UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones

5-1-2014

Runnin' With the Rebels: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Highly Identified College Student Sports Fans

Joseph Stanley Ervin
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations

Part of the Education Commons

.

RUNNIN' WITH THE REBELS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE

EXPERIENCES OF HIGHLY IDENTIFIED COLLEGE STUDENT SPORTS FANS

by

Joseph S. Ervin

Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2004

Master of Education in Special Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2008

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy – Higher Education

Department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education
College of Education
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2014

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Joseph S. Ervin

entitled

Runnin' with the Rebels: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Highly Identified College Student Sports Fans

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy - Higher Education

Department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education

Vicki J. Rosser, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Nancy Lough, Ed.D., Committee Member

Lisa Bendixen, Ph.D., Committee Member

Cynthia Carruthers, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D., Interim Dean of the Graduate College

May 2014

ABSTRACT

Runnin' With the Rebels: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Highly
Identified College Student Sports Fans

by

Joseph S. Ervin

Dr. Vicki J. Rosser, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Higher Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Intercollegiate athletics are integrated into the American system of higher education. College student sports fans are abundant, and in identifying with their university's marquee sports team, make up an interesting portion of collegiate culture. There is a lack of qualitative research on college student sports fans, and a need to understand the phenomenon of college student sports fandom at a deeper level than is currently available in the scholarly literature. Thus, this phenomenological analysis sought to discover college student sports fans' experiences.

Students who are highly identified with UNLV's Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team were interviewed. The purpose was to discover their experiences with team identification, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification. Utilizing social identity theory as a lens, students' experiences were captured by five overarching themes: (a) unity and connectivity, (b) pride and good feelings, (c) characteristics of the ingroup, (d) ingroup and outgroups, and (e) emotional and psychological reactions to the game. Students' experiences are discussed, and focused on significant, meaningful, compelling, and interesting aspects, in hopes of

shedding light on insightful elements of consideration in understanding students' team

identification at a deep level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Dave Beisecker, my former philosophy professor and current friend. You have advocated for me and supported me for a long time, and I am truly grateful. Thank you to my dear friends Chris Johnsten, Jon Keenan, Chris Leland, James Mathews, Aaron Ortega, and Rob Wingfield. You guys have always been there for me, and knowing that you always will is very valuable to me.

Last, although certainly not least, I would like to sincerely thank all of the students who participated in this study! Without you, this dissertation would not be possible. I am forever grateful and indebted to each and every one of you. Each of you so graciously took the time to share with me your experiences as a fan. Allowing me to interview you, and sharing with me your personal thoughts and experiences for use in this study, were truly acts of generosity and kindness. I cannot thank you enough!

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Susan Ervin, my father, Stanley Ervin, and my sister, Tonya Larsen. My love for you goes beyond what words can express ☺

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Intercollegiate athletics have become well-entrenched in American higher

education, and college sports maintain significance in the United States. College students

who identify with their university's marquee sports team makeup an intriguing segment

of the institution's athletic community and culture. The literature on college student

sports fans is rich with issues regarding team identification. Sports fan literature often

deals with team identification in conjunction with social connections. However, the

qualitative research on college student sports fans' team identification, and on students'

team identification and social connections, is lacking. No qualitative studies were found

on the experiences of college student sports fans, or on students' social experiences that

have come about through team identification. The purpose of this phenomenological

study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their

university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have

come about through team identification.

History of Intercollegiate Athletics and the Student Body

American intercollegiate athletics began with the efforts of college students.

Intercollegiate athletics arose in the middle of the 19th century, as students organized and

competed in a variety of sporting activities (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). While

promoting and developing athletic programs into the early 1900's, students began losing

control over athletics by the latter part of the 19th century (Covell & Barr, 2010). College

students, while no longer the governing and organizing force behind intercollegiate athletics, still identify with their school's teams.

Cultural Significance of Intercollegiate Athletics

The tight-knit connection between sports and universities is something unique to the United States (Chu, 1982). Beyer and Hannah (2000) discuss how college sports are related to the culture of American society. The media is also intertwined with college sports, and fans have many media options to choose from (Phua, 2010). Toma (2003) explores college sports in connection with the identity, traditions, and status of universities. Many believe that athletic programs add to the sense of community on campus. Kelly and Dixon's (2011) research has indicated that institutions often perceive that adding a football team will increase the sense of community on campus.

Sports Fans in General

In the sociological analysis "The Noble Sports Fan" (G.J. Smith, 1988), it is stated that sports fans are given a unique opportunity for social integration, and that following sports can provide fans with a sense of excitement and an escape from everyday life. Beyer and Hannah (2000) also give insight into the relationship between sports and sports fans. Melnick (1993) looked at sporting event attendance in relationship to individuals' desire to socialize with others. Wann (2006) discusses the enduring and temporary social connections fans can develop. Laverie and Arnett (2010) explore the concepts of enduring involvement, situational involvement, and identity

salience. Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) discuss the differences between lowly and highly identified sports fans.

Non-College Student Sports Fans

Gibson, Wilming, and Holdnak (2002), utilizing a qualitative grounded theory approach to inquiry, studied non-college student fans of the University of Florida Gators football team. Results indicated that the fans possess the characteristics of serious leisure. Several key findings indicated that social connections were important to the fans (Gibson, Wilming, & Holdnak, 2002). A qualitative case study on the University of Nebraska Alumni Association's "watch parties" (Aden et al, 2009) explored the rituals, connections, and communication of fans of the Cornhuskers football team, and results showed that the watch parties involve ritual building. Fans would transform the site into one which embodied Cornhusker culture, and it became a recreation of the live game experiences (Aden et al, 2009). A phenomenological study was conducted on members of a university fan club who traveled to watch their team play, and results showed that fans were looking for personal balance and socialization (Chen, 2006). Tonetti (2010) conducted a phenomenological study on sports fans in his recent doctoral dissertation. Differing themes emerged, including themes about family and social phenomena (Tonetti, 2010).

College Student Sports Fans

Wann and Robinson's (2002) quantitative studies showed that students with high team identification perceived the university in a positive light and reported to likely

persist in receiving a degree. Dietz-Uhler and Murrell's (1999) quantitative study on university identification and perceptions of a university's football team showed that students with strong university identification engaged in reevaluations of the team, depending on the context and as the season went on. Students with weak university identification showed no difference in evaluations of the team as the season went on (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999). In looking into rivalries, Luellen and Wann (2010) explored quantitatively the impact of students' awareness of a rival team on their level of team identification. The authors found that rival team salience increases the level of students' team identification, but salience of something related to the rival does not (Luellen & Wann, 2010). Wann and Dolan (1994) conducted a quantitative investigation on fans' evaluations of other fans, using a population of college students. Students either read a scenario describing behaviors of a fan of a rival team or a scenario describing the same behaviors of a fan of their own team, and results showed what the authors predicted: highly identified fans gave more positive evaluations of a fan of their own team than they gave a fan of a rival team. Also, as the authors predicted, non-highly identified fans did not show this bias (Wann & Dolan, 1994). Clopton's (2008) quantitative study showed that the more students identified with their university's sports teams, the more they perceived a sense of campus community. Clopton and Finch's (2010) regression study indicated that students' level of team identification contributed to their perceived level of campus social capital, although Clopton (2011), in factoring in students' identification with their university, found that students' team identification reduced their perceived level of campus social capital. In Clopton's (2011) study, it was

students' identification with their university that was found to have a positive contribution to their perceived level of campus social capital.

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986) was used as a theoretical framework. To discover students' experiences, a phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenology looks at experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Phenomenology analyzes and describes experiences, and was the natural choice for discovering the experiences of college student sports fans. In choosing a college sports team, I chose the marquee team of the institution. The institution was the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and their marquee team was the men's basketball team, the Runnin' Rebels. As a native of Las Vegas, a big-time fan of the Runnin' Rebels, and a student at UNLV, the topic of student fan experiences at UNLV had profound personal significance. Common and appropriate for qualitative research, I used a purposeful sampling strategy. The criteria for sample selection were: (a) students had to be full-time undergraduates at UNLV during either the fall of 2012 semester or the spring of 2013 semester, and (b) students had to be "highly identified" fans of the Runnin' Rebels, as measured by the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In-depth interviews are used for data collection in phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994), and on

UNLV's main campus, I interviewed nine students about their experiences. The interviews took place during the 2012-2013 NCAA Division I men's basketball regular season. The results of this study came from analyzing and presenting the data from students' interviews. The interviews were analyzed through the framework of social identity theory. I underwent the process of epoche (Moustakas, 1994), took analytic memos (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) during the interviews, utilized Atlas.ti, and engaged in seven levels of data analysis to arrive at a presentation of students' experiences. I also wrote a statement of essences.

