, only to learn that it also provides valued social interaction…" (Lee et al., 2013, p. 167).

This social dynamic of fantasy sports participation has been acknowledged in multiple studies (Raney, 2006 & Roy & Goss, 2007). The online platform provides individuals, who otherwise lack similar interests, with a stimulating conversation topic. Of the motivational dimensions, interpersonal motives are especially applicable to fantasy sports (Lee et al., 2013, p. 169).

Ruihley & Hardin (2011) expanded upon prior work and offered additional motivational dimensions of social sport, camaraderie, and competition. Per Billings & Ruihley (2013):

> The camaraderie is likely of a different nature when a group of sports fans bond over a Broncos game than when a group of fantasy sport participants watch games together (where they, by definition, do not share common players and game outcome interests.) There could be, as a result, a more competitive/aggressive component to the sense of social kinships involved in fantasy play. Nonetheless, social companionship is a shared desire of both types of fans, real and fantasy (p. 9).

As the Sports and Entertainment Academy at Indiana University (2000) discovered, friendship is the leader motivator for participation in fantasy sports. Very little research has been conducted to assess how exactly fantasy sports impact these friendships. As the usage of the Internet increases, people may use fantasy sports as a tool to stay connected to friends and family they otherwise would not remain close to. This study will seek to uncover the social motives and impacts associated with participation in fantasy sports.

Indiana University Sports and Entertainment Academy (2000) conducted a survey that discovered friendship was the top reason to play fantasy sports for 90% of respondents. Ruihley and Hardin (2011) expanded on prior fantasy sports motivation work to offer areas of social sport, camaraderie, and competition. The interview questions were created in relation to the aim of the study: to gauge social motives of fantasy sport participation and further understand how

this engagement impacts social groups as well as relationships between participants. Specifically, the following questions were used to guide the study:

RQ1: What social benefits do fantasy sport participants perceive?

RQ2: Would the experience be different if it was a league of strangers?

RQ3: How often do you engage with fellow fantasy owners throughout the season?

RQ4: In what ways do fantasy leagues enhance relationships between participants?

RQ5: Would relationships between league owners look different or even exist if they did not compete in fantasy sports together?

Chapter 3: Methods

The following sections will explain the process the author went through to collect and analyze data for this study. The background of the two fantasy sport leagues analyzed in this study will also be overviewed. More specifically, these sections will help to explain who participated in the study, how the author selected these individuals, the study's design, as well as how the author analyzed the data and the process of ensuring reliability and validity.

Context

Fantasy leagues are each unique in their own way. Every league has a different story as to how it come about as well as how the league has sustained throughout time. The way team owners are assembled is another fascinating dynamic of fantasy sports. Below the author has given a brief description of the background of each fantasy league incorporated in this study.

Fantasy League #1. The initial league incorporated into this study originated in the fall of 2011. As a fantasy football league, the initial live draft took place in late August. There were 12 original members of the 'La Crosse Brothers' fantasy league, eight of whom remain team owners. Having a core group of members who have experienced the league from its beginning to the present day was a strong determining factor in choosing it for this study.

The nucleus of the league collaborated after living close together on the 4th floor of Sanford Hall at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. This group paired up with a group of young men from Drake Hall, which ultimately produced the original 12 members of the La Crosse Brothers league. Members noted that most everyone was close prior to starting, but that the dynasty fantasy football league helped take the relationships to the next level.

A shared interest in football, gambling, and competition was the ultimate driver in the members' decision to create and invest in the league initially. Throughout the years, the league's dynamics have evolved, with owners exiting and entering sporadically. Still, as evidenced in this study, the social nature of fantasy leagues has become a primary reason for many members continued involvement. The core eight members intend to keep the league going into the future, with goals of reaching both the decade milestone in 2021, as well as the two-decade mark in 2031. Even newer league owners intend to stick around for the long-haul, noting the fun and close-knit culture of the La Crosse Brothers league.

The league's settings and rules have changed periodically throughout in seven-year existence. Each potential change is proposed to league members through a poll, which each owner can vote on once. If majority is reached, the commissioner then implements the change at an appropriate time. Starting lineups include: one quarterback, two running backs, three wide receivers, one tight end, one flex (RB, WR, TE), one team defense/special teams, and one kicker.

Fantasy League #2 Like the first fantasy league analyzed in this research, the second originated during the members' college days at the University of Nebraska - Omaha. At the time, most of the participants played together on the school's basketball team. Of the 12 original members, the commissioner estimated six or seven were basketball players, with the rest of the league being filled out with friends and family from back home.

The first year of the league was quite disorganized. Not a single owner had played fantasy basketball before and there were many individuals who did not know one another, which made communication and the overall experience challenging. It was not until the second season the participants felt the league gained credibility and momentum.

Following the first season, the league incorporated a keeper rule, which emphasized the members' aspirations of maintaining the league for the long-term. This system allowed owners to keep four players and only two of the four could be from the top four rounds. As a result, top talent remained in the draft pool for the following season. This wrinkle in their league settings helped to keep drafts entertaining, yet keep owners invested.

A handful of the basketball players also dropped out following the league's inaugural season, which opened spots for more friends and family of current owners to join. This created a more intimate and close-knit community, as everyone in the league was now connected. It is also worth noting that the league became much more competitive following the first year, as the lesser invested owners dropped out and the commissioner intentionally asked NBA fans to join.

The Nebraska fantasy basketball league made a dramatic transition just a couple of years ago. By consensus, they decided to forgo the popular snake draft system for an auction-style draft. This arguably requires more research and competence from owners than in the standard snake draft. Despite losing two individuals that voted against the auction draft, owners have unanimously enjoyed the change.

Despite losing a couple of basketball players after season one and a couple more guys due to the draft change, the league has retained eight of its original members. One owner still has the sheet they created that discusses what individuals they wanted to recruit for the league back in 2007. Although the men are now dispersed throughout the United States, it is this Nebraska fantasy basketball league that keeps them connected.