Definitions

The following list of terms, and their definitions, will be helpful in understanding this study:

- *Epoche:* Also known as bracketing, it is where I as a researcher attempt to set aside my own experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

- *Highly Identified:* Used as a way to categorize sports fans who strongly identify with, and are significantly devoted to, a particular sports team, where being a fan of the team is a central part of their identity (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). On the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), "highly identified" means scoring above 35 (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001).

- *Ingroup:* In social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986), an individual's ingroup is a social group to which they feel they belong.

- *Outgroup:* In social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986), an individual's outgroup is a social group to which they feel they do not belong.

- *Phenomenology:* A study which looks at experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

- *Social Identity:* The aspects of one's self-concept which come from group or category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. This study used UNLV students who highly identify with the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team, which is the marquee sports team at UNLV.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team?

- What are students' social experiences that have come about through team identification?

Limitations

This study, as it looked at experiences of UNLV students' team identification, was confined to the contexts of UNLV as an institution and the city of Las Vegas. Thus, the results should be understood within these contexts. This study also only utilized students who fit a certain criteria, namely full-time undergraduates who are highly identified sports fans. Furthermore, the interviews took place over the course of one season, and the particular context of the season (e.g., wins and losses, fan expectations, coaches and student-athletes, rivalries, etc.) can reasonably be assumed to have influenced the nature of the interview, and the experiences reported.

Significance of the Study

In the research on college student sports fans, qualitative inquiry is lacking. There is a need to hear students talk about their team identification, and this study is a step in that direction. This study probed the depths of students' experiences, and went below the surface of the current quantitative literature, getting at the rich, compelling, and descriptive detail of students' meaningful and significant experiences with fandom. This study allows readers to understand college student sports fans to a greater extent than is currently available elsewhere in the scholarly literature. The use of social identity theory as a framework is appropriate and logical, and naturally adds to the current research on sports fans and university based athletic teams.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. The qualitative research on college student sports fans is lacking, and this study offers a fundamental step in the direction of understanding student fan experiences. This study took place at UNLV, and attempted discover the experiences of highly identified student fans of UNLV's Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team. Chapter Two will be a review of literature, looking into intercollegiate athletics, sports fans, and social identity theory.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Intercollegiate athletics have become deeply-embedded in the American system of higher education. College students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team are experiencing a profound collegiate phenomenon. Major universities contain the presence of students who are devoted fans of their school's marquee team; their existence is recognized by those attending and working within the institution, the surrounding community, and even throughout the nation. These highly identified student fans makeup an intriguing portion of a university's athletic culture and community. As an introduction to the topic of college student sports fans, the following review of literature will briefly cover the history of intercollegiate athletics and the student body. To set the stage and illuminate the context of the topic, a succinct overview of the cultural significance of intercollegiate athletics will be covered. Most of the literature review will focus on selected research on sports fans. Literature on sports fans in general, on non-college students, and on the college student population will be presented. It will become apparent that there is a need for a qualitative study on students' experiences. Additionally, it will become clear that team identification and social connections go hand-in-hand, and that in studying students' experiences, there is a need to also study students' social experiences. The review of literature will naturally give-way to the exploration of social identity theory, which will be discussed on its own and in connection to sports fans. It will be shown that social identity theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for a study on the experiences of college student sports fans.

10

History of Intercollegiate Athletics and the Student Body

The rise of intercollegiate athletics in the American university system was truly started by college students. Covell and Barr (2010) express that students had been organizing group activities on university campuses for roughly a hundred years before intercollegiate athletics came into the picture. Intercollegiate athletics started to become a presence in American universities around the middle of the 19th century (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). Gymnasium and physical activity regimens for students were happening in the earlier part of the 19th century, but were not effective in evoking student interest; sports, however, did create such a spark and students participated in a variety of sporting activities (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). Lewis (1970) states the views expressed by Sheldon (1901), Rudolph (1962), and Braubacher and Rudy (1958): many student-led organizations, including sport, came about during the latter part of the 19th century, which coincided with students' changing views on college, and which gave students opportunities to identify with a group. Sporting competition between universities, or intercollegiate athletics, are seen to have had their beginnings in 1852 when students from Harvard competed against students from Yale in a crew race (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). Following the historic first competition, intercollegiate athletics grew even more (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). Baseball, track and field, and football all came to find a place as organized intercollegiate sporting activities (Lewis, 1970). Covell and Barr (2010) state:

> Student-run organizations still operated athletic programs well into the
> early 20th century, paying for programs through dues-assessing athletic
> associations, fund-raising drives, alumni donations, and gate receipts. The

games on the field were run by team captains, increasingly with support

and direction from paid or unpaid coaches, and off-field managerial

aspects were run by the students. (p. 4)

By the latter part of the 19th century, however, students began losing control of the

college sports domain (Covell & Barr, 2010). Covell and Barr (2010) cite R.A.Smith

(1988) in expressing that the first faculty committee to take the sporting reigns from

students was at Princeton in 1881. The first professional coach was hired at Yale in 1864

(Covell & Barr, 2010). As the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (2010)

states, in 1906, the NCAA was established to help protect athletes from harm and

exploitation, particularly in football, where injuries and even deaths occurred from the

violent practices of play. While students are no longer the governing and organizing

force behind college sports, students' identification with their university's sports teams

remains present.

Cultural Significance of Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics are part of the formal structure of American higher

education, and the tight-knit connection between sports and the postsecondary institution

is a phenomenon unique to the United States (Chu, 1982). Both inside and outside the

institutions, college sports have come to embody profound cultural significance. College

students, by way of their fandom, are engaging in a reciprocal relationship – they are both

being acted upon by athletic culture and contributing to it. The culture of college sports

takes on significance, and is perpetuated, in a variety of ways.

The Media

The culture of intercollegiate athletics is greatly influenced by the role of media forces such as print, television, radio, internet, and social media. College sporting events are widely covered in the media, with Division I men's basketball and football dominating the scene. Media audiences are exposed to the traditions and cultures of big-time college sports and sporting events. Mass media helps to greatly form the attitudes and values of contemporary society (Kane, 1988), and the heavy coverage of Division I men's basketball and football is connected to the perpetuation of the culture surrounding these sports. Sports fans have many media options to choose from in following their team (Phua, 2010).

The Wider American Society

Beyer and Hannah (2000) explored intercollegiate athletics through a cultural lens. The authors discuss how intercollegiate athletics, as cultural forms, in many ways express and celebrate the culture of the wider American society. They explain the American ideology of the Protestant ethic as wrapped-up in sports, as in their example of the athlete who seeks athletic victory in the contest and through intense training. Further, Beyer and Hannah explain that athletic contests reflect American capitalistic beliefs in that they promote competition and merit-based success. However, they also discuss the collectivism of team sports in intercollegiate athletics as a means to moderate the individualism associated with the American Protestant ethic and capitalism (Beyer & Hannah, 2000).

Identity, Traditions, and Status

Toma (2003) attempted to reconcile college sports with higher education while examining intercollegiate athletic culture within the realm of spectator sports, using football as his constant example. Toma explains how college sports contribute to the appeal, identity, and culture of postsecondary institutions. In football contests, for example, games on Saturdays can draw upwards of 80,000 people to the university stadium, where traditions and pageantry expressed through uniform colors, fans' chants and cheers, and marching bands, amongst others create an epic atmosphere. Toma also notes that athletics can help set the institution apart through cultural forms, traditions, mascots, language, stories, symbols, etc. Things like traditions, symbols, and unique language help define the culture and identity at all universities. While other traditions and cultural practices may be similar between institutions, athletics is where culture gets placed into something unique to the institution. He also discusses athletics as a way to help build the community, and as a way in which to express community practices and strengthen community bonds. Additionally, Toma expresses how college students have a means for bonding through college sports (Toma, 2003).

In discussing further the culture of higher education and spectator sports, Toma (2003) explains the fact that spectator sports at universities have national status. Many people may know a university simply because of its sports team. Institutions have a desire for national status, yet few of them are able to gain serious country-wide recognition aside from their athletics. Sports, then, can make an otherwise unknown institution a recognizable name (Toma, 2003).

A Striving for a Sense of Community on Campus

A qualitative content analysis by Kelly and Dixon (2011) looked into the justifications given and sought-after benefits for adding football programs to universities. The researchers analyzed football feasibility studies from six Division I institutions that, in the past five years, either added or had plans to add a football team. Results indicated that institutions perceived that adding a football team would increase the sense of community on campus. Overall, the belief that adding football would enhance the sense of campus community was a major theme in the data (Kelly & Dixon, 2011).