Procedures and Sample

Regarding qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) stated, "any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to

changes in some other component" (p. 2). Qualitative research focuses on the structure or essence of an experience and is applicable when the purpose of a study is to gain a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (Babbie, 2007; Merriam, 1998). This study sought to better understand the phenomenon of fantasy sport participation and how it affects social groups as well as relationships. A qualitative methodology was selected due to the study's exploratory nature and since no theories currently exist regarding the social impact of fantasy sport participation. This study attempts to uncover the role that developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships plays in the participation of fantasy sports. The study also seeks to improve the overall understand of how exactly relationships are impacted through participating in fantasy sports.

Unlike surveys or other quantitative methods, a qualitative interview design is adaptable and can change throughout the process (Babbie, 2007). This study utilized an interview protocol as it allowed participants to express their experiences and feelings (Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1 for interview protocol) were conducted with fourteen fantasy sport participants. This structure gave the author flexibility to forgo certain questions and implement additional questions depending upon the interview's flow. The semi-structured approach of this study allowed the author to inquire as to the subjects' motives for participating in fantasy sports as well as their favorite aspects of the experience. From there, additional questions and follow-up questions were in place if the conversation did not evolve organically.

Considering the author and participants of this study live with tremendously busy schedules throughout the United States, interviewing in person was not possible in all but one case. Therefore, interviews were conducted using speakerphone. These interviews all took no longer than twenty minutes. The interviews were digitally audiotaped and later transcribed by the

author of this study. Participants are identified throughout the study by pseudonyms. These names were given strategically to ensure anonymity for the participants.

Participants of this study were recruited intentionally through e-mail to discover, understand, and gain insight into this phenomenon. This purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select participants for effective use of resources (Patton, 2002). Individuals who have participated in fantasy sports for no less than three years were selected for this research by the author. This milestone was created to ensure that the participants have enough experience to provide meaningful perspective.

Members of both a fantasy football and fantasy basketball league are represented in the sample. Based upon responses, the previously mentioned purposeful sampling was utilized, dependent upon the willingness of the fantasy sport owners to participate. The author interviewed ten members of the fantasy football league and four members of the fantasy basketball league. Each subject for this study was male. Additionally, all but two interviewees were original members of their respective league. Interviews ceased once saturation was achieved. Saturation occurs when further investigation will not provide any new insights or information from what you already have uncovered (Gratton and Jones, 2004).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by the author and all ambiguities were then clarified with the study's participants. Upon transcribing, the author then analyzed the transcripts. An inductive approach was utilized in this study; inductive codes emerge from the raw data (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch, 2011). The author then used open coding to identify common themes that emerged from the data. Open coding entails an author creating headings and taking notes as they work through the transcripts to create categories and abstractions (Elo & Kyngas,

2008). Once the transcriptions were initially coded, the researcher went through again, this time analyzing headings and notes to create categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The author continued to review and analyze the transcripts until the emergent themes become saturated.

While only fourteen interviews took place for this study, the author did not stop conducting them until saturation was reached. This was clear to the author once the responses participants gave to questions became redundant and common themes evolved. Common to most qualitative research, generalization is not the goal of this study (Merriam, 1998). The sample of this study may not represent the entire population of fantasy sport participants.

To ensure reliability and validity, the author used five verification strategies described by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002): methodological coherence, appropriate sample, collecting and analyzing concurrently, thinking theoretically, and theory development. Participants responses were summarized collectively, with direct quotes supplementing the description of data themes. The author is confident that the findings of this research are in accordance with Morse et al.'s five strategies and therefore both reliable and valid.

Chapter 4: Results

The author uncovered the relevant findings through analysis of the transcriptions and these findings are described in this section. The overall understanding of the social manifestations of participating in fantasy sport for this study's subjects can be explained through three themes that emerged from their interviews: fantasy as a social tool, nostalgia, and bragging rights/smack talk. These themes derived from the combination of participant's spoken word, the explication of that spoken word, reoccurring notions, and relevant anecdotes. The author classified each overarching theme below to better explain the emergence of the theme from the data, provide context for the finding, and use direct quotes to depict it.

Fantasy as a Social Tool

Fantasy sports operating as a social tool emerged as a theme throughout participant interviews. The idea of fantasy sports acting as a "social tool" was described by Otis when asked about his favorite aspects of the fantasy sport experience. This theme re-emerged perpetually throughout the interview process. In analyzing the data, it became evident that this was the most prominent theme. While there is a plethora of reasons individuals participate in fantasy sports, the social components are arguably the most influential. One subject of this study went so far to say that they get no joy out of playing fantasy sports outside of the social aspect of doing it with people that they know. Others conveyed similar sentiments as well.

Through the participant's explications of fantasy sport as a social tool, three sub-themes emerged. These themes entail fantasy sports inducing camaraderie/deepening of relationships, connectedness/maintenance of relationships, and fantasy sports working as a social lubricant/conversational piece. These three sub-categories are described below.

Camaraderie and Deepening of Relationships. The most prominent sub-category of fantasy sports as a social tool was the camaraderie and deepening of relationships associated with participating in a league. Most subjects in this study pointed towards camaraderie, whether directly or indirectly, as one of the primary reasons they remain engaged in the league. According to Art, the main motivation for participating from the onset was, "definitely a camaraderie thing." The following statement described how Jake was drawn towards fantasy due to the camaraderie and how he would have been less inclined to participate without the relational aspect of being a part of a social league:

> I was initially anti-fantasy and it wasn't fantasy football itself that got me into it, it was
>
> having that camaraderie with the guys that really sold me on it. So, I think if it wasn't for
>
> this league, I don't think I would have ever began playing fantasy. The camaraderie is
>
> still the part I value the most, my team was so terrible this season but I still had a great
>
> time playing with everyone.

This suggests that fantasy sports function as a tool to curate camaraderie. The notion that participating in fantasy sports is less about winning and more about investing into relationships was frequently mentioned by subjects of this study. While many fantasy sports users are competitive in nature, it appears what Art referred to as a "bonding experience" with other participants is what keeps them coming back annually.

The participation in fantasy sports appears to not only encouragement engagement, but also has helped to develop rapport between members. Multiple interviewees described how being a part of their respective league led to the development of relationships, "a lot of the guys from this league I didn't know that well when I first joined… now I talk to and have everyone's number now, so it's a way to build relationships," (Steve). In addition to meeting people and

forming new friendships, fantasy sports also serve to deepen preexisting relationships, which Ed elaborated on when describing the social impact of fantasy sports:

> Me and my brother always got along fine, we never had any issues, but we were never close, you know we never hung out together and without a doubt fantasy basketball is probably the single biggest thing that made our relationship closer because we always have something we're excited to talk to each other about and that leads into other conversations and a deeper relationship…so you know a lot of those relationships wouldn't have developed into much more than an acquaintance, but because of fantasy basketball they turned into actual friendships and people I'm pretty close with now.

Mutual membership in a league was perceived to play a critical role in the relationship development between these brothers. These results exhibit how the commonality of competing in the same fantasy league trickles into other areas of participant's relationships.

Connectedness and Relationship Maintenance. Another way in which fantasy leagues were found to act as a social tool is how they keep individuals connected. Per P8, multiple members of their league struggle to keep up with the demands of playing fantasy football, yet, "they still want to be in the league because they feel like they're still connected." While their team's performance may be sub-par, multiple subjects mentioned how critical their association with the league was to remain in contact with other members. According to Otis:

> For me, our fantasy league is the thing that keeps me the most tied to my college friend group, which is hard to admit because it seems like such a distant way to stay in contact but what else are you going to do when you have 12 people you want to stay in contact with that live across the country and you're all adults now.

Despite being separated by hundreds, if not thousands of miles, fantasy sports were found to be one of the few remaining commonalities between friends. Without the league, some participants even questioned whether their friendships would remain intact. Upon being asked what these relationships would look like without fantasy sports, Kobe stated, "I love all those guys, but I would just have no connection with them…you don't get to see each other much, but you still feel connected because you're doing fantasy with them."

Many subjects in this study underscored how being a part of the same league played an instrumental role in maintaining relationships with their friends. Beyond simply keeping them connected, fantasy sports acted as a tool for individuals to maintain relationships consciously or unconsciously, "…whereas fantasy football is another avenue to maintain a relationship without having to think directly about that relationship," (Abe). A few interviewees even compared fantasy sports with social media in the way it allows participants to maintain relationships digitally. The authenticity of using fantasy as a social connection tool appealed to many subjects, including Rex who poignantly stated:

> It's a way to foster those relationships so that we have a way of interaction in not a forced way you know it's not like I'm just randomly trying to text someone out of the blue to keep up with, like we have a reason to talk and connect. It's not like I'm forcing a relationship which I think we all do with people we want to stay in contact with, this way there's no awkwardness on either side of why you're trying to maintain the relationship.

This individual pointed out how vital the organic nature of relationship maintenance through fantasy participation is. Rather than drifting apart, fantasy sports are conducive to keeping friends connected. It was described as a, "valuable way to maintain relationships," (Jim).

Conversation Stimulator. The third sub-section of fantasy sports as a social tool involves the way in which fantasy sports operate as a key conversational piece. This became apparent to the author after numerous subjects described how fantasy talk often stimulated further, deeper discussion regarding personal lives. Per Jake, it even encourages people's personalities to shine, "Fantasy sports are a social lubricant and gives you a way to start a conversation – it gives you something to talk about and opens you up to being more yourself."

The social and competitive nature of fantasy sports certainly led to members becoming more comfortable with one another. This dynamic ultimately led to the deepening of relationships previously mentioned in this section. Participants responded to the question of how fantasy impacted relationships with comments like, "It's a fun conversation piece between you and your friends," and "Some people don't even care about winning, they just want to maintain conversations with their friends," (Art & Brian). Pat went on to describe how fantasy sports work as a social tool in and out of person:

> All of us give it enough time that it's still a point of contact, if an injury happens to your buddy's player, you shoot him a text…so yeah this creates time when you're going to talk to someone… when I go back for the holidays I've got my cousin, brother, his best friend, and both brother-in-law's, so there's six, and if we're all in the room together we're just talking fantasy basketball and I'm sure everyone in the room hated us, especially our wives were not impressed, but it was a topic of conversation for sure and it still is.

This participant highlighted how fantasy sports intersect with socializing. Despite being home for the holidays, surrounded by family who have no personal stake in the league, the topic of fantasy basketball was always one that dominated conversation. Throughout the data collection,

fantasy sports operating as a social lubricant or point of conversation emerged as a popular social benefit related to participating in a league.

In discussing league membership with the subjects of this study, dynamics related to fantasy sports working as a social tool emerged as the predominant theme. The numerous ways in which fantasy participation creates, maintains, and deepens social bonds became clear throughout this research. Sub-categories of camaraderie, connectedness and fantasy acting as a conversation stimulator, helped to break down these social benefits. Beyond fantasy sports operating as social tool, an overarching theme related to smack talk and bragging rights became apparent to the author.

Smack Talk/Bragging Rights

Outside of utilizing fantasy sports as a social tool, a salient dynamic commonly expressed by subjects was the pleasure of talking smack. The nature of smack talk differs from the first theme in that it appeared to be the outlet in which participants could exercise their competitive side. This was depicted well in Abe's response when asked what his primary motivation for initially joining the league was:

> "Our freshman year everyone's got the competitive edge coming from a different high school and different backgrounds and want to prove that the style they were raised with, the school they come from is better than their classmates that came from a different background. You see that with intramural sports as well as Division 1 through 3 athletics, by having these other competitive outlets like fantasy sports, it allows more people to compete than they would be able to otherwise."

This example displays how participating in fantasy sports can help to fill the competitive void that may exist following an individual's athletic career. It appears that membership in fantasy

leagues can be beneficial to those whose identity is heavily tied to sports and competition. While competition was commonly found to be an early motivation for playing fantasy sports, Jim explained how that manifested itself in the form of bragging rights or smack talk:

> I'm a very competitive person so originally it starts with that and I love football, I love sports, so to me that was always something that I wanted to do. It started initially because I really wanted to win and wanted to win the money because poor college kid, right? That was a bigger deal for me in the early stages and as it has progressed, it has become more about bragging rights and just having the chance to talk a little smack.