Sports Fans in General

In the sociological analysis entitled "The Noble Sports Fan" (G.J. Smith, 1988), it is said that sports fans in general are given a unique opportunity for social integration through following athletics. G. J. Smith (1988) states that those with a common interest in a sport or a team are given a means for social interaction. The author also explains how following sports can provide fans with an escape from the boredom of everyday life. Furthermore, the emotions involved with rooting for a team bring on a sense of excitement. G.J. Smith also asserts that sports fans may be attracted to the aesthetics of the sport, such as in his examples of a football spiral and a body check (G.J. Smith, 1988).

Beyer and Hannah (2000) offer insight into the relationship between sports and sports fans. The authors discuss sports fans as members of a group who identify with their team and gain positive identities through this identification. As part of their team identification and group membership, sports fans have rituals. Beyer and Hannah, in

citing Lipsky (1983) and Stein (1983), also note that fans have a means for catharsis and emotional release through participation in their fandom (Beyer & Hannah, 2000).

Social Interaction at Games

Melnick (1993) looked at the attending of sporting events in relationship to individuals' desire to socialize with others, as a changing society has led to changes in the ways in which individuals satisfy their need for social interaction. Melnick explored the ways in which sporting events allow for social interactions. In understanding their role, those attending sporting events have the notion that collectively they are essential to the sporting contest itself, that as attendees, they factor into the event. Melnick explains that attendees also understand the acceptable and expected fan behaviors. They know that there is a common set of behaviors which all might display. The shared set of meanings, then, contributes to the ease in which the attendee can have experiences with social interactions. Also, Melnick discusses how the setting of a sporting event is considered an appropriate place to strike-up conversations and interact with strangers. All-in-all, Melnick presented a robust account of how attending of a sporting event serves as a way for individuals to comfortably and easily have social interactions and satisfy a need for sociability (Melnick, 1993).

Enduring and Temporary Social Connections

Wann (2006), in an article presenting his team identification – social psychological health model, relates that the social connections fans develop through team identification can be both enduring and temporary. As Wann states, enduring social connections are the connections a fan gains in a setting in which fellow fans of the same team are easily found. Wann gives as an example of enduring social connections the

16

situation of a baseball fan who lives in the town of the team they support. Other fans of

this team are easily found. Temporary social connections, on the other hand, are the

connections a fan gains temporarily when they are in a setting where fellow fans of the

same team are not normally or easily found. The temporary social connections, then,

come about when this fan enters a temporary setting where their fellow fans are present.

Wann gives as an example of temporary social connections a baseball fan who lives in a

different town than the team they support. If this fan discovers and attends a weekly

meet-up comprising of other displaced fans, they enter a setting of temporary social

connections (Wann, 2006).

Enduring and Situational Involvement, and Fan Identity Salience

Laverie and Arnett (2010), in their article entitled "Factors Affecting Fan

Attendance: The Influence of Identity Salience and Satisfaction", discuss the concepts of

enduring involvement, situational involvement, and identity salience. The authors state

that enduring involvement "is conceptualized as the ongoing baseline level of concern

with an activity or product" (p. 231). They state that situational involvement "is a

passing increase in concern for the activity or product due to temporary circumstances

(Richins & Bloch, 1991)" (Laverie & Arnett, 2010, p. 231). Laverie and Arnett (2010)

explain that both types of involvement can be applied to sports fans. They illustrate that

fandom can mutually contain both enduring and situational involvement; that they are not

mutually exclusive and can be applied to fans as coexisting within their realm of fandom.

In discussing fan identity salience, the authors state, "Salient identities are those that are

an important part of who we are and ones we display routinely" (Laverie & Arnett, 2010,

p. 228).

High and Low Team Identification

In their book entitled *Sports Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators,* Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) state:

Team identification refers to the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team (Guttmann, 1986; Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; M.R. Real & Mechikoff, 1992; Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This term is also used to describe a fan's loyalty to a specific player (e.g., Rinehart, 1998; Wann, 1997). (pp. 3-4)

Sports fans have varying degrees of team identification (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). In *Sports Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) discuss differences between "lowly identified" fans and "highly identified" fans. The authors explain that for lowly identified fans, being a fan of a team is not an important part of their self-concept, and lowly identified fans typically will not have strong reactions to their team's performances. For highly identified fans, however, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease state:

The role of team follower is a central component of their identity. In fact, they will readily present themselves as a fan of their team to others (Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 1999). Because of their close association with a team, highly identified fans often view it as a reflection of themselves. That is, the team becomes an extension of the individual (E.R. Smith & Henry, 1996; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The team's successes

become the fan's successes and the team's failures become the fan's

failures….

Because of the increased importance highly identified fans place

on their team's performances, their affective, cognitive, and behavioral

reactions tend to be quite extreme. For instance, research indicates that

compared to lowly identified fans, those high in team identification are

more likely to attempt to influence the outcome of a sporting event (Wann

et al., 1994), experience greater levels of anxiety and arousal watching

their team compete (Branscombe & Wann, 1992a; Wann, Schrader, &

Adamson, 1998), feel that sport spectating is a more enjoyable activity

(Madrigal, 1995; Wann & Schrader, 1997), and possess a greater level of

knowledge about their team and about sport in general (Wann &

Branscombe, 1995a; Wann et all., 1997). (p. 4)

Team identification level can be related to a variety of topics (Wann, Melnick, Russell, &

Pease, 2001). Referring to their book *Sports Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of

Spectators*, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) note:

Level of team identification is related to several topics examined in this

text, including the motives of fans (see chapter 2), attendance decisions

(chapter 3), sport hero worship (chapter 4), spectator aggression (chapter

5), and the psychological benefits of fandom (chapter 7). (p. 4)

Phua (2010) discusses highly identified sports fans in the context of intergroup

relationships and social identity theory. He says:

Highly identified fans are also more likely to make in-group-favoring

attributions about the team's performance. These fans also most often rate

other in-group members more favorably than out-group members and

overestimate their team's number of wins (Wann & Branscombe, 1993;

Wann & Dolan, 1994). Highly identified fans also strategically manipulate

attributions after a loss to protect their social identity because they are not

able to easily switch allegiances (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). (p. 193)

Non-College Student Sports Fans

Major American sports can be divided into two categories: intercollegiate and

professional. For the purposes of this study, since it is concerned with student fans of

intercollegiate sports, there can be made the distinction between non-college student

sports fans and college student sports fans. The literature on non-college student sports

fans involves explorations of team identification. To counter-balance the almost

exclusive use of quantitative methods in the college student sports fan literature, the

present look at the non-college student sports fan research will focus on qualitative

studies, which offer emerging themes and thick descriptions of fandom. This look at the

qualitative literature on non-college student sports fans will specifically highlight and

focus on certain portions of the studies' results that pertain to certain social connections.

Serious Gators Fans

Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, Gibson, Wilming, and Holdnak

(2002) studied non-college student fans (although one was a graduate student and several

were alumni) of the University of Florida Gators football team. Fans in this study were

analyzed through the framework of serious leisure. The authors state that the study was

part of a three-year project on Gators fans' behaviors. Data collection consisted of

interviews from twenty Gators football fans with varying degrees of fandom. Data was

supplemented and triangulated with field notes and ethnographic research. Results

showed that these Gators football fans possess the six characteristics of serious leisure

pursuits: perseverance, long-term careers, significant personal effort, durable self-

benefits, unique ethos, and identification. In the last characteristic, identification, it was

found that fans' identities were significantly constructed around Gator fandom. Several

key findings from the data showed that social connections were of importance to the fans.

Fans expressed connections with family and friends. Fans talked about their

identification with a group of Gators fans, comprising of those who were close friends

and family as well as a larger community of fans. Through their team identification, fans

of the University of Florida Gators maintained a common bond which allowed for all

sorts of social connections (Gibson, Wilming, & Holdnak, 2002).

Watch Parties

A qualitative case study by Aden et al (2009) on the University of Nebraska

Alumni Association's "watch parties" explored the rituals, connections, and

communication of fans of the university's Cornhuskers football team. The authors

express that watch parties, in the context of the study, are where fans come together in

public places, like a sports bar, and watch Cornhusker football on television. The

researchers in this qualitative study attended watch parties in various sites throughout the

United States. One researcher co-hosted several of the events. Data collection came

from observations, notes, interviews, and questionnaires. Data used for analysis of this

study came primarily from participant observation. Results showed that the system of watch parties involves a unique building of rituals by the fans. Fans at the watch party site would transform the public environment into one completely embodying the Cornhuskers football culture. Fans would don the colors and apparel of the Cornhuskers. The public space would become a recreation of the live game experiences, with the host site playing the Nebraska fight song and the fans shouting team chants (Aden et al, 2009).