This participant acknowledged the role competition and love for the game played in his decision to play fantasy football. While these two factors certainly still influence his decision to participate, the art of smack talk and opportunity for bragging rights have surpassed the original motivators. Kobe expressed similar feelings, "…I couldn't care less if it's about money, for me it's all bragging rights, you know what I'm saying, it's the rush of trying to develop and manage a team." In valuing bragging rights and smack talk, subjects emphasized how important it was to be in a league comprised of friends/acquaintances rather than strangers:

> With us knowing each other the whole smack talk aspect and dynamics are completely different. I did a league online with completely random people and it was just weird because there's no dialogue. With our league, we've all known each other for so long, so the whole back-and-forth smack-talk aspect is awesome. Almost every match-up I talk a little smack through text. It gets you more involved and engaged in the whole league when you do this. You're not just checking it on Sunday, you're checking it every day to see what other people are doing so you can talk smack about their moves. (P4)

His statement exhibits how using smack talk makes participants feel more involved with the league and engaged with other members. It also shows how smack talk triggers team owners to study competitors acquisitions, as that often provides them with tremendous ammunition to berate their personnel decisions.

Multiple layers of the smack talk dimension became apparent throughout the data. The first way discussed was fantasy participants using smack talk as a competitive outlet. One subject went on to explain how smack talk functioned to keep owners engaged and committed in the league. Per Abe, "I would be more likely to quit in a league of strangers, whereas if I was 0-7 in my league I would be ridiculed for quitting." This is a role smack talk plays that is not commonly thought of when thinking of fantasy sports. In playing with a league of strangers, there is no consequence to bailing early. Yet, participating in a league where one is connected in some way to the other members, there is a fear of backlash for quitting or colluding that exists.

The final way in which subjects found smack talk to be vital to their participation was the way in which it symbolized friendship and camaraderie. With message boards in the clear majority of leagues, friendly banter has become commonplace in the fantasy world. Multiple participants noted the increasing use of social media has taken smack talk to a whole new level, with some members calling one another out on Snapchat, Twitter and even Facebook. While on the surface showing each other up may seem like a surefire way to create animosity, P6 described this theme in a different way:

> Smack talking someone is a true sign of friendship and camaraderie. It might seem counter-intuitive, but when you really think about it, who smack talks someone they don't know very well or don't have some sort of rapport with? The thing that makes bragging acceptable is that common notion that it's fun to piss off your friends, but

somehow the opposite is mostly true when it comes to people you're not close with. So,

when you're smack talking someone and they dish it back, I think subconsciously

everyone involved gets that reassuring feeling of friendship and camaraderie.

This notion takes the entire act of smack talk and connects it with the first theme of fantasy

sports working as a social tool. This can also help to explain why some subjects suggested the

smack talk dynamic takes years to evolve. As members of a league become more comfortable

with one another, they employ more smack talk. In doing so, it shows that they indeed have

camaraderie with others in the league. Then through engaging in friendly back-and-forth banter,

these relationships deepen even further. These observations by P6 depict how smack talk needs

to be viewed beyond a surface-level action, but also as a way that individuals display their

friendships, camaraderie, and build on their existing relationships.

Nostalgia

The third theme that emerged throughout this research was the nostalgia attached to

fantasy sport participation. Many subjects elaborated on nostalgia and how exactly it functioned

for them personally. This is how Zach described the nostalgic nature of fantasy sports:

One of my fondest memories is from sophomore year and it came down to Monday night

and I was up by a lot. I wish I remember the players but I just remember the

feeling. Something happened, I was just heartbroken and devastated and it was

midnight because those Monday night games go so late and I lost and in a horrible

way so I wound up going for a 10-mile run… I think that Nostalgia plays a huge part of it

now. And I think we're the first generation to have the nostalgia tied to it.

Zach's reflection goes to show the lasting effect fantasy sports and matchups can have on

participants. While this specific memory may not have been the most positive, there is certainly a

level of nostalgia he has attached to the memory of staying up late on an otherwise random Monday night to see if his team would hold on to victory.

In response to being asked how participating in a league together enhances relationships, Jim said, "When you talk about fantasy sports, you have more of an organic conversation and it's a great way to stay in touch, I look at it now as reliving the glory days of college because I miss that and it's very nostalgic for me." Here, it became clear that fantasy sports could be used not only for social and competitive purposes, but also to connect emotionally with the past. Despite being years removed from school, this participant finds his fantasy league to be a symbol of his college experience. A friendly reminder of the "glory days." Jake expressed similar sentiments regarding nostalgia associated with playing fantasy sports:

> Part of the reason I feel nostalgic when thinking about the league is because it ties in so closely with my overall college experience (which makes sense since the guys were all my best buds in those days). It's so easy to feel nostalgic for a time in your past... so, having that little piece of college that has carried over so far after graduation allows you to hold onto that notion in almost a tangible way.

Fantasy sports seem to be a bridge between where participants are at now in their lives and where they have been. Based on the interviews, membership in a fantasy league appears to help individuals to create and remember fond memories from the past.

By briefly reminiscing on their experience in the league, subjects could recall vivid stories from live drafts, Sundays spent watching together, and Monday night heartbreaks. Another way that nostalgia manifests itself in relationship to fantasy sports, is when league members gather in-person. This dynamic was elaborated on by Pat:

Nostalgia usually comes out when a group of guys in the league are hanging out together

in person. We often reminisce about various events from the league's past—things like

ridiculous trades that were offered, or the time that we had a two-week playoff final

matchup (they are typically one week), and the extra week cost the clear favorite the title.

Talking about past events from the league definitely helps to sustain interest, and the

shared memories are an important part of the friendships that are strengthened/continued

because of participation in the league.

The nostalgia described here varies in that it transpires when league members are brought

together. This participant pointed out how these shared memories work to strengthen the

friendships of league members. Additionally, it is important to note that by talking and bonding

through the past, participants perceived an increase of interest in the league.

Ultimately, nostalgia worked on an individual as well as a group level. Multiple subjects

of this study noted that just by thinking about their league, fond memories, and associations from

the past surfaced. Other interviewees focused on the story telling and jesting that occurs when

the league unites. The data suggests that rituals such as live drafts, watch parties or message

boards are most commonly associated with the nostalgia that fantasy users cite. Regarding

fantasy participation, Rex stated, "Yeah it's a good excuse to interact with some folks I wouldn't

interact with and yes I think it always brings back good memories, whether it's fantasy or other

times you were together." This comment expresses how fantasy sports can remind us not only of

past experiences in the league, but also in everyday life. According to the data, the way nostalgia

manifests throughout participating in fantasy sports is multi-faceted.

Throughout the interviews, fantasy sports as a social tool, smack-talk/bragging rights, and

nostalgia were the most reoccurring elements regarding the social benefits related to participating

in a league. Therefore, these three sections can be classified as themes for this study. This study's result allowed the author to consider the six questions considered above, and aligned very well with the past relevant literature on fantasy sport participation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study's purpose was to uncover the social manifestations of participating in a fantasy sports league. The author has examined ways in which the development of the major themes aligns with past literature and the research questions. Additionally, the author has included practical implications for this study, limitations of research, and future considerations.

In focusing on specific elements of the fantasy sports experience (e.g., social dynamics, relationships, and motives for participation), this study's primary objective was to investigate and explain the significance of understanding fantasy sport users to sport marketers and managers. Despite numerous studies regarding motivation for participating in fantasy sports (Billings and Ruihley, 2013; Dwyer & Kim 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Spinda and Haridakas, 2008), there is little available research on the social benefits provided to those participating in a league. This research illuminates the importance of utilizing fantasy sport as a social tool as well as a tremendous way to connect participants to their past.

The overarching theme of this study was "fantasy sports as a social tool." This ultimately means that individuals play fantasy sports for the vast array of social benefits that it provides, including deepening of relationships, connection, discussion topic, among others. At its core, fantasy leagues provide users with a range of benefits. In his research on sport fan motivation, Raney (2006) highlighted three main motive categories: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral/social. Regarding the behavioral/social section, Raney pointed out the presence of friends and its profound impact on the motive. This interest in social interaction and friend engagement was also found to be persistent in the fantasy leagues. Per Wann et al. (2001), "Sport fandom and sport spectating can help fulfill the human need for social interaction by providing a sense of belongingness…" (p. 32). Just like sport fans consume sport as members of a social

group, individuals participating in fantasy leagues are also a part of a social group revolving around sports. These sports-related social groups have become more common with increasing technologies to connect individuals. People using sports and more specifically, fantasy sports, to satisfy social interaction needs is a critical reason so many people invest their time and energy into leagues.

The most profound social manifestation that emerged from this study was the camaraderie and deepening of relationships that playing fantasy sports stimulated between participants. Typically, it is believed that people play fantasy sports for extrinsic rewards like competition and prizes (Lee et al., 2013). This study shows that individuals are more motivated to participate in fantasy leagues to build chemistry with friends and to ultimately take these relationships to the next level. Leagues provide a tremendous amount of opportunities for interaction between participants not only during the season, but also throughout the offseason. This aligns with the earliest study on fantasy participation motivation, where 90% of respondents reported their primary reason for playing fantasy sports was friendship (Indiana Sports and Entertainment Academy, 2000). While ISEA's study determined friendship to be a critical reason people play, it did not uncover the specific ways relationships were impacted.

While little prior research regarding the social nature of fantasy sports exists, the author compared this study's findings with research on other virtual communities. One of which, e-Sports, has had a massive increase in popularity and has received attention from scholars (Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008). Since both e-Sports and fantasy sports are extremely common leisure activities and share similar characteristics such as virtual competition, social-nature and sports-related, the author deemed them a quality comparison. According to Zillmann et al. (1989), sports fandom provides social benefits such as camaraderie, community, and solidarity.

Due to technology, these communities are now cultivated virtually and fantasy sports has become a tremendously popular medium for individuals seeking community. There seems to be a ubiquitous agreement regarding the importance of belonging to a community for human beings (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This study and past research has helped to depict how both sports and fantasy sports work to achieve these desires.

Zillmann et al. (1989) elaborated on the role sports plays in fulfilling this basic human need, "It appears that sports fanship can unite and provide feelings of belongingness that are beneficial to individuals and to the social setting in which they live," (p. 251). This statement reaffirms the group affiliation motive that Wann (1995) discovered in sports fans during some of his early research. Many fans use sport as a platform to associate with a social group and the same can be said for fantasy sport users. Being a part of these groups can lead to a sense of "togetherness" as pointed out by Murrell & Dietz (1992). Sports fans build camaraderie by wearing similar apparel, tailgating, taking part in rituals and cheering. This study's subjects compared the sport fan dynamics to those associated with their leagues. Participating in live drafts, message boards, smack talk and watching games together were deemed a variety of ways in which fantasy sports induced camaraderie among players. This camaraderie then trickled into other areas of participants lives and helped to keep relational bonds strong.

Participants in this study reiterated the variety of ways camaraderie was developed throughout the participation in their respective league. Fantasy sport participation offers opportunities to not only form friendships, but also to go deeper with preexisting relationships. Participants in this study noted how their leagues helped to keep one another connected, despite being thousands of miles apart. Their leagues also serve as a bridge to keep one another informed

as to the happenings in each other's everyday lives, whereas they felt they would be out of the loop without their connection through fantasy.