Traveling Fans, Club Membership, and Socialization

Chen (2006) conducted a phenomenological study on members of a university fan club who traveled to watch their team play. Thirty-three fans of an NCAA Division I women's basketball program were interviewed, utilizing a technique that incorporates images collected by participants. Results showed that fans were looking for personal balance and socialization. With regard to socialization, most of the activities with the club provided social connection opportunities. Fans were also able to socialize with players on the team. Belonging to a social group was important to the participants in this study, and they expressed that they liked the feeling of being part of a group with common interests. Participants noted that if any member was going through something difficult, other members would be there as a source of support. Belonging to a sport fan club gave these fans a way to sustain their identification with a group of like-minded sports fans and the players on the team (Chen, 2006).

Family Relationships and Social Connections

In a recent doctoral dissertation, Tonetti (2010) set-out to discover the sports fan experience through a phenomenological investigation. Participants were adult males who were categorized as highly identified fans of various professional and collegiate sports

teams. Open-ended interviews were conducted with ten sports fans. In order to receive an overall picture of fans' experiences, the researcher initially engaged in a verbatim reading of the interview transcripts. The interviews were then examined for significant statements. Next, significant statements were put into meaning units which revealed hidden meaning in the statements. From the meaning units, the researcher constructed themes. Differing themes emerged as significant to participants in their experiences as a fan of their respective teams, including themes about family and social phenomena. Participants expressed that family relationships were crucial in their progress of becoming a fan, and that fandom has impacted their relationships with family members. One fan related a touching story of how his family went to a baseball game where a no-hitter was thrown. His brother died a couple of months after the game, and the memory of him and his family sharing the rare occurrence of a no-hitter with his brother stood-out as meaningful and precious. Another common theme, involving social connections, showed the influence of friends and other people in participants' development of their sports fandom. One person described the setting at a bar where everyone is sitting around and rooting for a particular team. Another fan expressed how watching sports made his friendships stronger and helped him foster social bonds (Tonetti, 2010).

College Student Sports Fans

As explored earlier, intercollegiate athletics are a significant part of the cultural climate of American higher education. The research on college student sports fans, similar to the literature on non-college student sports fans, involves explorations of team identification. A major difference between the literature on non-college students and

23

college students is in the methodology. Research on non-college student sports fans offers-up qualitative inquiry where fans' experiences, stories, voices, behaviors, and rituals are discovered. Through qualitative methods, non-college student fans' voices and stories are heard with thick description. The research on college student sports fans is almost exclusively quantitative.

The Team and the University

Wann and Robinson (2002) looked at students' level of team identification in the context of their university. The authors conducted two studies. In the first study, one-hundred and fifty-nine students were assessed for the way in which they perceived the university, their persistence intentions, and their level of team identification with their school's football and men's basketball teams. Results showed that students with a high level of team identification perceived the university in a positive light and reported that they were likely to persist in receiving a degree from the university. The second study replicated the first, while assessing identification with the institution's sports program overall instead of particular teams, and controlling for levels of fandom. In the second study, one-hundred and sixty-four students were used as participants. Results from the second study were the same as the first: students with high identification with the sports program perceived the university in a more positive light and reported being more likely to persist (Wann & Robinson, 2002).

Dietz-Uhler and Murrell (1999) studied college student sports fans' identification with their university and their perceptions of the university's football team. The study assessed university identification and its relationship to student sports fans' perceptions of the team and their reactions to the outcome of games. Seventy-four college students

24

were assessed for their identification with the university and split into two groups: one with weak university identification and one with strong identification. The students completed a questionnaire after every one of their school's football games. For students with weak university identification, their evaluations of the team stayed the same throughout the season, while students with strong university identification had more favorable team evaluations as the season progressed. Students in the high identification group had more favorable team evaluations after wins, when the team was expected to win, and when there was positive media coverage of the game. Those in the low identification group had evaluations of the team which were the same after wins, whether or not the team was expected to win, and regardless of positive media coverage. In general, results indicated that students with a strong identification with the university engaged in reevaluations of the team, depending on the context and as the season went on, whereas students with a weak identification showed no differences in evaluations (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999).

Rivalries

An exciting and intriguing component of intercollegiate athletics is the existence of rivalries. The University of Michigan Wolverines are rivals of the Ohio State University Buckeyes. The University of Oklahoma Sooners are rivals of the University of Texas Longhorns. Luellen and Wann (2010) explored the impact of students' awareness of a rival team on their level of team identification. The authors refer to the awareness of a rival team as rival team salience. The research involved three separate studies and concerned the rivalry between the men's basketball teams of the University of Kentucky Wildcats and Duke University Blue Devils. In study one, one-hundred and

25

forty-three college student fans of the Wildcats men's basketball team were assessed of

their level of team identification. Several weeks later, students then watched either a

highlight video of the Duke Blue Devils or, for the control group, a sports-related video

which was neutral. Following the videos, students were again assessed of their level of

team identification. A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that

students' level of team identification with the Wildcats increased after watching the

highlight video of the Duke Blue Devils. When students became aware of the rival Duke

team their level of team identification with the Kentucky team increased. In the second

study, sixty-seven students interacted with an experimenter wearing a t-shirt of either a

Duke logo or a neutral athletic logo. The Duke shirt did not depict the basketball team in

particular, but only the word "Duke." Students were then assessed of their identification

with the Wildcats. A univariate ANOVA indicated that there were no differences in team

identification between those exposed to the Duke shirt and those exposed to the neutral

athletic logo. The third study had one-hundred and sixty-three students watch either a

campus information video about Duke – not specific to the men's basketball team – or a

neutral campus information video. Students were assessed of their identification with the

Wildcats both before and after the viewing of the videos. A repeated measures ANOVA

showed no changes in level of team identification for those watching the Duke campus

video or those watching the neutral campus video. The authors explain what the results

of the three studies suggest: the salience of a rival team itself increases one's level of

team identification, but salience of something related to the rival team, like the university

to which it belongs, does not (Luellen & Wann, 2010).

Wann and Dolan (1994) investigated team identification and sports fans'
evaluations of other fans. Using a population consisting of college students, the authors
looked into the bias fans might show towards fans of their own team, and the bias highly
identified fans might show compared to those with low team identification. One-hundred
and three students at a university were assessed of their level of team identification with
their university's men's basketball team, and of their thoughts pertaining to a scenario
involving the behaviors of either a fan of their own team or a rival fan at a game.
Students were asked to imagine they were at an important game between their
university's men's basketball team and a rival team. Students then read either a scenario
depicting controversial calls against the rival team, who lost the game, and describing the
subsequent behaviors of a fan of the rival team, or a scenario depicting controversial calls
against their own team and describing the same subsequent behaviors of a fan of their
own team. Results showed, as the authors predicted, that highly identified fans gave
more positive evaluations of the fan of their own team than they gave the fan of the rival
team. Also, as the authors predicted, non-highly identified fans did not show this bias
(Wann & Dolan, 1994).

A Sense of Community on Campus

Clopton (2008) investigated college students' connection to their school's sports
teams and the sense of campus community they feel. One-thousand, seven-hundred and
ninety full-time undergraduate students from various NCAA Division I, Football Bowl
Subdivision institutions were surveyed. Students were assessed for the sense of
community they perceived to exist on their university's campus, their academic and
social integration, and their level of identification with their university's sports teams.

27

Results showed a significant relationship between the level of students' identification

with their school's teams and the sense of community they perceived to exist on campus.

The more students identified with the teams, the more they perceived a sense of campus

community (Clopton, 2008).

Social Capital

Clopton and Finch (2010) examined the topic of student identification with their

university's athletics in connection to social capital. This regression study explored how

identifying with college sports teams correlates to students' perceived level of social

capital on campus. One-thousand, two-hundred and fifty-two students from forty-one

Division I Bowl Championship Series schools were surveyed to assess their level of team

identification and the level of social capital they felt existed on campus. Results showed

that the level of team identification contributed to students' perceived social capital.

Students' level of team identification was correlated with students' perceived level of

campus social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010). However, Clopton (2011), in factoring in

students' identification with their university, found that students' team identification

reduced their perceived level of campus social capital. In Clopton's analysis, it was

students' university identification that was found to have a positive contribution to their

perceived level of campus social capital. Also, it was found that team identification was

not a predictor of their adjustment to the college environment (Clopton, 2011).

A Need to Study the Experiences of Students' Team Identification

Intercollegiate athletics are a major part of higher education. College sports

contribute cultural significance to higher education and to the United States as a whole.

The themes in the literature on intercollegiate athletics are diverse, from media use to a

striving for a sense of campus community. Sports fans exhibit a multitude of characteristics and qualities through their fandom, and are afforded a number of opportunities from following their team. There is enough interest in sports fans and issues surrounding fandom to provoke scholars to engage in qualitative research delving into fans' experiences, stories, voices, behaviors, and rituals.