All in all, subjects described fantasy sports as an enjoyable experience, but the camaraderie with fellow participants is what really made the experience worthwhile to them. Most subjects proclaimed they continue playing for the relational benefits more so than any other factor. Some interviewees went so far to say that they would prefer to be in a league with friends and lose every game than win a league filled with strangers. Evidently, the social offerings of participating in a fantasy league are vast. This is comparable to studies conducted on the motivation of e-Sports players. These studies found the strongest motive for participation to be sociability, followed by playing for fun and then followed up by performance (Frostling-Henningsson, 2009; Hobler, 2006; Jansz & Martens, 2005). Fantasy league and e-Sports motives are similar in that both activities involve virtual competition between two individuals. Unlike eSports where each game may last merely an hour, fantasy leagues can go on for months at a time, as well as require offseason time investments. Therefore, fantasy sports demand an even stronger level of motivation to play and perceived benefit for users.

The second section of this theme involves fantasy sports working to help individuals stay connected and maintain their relationships. In analyzing the motives for e-Sports players, Muller-Lietzkow (2006) found that participants are predominantly motivated by social contact and less by the drive to compete and win. This corroborates with the findings of this study. The nature of e-Sports involves players' communicating with one another during games for social interaction purposes (Teng & Chen, 2013). Fantasy sports operate in the same fashion. Many of the study's subjects elaborated on this notion, proclaiming their leagues functioned as a way to stay connected with fellow competitors. The fantasy sport experience keeps individuals connected

leading up to, during as well as following the matchups. Maintaining friendships through the participation in fantasy sports is a tremendous benefit of playing.

Thus, fantasy sports do not solely serve as a competitive outlet, but more importantly, a space where players are able to satisfy their need to remain connected. This study was based on the rationale that people participate in fantasy sports for the numerous social benefits provided. The data shows that participants' goals of using fantasy sports as a social tool were mirrored in their perception of how well their respective league kept them connected to others. Similar to e-Sports, fantasy is not merely an online game, but a space (virtual and real) for remaining connected to and maintaining relationships (Martoncik, 2015). Roy and Goss (2007) acknowledged the role fantasy sports play in fulfilling social needs. Some participants may initially sign-up for the competition, only to learn the numerous social benefits associated with playing (Lee et al, 2013). This research confirmed the notion of fantasy sport working as a social tool. The online platform provides people who otherwise may lack social connection, an opportunity to invest in their relationships organically.

The final section of the 'social tool' theme revolves around fantasy sports working as a key conversational piece. Crawford (2004) noted that internet technologies have influenced sport fandom by giving supporters a space to form and interact in online groups. Fantasy sports has stood out as a strong platform for those interested in using sports to satisfy social needs. This study discovered that participants perceive fantasy sports to not only stimulate camaraderie and connection, but also to act as a conversational topic in social settings. Subjects underscored the inherent ability of fantasy sport participation to producing a fun and engaging topic for discussion. The online platform provides individuals who lack similar interests, a stimulating

conversational piece (Raney, 2006). Upon discussing their fantasy teams and performances, individuals pointed out how much more fluidly conversation tends to shift in other directions.

Overall, participants found fantasy as a valuable way to begin conversation and ultimately, open up to being more authentic during social interactions. Billings and Ruihley (2013) alluded to the social companionship of fantasy sports being strikingly similar to that of sports fans. By easing interactions, fantasy sports concurrently served to deepen relationships, as discussed previously. According to Keaton and Gearhart (2014), social connections derived from sport identification are often beneficial to one's health by improving their self-esteem while alleviating depression and alienation. Fantasy sports and the plethora of social benefits provided by it could certainly function in the same fashion.

Another very strong theme that emerged from the interviews was how strong of an affinity participants have for bragging rights and smack talk. Competition does play a role in many people's decision to play fantasy sports (Farquhar & Meeds, 2007). Spinda and Haridakas (2008) advanced research on fantasy sport users' motivation to include bragging rights. This study discovered that this dynamic is viewed quite favorable by participants.

Smack talk is not new in relation to sports. Basketball has developed a culture where talking trash is not only accepted but celebrated (Albom, 1993). The findings of this study show that the same holds true in the fantasy sports world. Individuals commented on how their desire to talk smack fueled their pursuit of excellence. Like how sport websites, forums, and blogs are saturated with trash talk between fans, fantasy league message boards tend to be as well. Legendary ballers, Larry Bird, and Michael Jordan, were infamous for their smack talk which, "…could burn the ears of a longshoreman," (Saunders, 2004). From two of the best basketball players to ever play the game, to an average fantasy sport participant, smack talk is certainly a

commonality throughout the entire sports world. The participants interviewed for this study expressed the pleasure they take in enacting this type of behavior with competitors.

Smack talk has also become commonplace in the video game community. Whether typed or spoken, this action is utilized by participants in many competitive environments. Fantasy leagues are no different, as numerous subjects pointed towards bragging rights and smack talk as their favorite aspects of the fantasy sport experience. A reality television show called "Madden Nation" gave viewers an inside look at the environment around the video game Madden NFL. In portraying some of the most talented players in the world, a key selling point was clearly the perpetual smack talk between competitors throughout the duration of the tournaments (Chalifoux, 2006). Talking smack was a fundamental aspect of the Madden Nation experience. The same can be said of fantasy sports. The desire to be on the giving rather than receiving end of league smack talk is what drives competition in the leagues studied. Since the fantasy sports users interviewed for this study no longer participate in competitive sports, it appears that they now use this medium to fill the identity they once had as an athlete. By aiming for bragging rights, they can do so through strong fantasy sport performance.

Some participants for this study pointed to smack talk and bragging rights as their primary motivation for investing time into fantasy sports. Rather than wanting to win for the financial reward, they preferred winning for the opportunity to engage a friend in friendly banter. The phenomenon of smack talk has the potential to disrupt athletes at all skill levels (Conmy, 2007). In the fantasy sport context, it appears participants utilize it more so to engage with their competitors more so than to impact their performance. Those interviewed for this study also noted that playing in leagues comprised of strangers took away the pleasure associated with

smack talk and bragging rights. This is further evidence of how critical socializing is in relation to the nature of the fantasy sports experience.

Nostalgia associated with fantasy sport participation was a theme the author did not anticipate uncovering in this study. Yet, most individuals interviewed expressed nostalgia when prompted as to what about their league meant most to them. Researchers have differentiated between two types of nostalgia in past literature. According to Zhao et al. (2014), individualistic nostalgia is self-focused and involves an individual's past. Conversely, collectivistic nostalgia is much more relationship-focused and is associated with a shared past time (Zhao, Li, Teng & Lu, 2014). Multiple subjects of this study simply had collectivistic nostalgia attached to their league regarding past events, seasons, and games. For others, league association stimulated personal nostalgia for past experiences and memories with those who they play fantasy sports with.

The link and tendency for sentimental reflecting is caused not only by past feelings of warmth, but also by the unpredictable and unstable world individuals perceive. This nature is ultimately what drives people to gravitate towards fond memories of the past (Brown et al., 2003). Furthermore, Brown et al. (2003) explained that, "…in times of threat or of sociocultural and economic turbulence, nostalgia would provide a sense of comfort and close-knit community, a safe haven in an unsafe world," (p. 20).

The beauty and uniqueness of sports is how they provide formative moments, which individuals tend to form emotional bonds to. This also is held to be true in the fantasy sport experience. While a live draft or epic matchup may have occurred years ago, it is still a fond memory shared between fellow league members. A yearning to return or relive these moments is what is described as nostalgia (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holbrook, 1993). The positive emotions of "what once was" ultimately encourages the future actions of those experiencing the nostalgia

(Holak & Havlena, 1998). So, in feeling nostalgic about their leagues or the members who comprise those leagues, it seems that fantasy sport users are more likely to continue playing due in large part to the positive affiliations they have.

The significant role nostalgia plays in the fantasy sport experience was evident in the detail subjects were able to go into when reflecting on past memories. It is not possible to have feelings of nostalgia without memory or perceptions of how things used to be (Holak & Havlena, 1998). Therefore, memory and nostalgia are inherently linked. By the same note, memories of group experiences can be tied to one's identity (Fairley, 2003). This collectivist nostalgia became apparent throughout this study. Collective memory involves the recollections that belong to an entire group and feature a shared memory of a past event that is shared by each member of a social group (Blockland, 2001). Subjects of this study noted the significance of collective memory. While everyone experienced their own personal nostalgia attached to memories, they explained how this evolved when members of the league united. When together, past events would be brought up and collective memories became more salient as each individual contributed more detail. Slowikowski (1991) suggests that feelings of nostalgia are linked to rituals or ceremonial gatherings, reiterating that a group unifying leads to feelings of nostalgia. This can be found when leagues come together for their annual drafts. Whether it be online or in-person, interaction between participants often fluctuates between banter regarding past drafts/seasons and the up-coming season.

Overall, it was found that participants feel both personally and collectively nostalgic about the times they have personally experienced while playing fantasy sports. Being a part of their leagues allows them to "relive their glory days" as one interviewee described it. By connecting emotionally to the past, individuals are able to momentarily escape the burdens of

their present situation. This finding suggests the notion that nostalgia can provide security and comfort amidst the uncertain environment of today (Brown et al., 2003).

Distinguishing between the two types of nostalgia provides sport marketers and fantasy sport professionals a tremendous opportunity to meet consumer's needs based upon their nostalgic experiences. This study helped to advance the current understanding of nostalgia's ability to help individuals feel positive despite current circumstances in the world. Further, experiencing nostalgia can help to ensure individuals will continue to participate in fantasy sports, as they seek to relive those experiences once again and return to a subliminal state. Marketers can now cater to those with individualistic nostalgia as well as those who experience collective nostalgia, rather than trying to appeal to each segment concurrently.

The results of this study led the author to find that fantasy sports act as a social tool to enhance camaraderie/deepening of relationships, connectedness, conversation, friendly banter, and nostalgia among participants. The findings also addressed all of the research questions proposed by the author in the manner expected, expect nostalgia which was discussed above. The purpose of this paper was to investigate the social dynamics associated with participating in fantasy sport leagues, and the study found many strong overarching manifestations which were discussed above. Below, the author has considered the studies practical implications, limitations, and considerations for future research.

Practical Implications

This study certainly has useful practical considerations, most prominently in the marketing field. From a marketing perspective, it is imperative to understand what motivates individuals to play fantasy sports and what benefits they perceive to exist in doing so, which is why scholars have begun to examine this evolving area of sport. More specifically, it is

important to gain a deeper understanding of the social benefits scholars have previously found related to fantasy sports participation (Raney, 2006; Roy & Goss, 2007; Ruihley & Hardin 2011). In furthering this understanding, marketers and sports managers will be better equipped to meet the needs of fantasy sport users in the future.

Wann et al. (2001) noted how motivated sports fans are by the inter-personal nature of spectating sports. Fantasy participant motives are similar with the findings that 90% of fantasy sport users primary reason for playing was friendship (Indiana Sports and Entertainment Academy, 2000). This goes to show that fantasy sports are much more than a game. People are motivated to play beyond the competition and potential prizes. They view fantasy sports as a social tool to invest in relationships and bond with friends over sporting events.

Also, if the findings of this study align with other sport contexts then fantasy leagues are an area where individuals can find community and support that they may be missing otherwise in their lives. According to Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James (2015), "a sport fan community can be defined as a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on sport fans' personal identity with the cultural milieu surrounding a specific sport team," (p. 107). Fantasy sport communities appear to operate in a similar fashion to sport fan communities. Leagues offer participants various social benefits, specifically an opportunity to build friendships, deepen preexisting relationships as well as a connection with people they might otherwise have drifted apart from. Yoshida et al. (2015), discussed the "intrinsic connection" between community members, which was apparent among the fantasy sport participants interviewed for this study. Furthermore, Yoshida et al. (2015) noted that fan community attachment was the primary predictor of attendance frequency. This suggests that fantasy sport communities might also be a strong predictor of future sport consumption as well as attendance.

Similar to how e-Sports players value in-game social interactions more than any other aspect, fantasy sport users were found to focus more on social dynamics than anything else (Teng & Chen, 2013). These insights could be extremely valuable for anyone looking to invent a new product or medium where fantasy players and leagues could virtually interact within the same chat room during games. Even Facebook could find a way to incorporate this with their innovative Facebook Live approach. There are many opportunities for sport businesses and professionals to appeal to fantasy sport communities through innovative technology.