Qualitative research is severely lacking in the body of work on college student sports fans. In the literature on college student sports fans, the quantitative examinations of team identification, while meaningful in their own right, do not probe into the depths of students' experiences. In conducting a review of literature on college student sports fans, it was found that students' voices are not being heard, and they have yet to be given a platform from which to share their most significant and meaningful experiences. The relationship between a particular sports team at a university and the student fans was not found to have been explored from the perspective of students' profound experiences, as the students tell them. Indeed, the current quantitative research on college student sports fans is rich with issues surrounding students' team identification. However, a fundamental step was found to be missing. No studies were found which simply ask the students to talk about their experiences. A qualitative investigation of students' experiences will give students a forum in which to personally tell their stories and experiences; students' voices will be heard and readers of this investigation will get a deeper understanding of student fandom, as told by the students with thick description and rich detail.

A Need to Include Students' Social Experiences

Social connections with others and team identification go hand-in-hand, and as much is expressed and explored in the sports fan literature (e.g., Chen, 2006; Clopton & Finch, 2010; Melnick, 1993; Wann, 2006). Wann, Waddill, Polk, and Weaver (2011) found a positive correlation between level of team identification and team/fan-related social connections. In conducting a study on college students' experiences, it would be natural to inquire about students' social experiences. However, just as no qualitative studies were found on college students' experiences, there were also no qualitative studies found on students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. Therefore, in a study on the experiences of college student sports fans, it is appropriate and warranted to specifically include students' social experiences that have come about through team identification.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner (1979) present the term "social identity" as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (p. 40). Turner and Oakes (1986) use the term as "those aspects of a person's self-concept based upon their group membership together with their emotional, evaluative and other psychological correlates" (p. 240). My use of the term "social identity" throughout this study comes from Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Turner and Oakes (1986), and in general, refers to the authors' use of the term as the aspects of one's self-concept which come from group or category membership. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) note that social identity theory is concerned with groups, intergroup relationships,

and one's social self. In the social identity theory literature, it is claimed that one's social

identity is different from their personal identity. Personal identity does not come from

group or category membership, but rather, is self-concept derived from one as a unique

and distinct individual, or is based on interpersonal relationships (Hogg, 1992).

Turner and Oakes (1986) said about social identity theory, "The basic hypothesis

of which is that people are motivated to seek positive social identity by comparing in-

groups favourably with out-groups" (p. 240). Hogg and Abrams (1988) explain

intergroup social comparison from the social identity perspective, which states that

individuals will differentiate between their ingroup and outgroups, accentuating the

differences that make the ingroup seem more favorable by comparison, thus "the ingroup

acquires a *positive distinctiveness*", which leads to a "*positive social identity* in

comparison to the outgroup" and "a relatively positive self-evaluation that endows the

individual with a sense of well-being, enhanced self-worth and self-esteem" (p. 23).

Branscombe and Wann (1994) cite Tajfel's (1982) position that one may exhibit ingroup

favoritism or outgroup derogation out of a desire for a positive social identity. Tajfel and

Turner (1979) state that there is evidence to support that "in-group bias is a remarkably

omnipresent feature of intergroup relations" (p. 38).

Social Identity Theory and Sports Fans

As an interesting note on intergroup comparison and social competition, Tajfel

and Turner (1979) mention an example of two football teams where one finishes the

season in first place, and the other in second place. The authors explain that while the

comparison of the second place team to the first place team may result in the perception

of the first place team having a higher status, it is possible for this status to change in the

31

subsequent season (e.g., the second place team may take first place in the following

season). Thus, competition and meaningful comparison resumes the following season, as

statuses have the potential to be changed (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

When sports fandom is seen through a social identity theory perspective, it can be

said that sports fans develop a part of their identity through team identification, and they

develop ingroups and outgroups. To achieve a positive social identity, fans may make

intergroup comparisons which favor the ingroup. Phua (2010) discusses sports fans,

social identity, and intergroup relationships. He states:

> Sports fandom presents an excellent context for the study of intergroup
>
> relationships. First, sports fans identify strongly with the team they
>
> support, striving to achieve and maintain a positive social identity (Wann
>
> et al., 2000). Because most U.S. sports teams represent cities, states, or
>
> colleges, fan identification is usually highly enduring (Wann & Schrader,
>
> 2000). Second, positive social identity is achieved through intergroup
>
> differentiation from rival teams. When a fan's social identity is threatened,
>
> that is, when the fan's team loses a game, he or she can employ self-
>
> enhancement strategies and self-serving attributions to regain a positive
>
> social identity. Third, sports fans experience depersonalization when they
>
> are highly identified with a team. Crowd events like games result in highly
>
> salient social identities, where people become deindividuated and
>
> therefore especially responsive to contextually salient group norms. Team
>
> identification unites fans as part of the in-group, providing them with
>
> feelings of belonging and solidarity, creating an "us versus them"

atmosphere. Fans psychologically become part of the sports team they

support, sharing in its glory of winning and agony of defeat. (p. 192)

Haridakis (2010) discusses the various social identities in sports. In addition to

identification with a team, sports may be associated with other identifications. Haridakis,

in citing and incorporating a variety of research, talks about sports in the context of team

identification, national identity, geography and community – which includes universities,

other fans, and family and friends. About this, Haridakis says:

Identities are tied to group membership, and people can have a different

social identity for each group to which they belong. This makes

understanding the connection between sports fans' social identity and

communication activities surrounding sports complex, because there are

different social identities associated with sports. Sports fans often identify

with a team. However, connection to a team may be through connection

to other reference groups with whom fans watch sports and share a

connection (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). The connection to a team also

may be through a connection to a larger community such as a university,

city, or other geographic locale represented by a team. Even national

identity can become a type of attachment to a team or sport. Each of these

types of connections is a different "point of attachment" – that is, there are

group attachments in the context of sports besides attachment to a team

itself (p. 501). (Haridakis, 2010, pp. 250-251)

Indeed, social identity theory has been used extensively as a theoretical lens through which to analyze sports fans. Social identity theory has influenced and been incorporated into some of the sports fan literature presented in this review of literature (e.g., Clopton & Finch, 2010; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wann & Dolan, 1994). Thus, using social identity theory as a framework for a study on college students' experiences with team identification is appropriate, and naturally contributes to the literature on sports fans.

Summary

Intercollegiate athletics are a major part of higher education in the United States, and it was through the efforts of the student body that college sports began. Sports fans have opportunities for social connections as they follow athletics. The literature on non-college student sports fans involves issues surrounding students' team identification, yet the qualitative research is severely lacking, and no qualitative studies were found on college students' experiences. In conducting a qualitative study on the experiences of college student sports fans, it would be natural to include students' social experiences. Social identity theory is often used as a framework for studying sports fans, and using it as a framework for a qualitative study on experiences of college student sports fans is appropriate, and naturally contributes to the sports fan literature. Chapter Three will look at the methodology of this study.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In chapter two, the review of literature on intercollegiate athletics showed how college sports are significant in the United States. Sports fans' identification with a team remains a phenomenon which is widely-studied. In the body of work on college student sports fans, qualitative research is lacking. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. I used a phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis, and social identity theory as a framework.

Methodological Approach

This qualitative study utilized a methodology known as phenomenology. Phenomenological investigations are concerned with experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Phenomenology was the natural, logical, and appropriate method for studying the experiences of student sports fans. Through phenomenological analysis, the experiences of students were captured and analyzed, with a concerted effort to fully understand the depths and dimensions of the experiences.

Qualitative Analysis in General

Marshall and Rossman (2011) note that research on the social sciences and education has increasingly relied upon qualitative methodologies. When a social phenomenon warrants exploration due to the absence of individual or group voices, when

there is a need for a complex understanding of a social issue, qualitative research appropriately seeks-out the voices of human participants in their natural setting (Creswell, 2007). This research on the experiences of highly identified college student sports fans was indeed an examination of a social phenomenon. Students at a university who highly identify with the marquee sports team makeup an intriguing segment of the institution's social landscape. By utilizing qualitative means for studying college student sports fans, this study gave students the opportunity to express their voices. This qualitative study on student fan experiences provides an in-depth, thick description of students' fandom, and presents students' team identification and social experiences in an authentic and meaningful way.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological study looks at experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The individuals in this study, college student sports fans, were experiencing the phenomenon of being a highly identified fan of their university's marquee sports team, and were having social experiences that came about through their team identification. Therefore, within this phenomenon of college student fandom there were two components: the experiences of highly identifying with their university's marquee sports team and the social experiences that have come about through team identification. As this study aimed to discover the experiences of highly identified college student sports fans, phenomenology was the appropriate research method. Phenomenology analyzes and describes experiences (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and thus was the natural choice for discovering the experiences of students' team identification and their social experiences that have come about.

Phenomenology is rooted in philosophy, especially in the ideas of Edmund

Husserl (1859-1938) (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) presents Stewart and Mickunas'

(1990) emphasis on four ways in which phenomenology is rooted in philosophy:

1. Phenomenology gets back to traditional philosophy; it returns to "philosophy as a
   search for wisdom" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58).

2. The phenomenological researcher seeks "to suspend all judgments about what is
   real…until they are founded on a more certain basis" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 58-59).

3. "*The **intentionality of consciousness**. This idea is that consciousness is always
   directed toward an object*" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

4. "*The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy*….The reality of an object is only
   perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 2007,
   p. 59).

The second perspective had particular significance for me as a researcher. It will become

apparent that I, just like the students in this study, am a highly identified sports fan. More

importantly, I highly identify with the same marquee college sports team as the students

in this study. Therefore, I attempted to set aside my own experiences (Creswell, 2007;

Moustakas, 1994), but this was doable only to a limited extent. In relation to perspectives

three and four, it is important to understand that this study sought only to discover and

describe students' experiences, and not any "actuality" or "reality" behind or beyond

them.

A significant portion of this phenomenological research was influenced by

Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' approach focuses on describing the experiences of the

participants (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Making use of Husserl's concept of

"epoche," the researcher makes an attempt to set aside their own experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). I utilized the epoche process, although my ability to set aside my experiences was limited. Moustakas' (1994) approach involves what is known as textural and structural descriptions, where the researcher describes what participants have experienced and how they have experienced it (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). I did not utilize these concepts; rather, I gave one presentation of students' experiences. This presentation contained themes and sub-themes which captured students' experiences with depth and nuance, and in a way that adequately and appropriately answered my research questions. I felt that this presentation made students' experiences clear to the reader. The decision not to utilize textural and structural descriptions was not because of any opposition or intended contradiction to Moustakas' (1994) approach. The way in which I presented students' experiences came about due to my personal style, comfort, and preferences as a qualitative researcher, and the direction taken with seven levels of data analysis. After the presentation of students' experiences, I wrote a statement of essences.

Sample Site

This study explored students' team identification. It was therefore beneficial for this study to utilize a university that had a sports team with which students commonly and easily recognized. In order to ensure that I was able to find student fans at the institution, I had to choose an institution with an easily recognizable marquee sports team. I believed it would be helpful if this was a collegiate sports team with historical and contemporary prominence, and the one which was most readily associated with the

university's athletic department. In short, the team had to be the university's most widely-recognized and publicized – the marquee sport. I felt I was more likely to find student fans of this type of team than of any other. A marquee team is highly covered by the media and brings about student and community interest. Students at a university cannot help but be aware of the team's existence. In selecting a university's marquee sport, I believed I was increasing my chances of getting an appropriate sample size of student fans. Choosing the marquee sports team, I felt, would likely make for rich and compelling student fan experiences. I was fortunate enough as a researcher to be a doctoral student conducting this study at a university with an easily recognizable marquee sports team, one with historical and contemporary prominence, and where there were obvious student fans of the team. The institution was the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and the marquee team was their men's basketball team, the Runnin' Rebels.

Moustakas (1994) states, "The first challenge of the researcher, in preparing to conduct a phenomenological investigation, is to arrive at a topic and question that have both social meaning and personal significance" (p. 104). He notes, "In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the research" (p. 104). Indeed, as a native of Las Vegas and as a student at UNLV, and as a big-time fan of the Runnin' Rebels myself, the topic of student fan experiences at UNLV has deep personal significance. I received both a bachelor's and master's degree from UNLV, and was pursuing a doctorate there at the time of this study. I am a fan of the Runnin' Rebels and will continue to be a fan throughout my lifetime. I grew up as a fan of the team. I

possess intense interest in college sports and the Runnin' Rebels team. I am a highly identified fan of the Runnin' Rebels, and my excitement about the topic inspired the study.

This study had the ability to take shape in any setting where college students had high identification with their university's marquee sports team. Readers will have to consider the context of the institution and the team. To help illuminate the context, the following is a brief history of UNLV, a brief history of the Runnin' Rebels, and a brief look at the Runnin' Rebels and UNLV students at the time of this study.

History of UNLV

On UNLV's official website, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2013) cites Moehring (2007) in presenting the history of the institution. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2013, citing Moehring, 2007) notes that the institution started as an extension of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) in 1951, and became known as Nevada Southern in 1954. The "Rebel" name came about from students' wish to break away, or rebel, from UNR. In 1957, students began taking classes in a new building on newly acquired campus land, and the construction of more campus buildings quickly followed. University of Nevada, Las Vegas' (2013, citing Moehring, 2007) presentation states that Nevada Southern became a "university", known as Nevada Southern University, in 1965. In 1968, the university became independent from UNR, with equal status, gaining autonomy under Nevada's higher education system. The name UNLV was adopted in 1969. UNLV continued to develop in the years to follow (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013, citing Moehring, 2007).

History of Runnin' Rebels Men's Basketball

     Carp (2005) wrote a history of Runnin' Rebels men's basketball. He states that during the early years under the name Nevada Southern, students of the school were looking for a coherent identity. Students asked the dean about the possibility of sports teams for the school. Excitement through athletics was already a part of the university to the north, the University of Nevada, Reno, and students at Nevada Southern wished to experience college sports on their campus. Carp discusses the beginnings of the basketball team and Michael "Chub" Drakulich, who became the first head basketball coach of Nevada Southern in 1958 (Carp, 2005).

     Carp (2005) explains that the early Rebels basketball teams operated with limited finances. He notes that the school's name was changed to UNLV during the 1968-1969 season. UNLV became part of the West Coast Athletic Conference, the conference of their in-state rival university in Reno. During the early 1970's, UNLV men's basketball was not winning an impressive number of games, but "history was about to be changed forever" (Carp, 2005, p. 13). Jerry Tarkanian took over head coaching duties in the 1973-1974 season. Carp states that by 1976, UNLV was recognized throughout the country. Home games sold out, Tarkanian continually got better and better players, and the team's style of play became nationally known (Carp, 2005).

     Carp (2005) explains that in the 1976-1977 season, the Rebels made the Final Four in the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament for the first time. The team made the Final Four again in 1987. In the 1989-1990 season, the team defeated Duke University to win the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship. The Runnin' Rebels beat Duke 103-73, setting the record for the largest margin of victory in a

championship game. The city of Las Vegas visibly celebrated the Runnin' Rebel's victory. Carp discusses how the next day, a parade was held which moved from downtown to the Las Vegas Strip, and ended at the Thomas & Mack Center. The following season, the Runnin' Rebels would go undefeated in the regular season. However, Duke, who lost to UNLV the previous year in the championship game, would cause the Runnin' Rebels to fall short of back-to-back championships, defeating UNLV in the Final Four of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament (Carp, 2005).

Carp (2005) discusses how after continued controversial struggles with the NCAA and UNLV president Bob Maxson, and the surfacing of photos showing players drinking alcohol in a hot tub with a known sports "fixer," Jerry Tarkanian decided to resign as head coach following the 1991-1992 season. Carp notes that fans showed support of Tarkanian. A support rally was held at a church, and fans who attended home games during Tarkanian's last season wore t-shirts saying "Keep Tark" on one side and "Fire Maxson" on the other. Because of sanctions handed down by the NCAA for past violations, the team was not allowed to play in the NCAA Tournament during Tarkanian's final year (Carp, 2005). In 2005, the Thomas & Mack Center basketball court was dedicated to Tarkanian (UNLV Rebels, 2012). Tarkanian is still a consistent attendee of the Runnin' Rebels home games at the Thomas & Mack Center. In 2011, HBO released a documentary of the Tarkanian era and the team's impact on Las Vegas (Katsilometes, 2011). In the years following Tarkanian's departure, the Runnin' Rebels were led by several different head coaches, though the team was unable to obtain the same level of success (Carp, 2005).

The Runnin' Rebels and UNLV Students Today

In the 2006-2007 season, under head coach Lon Kruger, the Runnin' Rebels returned to the national spotlight after an impressive regular season and an appearance in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament. After bringing the team back into athletic prominence, Lon Kruger left for a head coaching position at the University of Oklahoma at the end of the 2010-2011 season. Dave Rice, a former player under Tarkanian and part of the championship team, took over head coaching duties for the 2011-2012 season. Rice was the first ever former player to become head coach of the Runnin' Rebels. When Rice took over, UNLV created a marketing campaign known as "Let's Run" to signify the fast-paced, up-tempo style of play that Rice intended (Sun Staff, 2011). Stacey Augmon, an assistant coach, was a standout superstar player for Tarkanian and the championship team of the 1989-1990 season. Rice's first year as head coach saw the team defeat the number one seeded North Carolina Tar Heels in regular season play. The Runnin' Rebels finished the season ranked as one of the top twenty-five teams in the country. The team played in the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament for the 2011-2012 season, but lost in their first game. The Runnin' Rebels of UNLV maintain national prominence. In 2008, ESPN named the Runnin' Rebels the eighth most prestigious Division I men's basketball program since 1984-1985 (Shelton, Loucks, & Fallica, 2008).