As Keaton and Gearhart (2014) found, social connections derived from sports can help to alleviate a multitude of psychological issues. This coincides with the social nature of people and is comparable to the fashion fantasy leagues appeal to their users. Although it was not analyzed through the angle of fantasy sports helping to remedy social/psychological struggles, the camaraderie, relationship, and connection heavy data suggests this is indeed a function of fantasy sport participation. With this knowledge, sport marketers could certainly find ways to utilize fantasy sports to encourage social interaction and also to minimize isolation. The findings that individuals felt a sense of nostalgia in thinking about their league suggests that fantasy leagues provide positive memories for those who participate. Prior research suggests nostalgia helps people to escape their present struggles and unknown futures as they return to a time associated with fondness and pleasure (Brown et al., 2003). Therefore, sport marketers also have an opportunity to incorporate past fantasy seasons, experiences to increase nostalgia for current users. As this study found fantasy leagues to provide participants with opportunities to build relationships, maintain friendships as well as a social lubricant. Additionally, fantasy sports encouraged smack talk and produced nostalgia in participants, so it may be in the best interest of

companies, athletic departments and etc., to implement fantasy leagues as a way to improve their culture and stimulate the tremendous amount of social benefits uncovered in this study.

Limitations

Naturally, this study was not conducted without limitations. Considering purposeful sampling was implemented for research, the findings may not be generalizable. The author interviewed members of two male-only, midwestern leagues. Expanding the research to incorporate additional interviews would have been beneficial. Including international, women-only, and co-ed leagues would have diversified the subjects of this study and therefore, produced different social benefits unfound in the leagues analyzed. It is also important to acknowledge that studies of this nature can be limited by the information participants chose not to share. This study is also limited by the fact that each league is unique and operates differently than others. For example, one league looked at for this research conducts annual live drafts, while the other holds their drafts online. As a result, participants could perceive the social dynamics of their respective league much differently. Additionally, some fantasy leagues may hold in-season or out-of-season gatherings that neither of these leagues incorporated.

Another limitation of this study was that most interviews took place over the phone. Had they been in person, the interviewer would have been able to read subjects body language, which could have enriched the data. Also, being in person could have allowed the author and subject to develop more rapport before beginning the interview. This certainly would have helped to produce higher quality data for the study. It is possible that conducting the interviews during the fantasy season would have also been beneficial. The author believes the subjects would have been more excited to talk about fantasy and perhaps would have more personal stories on top of their mind. This also would have allowed the author to analyze how recently the subjects

communicated with other league members, and to what depth the interactions went. Conducting a longitudinal study regarding the social dynamics of fantasy leagues would also be fascinating, relative to the year period the author had to complete this study. This could expose how leagues evolve and the way social dynamics change throughout the years of a league's existence. It would also provide much deeper data with which to analyze.

Considerations for Future Research

Despite numerous limitations, this study still found plenty of data that will be useful for sport managers, marketers as well as academics. First of all, with this being the first study to analyze specific social dynamics associated with fantasy sport participation, it would be beneficial for future studies to quantitatively analyze this line of research to determine salient social components. From a marketing perspective, it is important to know what motivates people to participate in fantasy sports as well as why keeps them attached to certain leagues. As this study sought to do, scholars should investigate what benefits participants perceive regarding their membership in a fantasy league. In discovering what motivates people to play fantasy sports as well as what social benefits these individuals receive from participating, sport marketers and managers can cater to these desires and trends through product offerings as well as events.

With nostalgia being the most surprising finding of the study, a substantial amount of future considerations should be given to this area. The current research uncovered how participants favor fantasy in the way it can stimulate nostalgic feelings and help them to reconnect with their past. As Blockland (2001) found, collective memories shared by each member can have a profound effect on a social group. Past research on nostalgia has shown how powerful it can be in helping people to escape uncertain, volatile circumstances (Brown et al., 2003; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holbrook, 1993). It appears fantasy participation has the potential

to offer these benefits to users. Specifically, future research should be conducted on nostalgic feelings associated with fantasy leagues to see if "nostalgia" is a common benefit of playing. If it appears to be so, scholars could dig deeper to examine what precisely produces these positive emotional attachments to fantasy sports. It is possible that the memories associated with leagues are a key motivator for individual's continued participation as well as their overall fantasy sport experience.

Another direction scholars can take with this study is how an individual's performance determines their perception of the league. This study did not consider the potential impact success could play on the perceived benefits associated with fantasy participation. For future research, scholars should also aim to interview subjects prior to (high excitement), during (excitement), and following (low excitement) fantasy seasons. It is possible that motivational and social themes would differ between these three stages. It would also be advantageous to reconnect with subjects in the future to see if participation in this study stimulated additional insights regarding the fantasy sport experience. This could also help to illuminate new social manifestations with further league maturation. Scholars should also research March Madness— which is very similar to fantasy football, baseball, and basketball—to see if motivations and social dynamics are similar to those discovered in this research. This research could help strengthen the findings of this study or even add new motivations and social benefits, therefore supplementing the literature. With research regarding fantasy sports in its infancy, there is a wide array of research angles that have yet to be capitalized on.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about the origination of your fantasy league.

    a. When did it begin?

    b. How were all the members connected?

2. What is your primary motivation for participating in fantasy football/basketball?

3. Describe your favorite aspect of fantasy sports.

4. How has your league grown/changed since its inception?

    a. Have your relationships with other league members evolved as well?

5. Would the experience be different if it was a league of strangers? How so?

6. What separates this league from other leagues you have been a part of?

7. How does your identity in this league compare to other social groups you belong to?

8. In what ways does this league enhance your relationships with other participants?

9. Would your relationships with other league owners look different or even exist if you did not compete in this fantasy league together?

    a. If so, what about fantasy sports contributes to this phenomenon?

    b. If you were to leave the league, how many relationships would remain intact?

10. What about fantasy football keeps you coming back year after year?

    a. Does your league have any rituals?