The section of a stadium populated by student fans during a live game is commonly referred to as the student section. Ahmed (2012) and Bichelman (2012) wrote about the notable and recently developed social phenomenon known as The Rebellion, UNLV's student section. The Rebellion was started by students who were looking to

43

unify the student section. Bichelman states, "UNLV now boasts a group that rivals any other student section in the country: 'The Rebellion'" (Student section is second to none, para.1). Ahmed (2012) and Bichelman (2012) discuss The Rebellion, noting their use of oversized cutouts of the faces of Las Vegas celebrities, and their "Mozilla", an exceptionally large moveable cutout of Runnin' Rebels player Mike Moser. Head coach Dave Rice (as Bichelman, 2012 quotes) states that The Rebellion is "as good of an environment as there is in college basketball" (Student section is second to none, para.1).

This study took place during the Runnin' Rebels' 2012-2013 season. Many were anticipating an even more successful season than the previous one. The Runnin' Rebels were ranked number nineteen in the pre-season USA Today Coaches Poll, their first pre-season ranking since 1992-1993 (Mauss, 2012). A high level of excitement, hopes, and expectations surrounded the team. The season's opening day crowd of eighteen-thousand one-hundred and eighty-seven at the Thomas & Mack Center was the largest for a season opener in UNLV history (Bern, 2012). There was much talk in various media outlets about the outstanding student-athlete talents returning for the 2012-2013 season, and the much-hyped new recruits to be playing in their first season. However, the 2012-2013 season ended with the Runnin' Rebels not ranked in the top twenty-five, and with once again losing in their first game of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament.

It is important to note some attributes of UNLV and the Runnin' Rebels. While the Runnin' Rebels are indeed the marquee sport of UNLV, the most well-known sports team in the Las Vegas community, and well-known throughout the nation, the culture of UNLV and the Las Vegas community may not reflect a presence of symbolic team identification in the same way as some other institutions and cities with big-name college

sports teams. For example, in Norman, Oklahoma, home of the Sooners football team,

the town transforms on game day into one of celebration of the game and the team. On

game day, it can be nearly impossible to travel anywhere in Norman, Oklahoma without

seeing Sooners apparel or logos (G.K. Nwosu, personal communication, February 10,

2012). UNLV is situated in Las Vegas, a young and vibrant city with many attractions to

keep the interest of its large population. The Runnin' Rebels draw a considerable number

of people to their games, yet throughout the city there are still many other options on

game day. Las Vegas is large in population and spread out in area. Many residents

moved to Las Vegas from somewhere else. So, as a whole, the city's expression of

identification with the Runnin' Rebels may not appear as strong, or at least not the same

as other, more traditional college towns. Furthermore, UNLV is considered a commuter

institution. Most students at UNLV do not live on campus. Even many full-time

students at UNLV live off campus, work jobs away from UNLV, and engage in social

activities not related to the university. Students at UNLV certainly identify with the

Runnin' Rebels, yet their context may be different from that of students in other college-

sports dominated towns. The results of this study should be understood within the

context of UNLV as an institution, UNLV students, and the city of Las Vegas.

Sample Selection Criteria

I used a sampling strategy known as purposeful sampling, which is often used in

qualitative research. Merriam (2009) states that "purposeful sampling is based on the

assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and

therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.77). The college

student sports fans used in this study were students at UNLV who were highly identified

fans of the Runnin' Rebels. These student Runnin' Rebels fans had to meet certain

criteria in order to be considered for participation. It was important that I had a tight and

well-defined set of characteristics which my participants shared. I needed participants

who were indeed student fans of the Runnin' Rebels, and who had rich experiences to

share. The criteria for sample selection were: (a) students had to be full-time

undergraduate students at UNLV during either the fall of 2012 semester or the spring of

2013 semester, and (b) students had to be "highly identified" fans of the Runnin' Rebels,

as measured by the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe,

1993).

Full-Time Undergraduates

I collected data from students enrolled during the semesters which the 2012-2013

men's basketball season took place (i.e., fall of 2012 and spring of 2013). Students were

actively participating in their fandom and experiencing the phenomenon under study

during the time of data collection. In looking at the experiences of UNLV student fans of

the Runnin' Rebels, it was important to solicit students who had as much exposure to the

culture of UNLV and the Runnin' Rebels, and as much chance for social experiences, as

possible. The decision to use full-time students instead of part-time students was based

on the assumption that full-time students would have had more exposure to the culture of

UNLV and the Runnin' Rebels. Full-time students are on UNLV's campus more, take

more classes, and typically have more exposure to social connections with other students.

For the purposes of this study, students' social experiences, in regard to following the

Runnin' Rebels, did not have to be experiences with other students necessarily, however

selecting full-time students allowed for more possibility of gathering the experiences of students' connections with other students. Whether or not these full-time students lived on campus, they at least had maximum exposure to the climate of UNLV during the basketball season, as they were engaged on a full-time basis with their pursuits as a student. The decision to utilize only undergraduate students was based upon the assumption that undergraduates are typically more engaged in extra-academic and extra-professional affairs on campus, including following their university's marquee sports team, than graduate and professional students. In choosing only full-time undergraduate students, I ensured that the population sample had a consistent set of characteristics in regard to their student status. This consistency narrowed the focus of the study and allowed me to examine data from individuals with like attributes.

Highly Identified Fans

As I was attempting to discover student fans' experiences, I wanted to seek-out fans who indeed had rich experiences with fandom, and who could provide thick and descriptive data. In selecting highly identified fans, I felt I was increasing my chances of finding fans who have had rich experiences with fandom to share, and who could provide thick and descriptive data. UNLV students who were highly identified with the Runnin' Rebels would likely have had meaningful experiences following the team. Additionally, highly identified student fans of the Runnin' Rebels would likely have had social experiences as they pertained to their devoted fandom. A positive correlation has been found between level of team identification and team/fan-related social connections (Wann, Waddill, Polk, & Weaver, 2011). Finally, selecting only highly identified fans further narrowed the focus of the study and ensured more consistent attributes of the

participants. By selecting only full-time undergraduate students who were highly

identified with the Runnin' Rebels, the characteristics of my potential student fans would

be well-defined, and I believed students with these characteristics would likely be able to

provide thick and descriptive data on the experiences of their identification with the

Runnin' Rebels and their social experiences that have come about.

Assessment of Team Identification and Student Status

To determine the level of UNLV students' identification with the Runnin' Rebels,

that is, whether or not they were highly identified, I used a valid and reliable instrument

known as the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

The SSIS has been widely used in the sports fan literature to determine individuals' level

of identification with a team. In the literature on college student sports fans presented in

Chapter Two, all studies involving the measurement of students' level of team

identification made use of the SSIS (e.g., Clopton & Finch, 2010; Luellen & Wann, 2010;

Wann & Robinson, 2002). The literature on non-college student sports fans also makes

use of the SSIS; in Tonetti's (2010) phenomenological doctoral dissertation, participants

were highly identified sports fans as measured by the SSIS.

Wann and Branscombe (1993) found reliability and validity of the SSIS as an

instrument by which to assess one's level of identification with a team. As the authors

state about their research:

In the studies reported here, reliability and validity data were provided for

a measure assessing spectators' degree of identification with a sports team.

Numerous behavioral, cognitive, and emotional reaction differences were

observed for persons who differ in the degree to which they identify with a

particular sports team. The measure was found to be reliable and

internally consistent with a simple factor structure (Study 1), and it related

to other relevant variables as expected (Study 2). Thus, this measure

appears to be quite accurate in determining people's allegiance to a team

and would be appropriate for use in other studies investigating sports

spectators. (Wann & Branscombe, 1993, p. 10)

Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) discuss the nature of the SSIS. The

authors cite Wann and Branscombe (1993, p. 5) in showing the SSIS, which asks

questions such as "How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the team listed above?"

and "How important is being a fan of the team listed above to you?" The authors note

that there are seven items, where options for response range from one to eight, and that

team identification level is determined by totaling the responses to the seven items.

Scores above thirty-five indicate that the fan is highly identified (Wann, Melnick,

Russell, & Pease, 2001).

For my use of the SSIS for UNLV student Runnin' Rebels fans, I pre-typed the

team "UNLV Runnin' Rebels men's basketball" in the spot on the SSIS where the fan is

instructed to list the name of their favorite team, which is the team to which all seven

items on the SSIS refer. I also verbally informed students to complete the SSIS as it

pertained to their fandom of the Runnin' Rebels. Students scoring above thirty-five on

the SSIS were considered highly identified. To determine students' status as full-time

undergraduates, the top of the form containing the SSIS had basic demographic

information for students to complete. Students had the option to circle either "part-time"

or "full-time", and either "undergraduate" or "graduate." Students who circled "full-

49

time" and "undergraduate," and who scored above thirty-five on the SSIS, were considered eligible participants for the study. On an interesting note, all students who completed the form scored above thirty-five on the SSIS. Please see Appendix A for the form containing the SSIS and basic demographic information.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. This study used UNLV students who highly identify with the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team, which is the marquee sports team at UNLV.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team?
- What are students' social experiences that have come about through team identification?

Data Collection Procedures

Phenomenology relies upon in-depth interviews for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). For my data collection from UNLV student fans, I interviewed nine students about their experiences. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to data collection. The interviews were

conducted on UNLV's main campus. The interviews took place during the 2012-2013

NCAA Division I men's basketball regular season, which began for the Runnin' Rebels

on November 12, 2012 and ended on March 9, 2013. The first interview took place on

November 13, 2012 and the last interview took place on February 26, 2013. Prior to the

interview, students were asked to sign a consent form, and fill out the form containing the

SSIS and demographic information, to measure their student status and level of Runnin'

Rebel identification.

Time of Data Collection

In order to help ensure that these student fans were fully engaged in their fandom,

where their experiences were fresh and they were enthusiastic about the happenings of

the team, I collected data during the regular season play of NCAA Division I men's

basketball. I decided to collect data during the season as I believed that participants

would be following the team, their thoughts and attitudes would be geared toward the

Runnin' Rebels and all that was going on with intercollegiate men's basketball, and that

they would be in the process of going through the activities, events, behaviors, thoughts,

feelings, and desires that go-along with being a fan. I believed that students would be

engaging with other fans in communication and social activities. In short, I would be

asking students to talk about their experiences, and they would be in the midst of

experiencing aspects of the phenomenon. I felt that even experiences from long-ago

might be talked about with increased enthusiasm because of the season being in full-

swing.

This study was concerned with students' experiences past and present, meaning,

the phenomenon of their fandom was not specifically being explored as it necessarily

pertained to the particular 2012-2013 season. Students could talk about experiences from

this season, past seasons, off-seasons, or experiences from long-ago. The overall aim

was to explore students' most meaningful and significant experiences, and to present the

experiences in rich, in-depth, and descriptive detail. Students were interviewed only once

during the season, interviews took place during different times during the season, and the

interview questions were not in specific regard to the 2012-2013 season. Thus, the

results are not confined to students' experiences with one season; rather, the study

discovered students' meaningful and significant experiences from past and present.

However, it was believed that collecting data during the regular season would promote

the discussion of meaningful and significant experiences in a most vivid and descriptive

manner.

Number of Participants

The amount of students to be interviewed was determined by the point at which

saturation was reached in the data. The first three levels of my data analysis were

conducted during the collection of data. After I received the transcript of each interview,

I completed the first three levels. I felt that I could claim to have reached saturation in

the data if patterns and similarities were found across six consecutive interviews. I

decided that when I reached saturation, I would interview several more students to see if

the saturation held. After the first six interviews, there were definitely identifiable

patterns and similarities across each one. I decided to interview several more students

and, after the seventh, eighth, and ninth interviews, the saturation held, meaning patterns

and similarities which were found across the first six interviews were also found in the

seventh, eighth, and ninth interviews. Thus, I concluded data collection after nine student

interviews. The first interview took place on November 13, 2012 and the last interview

took place on February 26, 2013.

Participant Solicitation

I targeted full-time undergraduate students at UNLV who highly identify with the

Runnin' Rebels. I informed those I knew at UNLV, including students, faculty, staff, and

colleagues, about my study. I asked faculty who teach undergraduate courses to make

announcements about my study before they began class. Please see Appendix B for a

sample script faculty have used for their classroom announcements. I also created paper

flyers. The flyer briefly noted the study and my need for UNLV students who were big-

time fans of the Runnin' Rebels. The flyer also contained my personal contact

information. Please see Appendix C for the flyer. The flyers were posted all around

UNLV's main campus, and at various businesses outside the campus (e.g., coffee houses,

restaurants, bookstores, etc.). The flyers were given to those I knew at UNLV who might

possibly help me identify participants. I attended the vast majority of Runnin' Rebels

home games, where I passed out flyers in the student section. Along with the passing out

of flyers, I verbally explained my study. As I was consistently on UNLV's main campus

as a student and graduate assistant, I kept the flyers with me at all times. There were

times when I saw individuals on campus who could reasonably be assumed to be a

student fan, for example, if they were wearing Runnin' Rebel apparel, and I stopped them

and gave them a flyer and briefly explained my study. I gave flyers and explained my

study to individuals outside of UNLV. I went to viewing parties for away games and

passed out flyers and explained my study to those I thought may be student fans.

Members of the Las Vegas community, such as business owners and employees at

businesses where UNLV students frequently attend or engage in their fandom, were made aware of my study and need for student fans, and given flyers. I promoted my study on several social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and a UNLV fan message board. I promoted my study, and informed individuals and organizations about my study, both in-person and via the internet. I asked individuals, organizations, and participants to help me identify potential student fans, and to have potential student fans contact me. These individuals, organizations, and participants used my flyers, my contact information, and study information to promote my study. I used publicly distributed contact information to contact individuals, organizations, or potential participants, and inform them of my study and need for student fans.

Snowball sampling is where participants are asked to recommend other participants who may be useful for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). I utilized a snowball sampling technique for this study. After interviews, I asked students if they could recommend other students who might fit the criteria for my study. I then gave interview participants flyers to take with them, to pass out to potential future participants that they thought may fit the criteria.

Consent and Measurement of Criteria

After initial contact was made, I established a time to meet with the student. The meetings took place on UNLV's main campus. At the meeting, students were given a consent form to sign. The consent form gave basic details about the study and informed the student that they may be asked to participate in an interview. The consent form confirmed that students were at least eighteen years of age. Only students who were at least eighteen years of age were considered for participation in the study. Please see

Appendix D for the consent form. After students signed the consent form, they were asked to complete the form containing basic demographic information and the SSIS. Students who circled that they were full-time undergraduates and scored above thirty-five on the SSIS were asked to participate in an interview. The interview took place either immediately or at another time, depending upon the environment and its conduciveness to an interview, students' wishes, time restrictions, or other logistical factors.

Phenomenological Interview

Phenomenology relies upon in-depth interviews for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) states, "The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p.114). The results of this study came from analyzing and presenting the data from students' interviews. The form containing basic demographic information and the SSIS was only used to pick-out students who fit the criteria participation. It was from students' phenomenological interviews that their experiences were presented and the research questions answered.

Prior to the interview, students were made fully aware of the type of interview to take place. I described in detail the purpose of my study and the types of questions I would be asking during the interview. Moustakas (1994) states, "The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (p. 114). On UNLV's main campus, I promoted a comfortable and informal atmosphere in which to conduct the interviews. The interview was designed to solicit particular kinds of responses. More specifically, the interview was designed to solicit responses regarding the two research questions.

Questions kept in line with the two research questions, and came from concepts in the literature, phenomenology, and social identity theory. To guide my thinking during the interview, I developed an interview protocol, which contained a list of possible questions to be asked during the interview. Not all questions contained in the interview protocol were asked during each interview. Also, I asked questions, sub-questions, and probing questions not contained in the interview protocol. Students described meaningful experiences that warranted further exploration, which were not part of the interview protocol. Students were, at times, asked to be more specific about certain experiences or to elaborate on their answers, in part to help me fully understand the depths of the experience, and also to allow me to draw contrasts and comparisons to other students' responses. As the number of interviews progressed, I was able to identify patterns and commonalities, which in general prompted certain probes for specificity, in order to make sure that I would be able to truly understand students' responses, and to be able to accurately compare and contrast students' experiences. While the interview protocol remained the same throughout the study, and I did my best to cover all points in the interview protocol, my questions, sub-questions, and probing questions became fine-tuned as the number of interviews progressed. Depending on students' responses to certain questions, the flow of the interview, what I felt would bring about the most meaningful and descriptive responses, or the fine-tuning of the interview process as data collection progressed, there were times when interview questions were worded differently, were explained in different ways, and were even at times changed to ask a different kind of question altogether. In general, the interview protocol was meant to serve as an informal guide. Thus, while the interviews did not maintain strict

consistency, the interviews did result in meaningful, thick, rich, and descriptive responses. Please see Appendix E for the interview protocol.

Class Project

Approximately one year before the start of this study, in the fall of 2011, I conducted a phenomenological case study on the differences and similarities between a student fan of the Runnin' Rebels and a non-student fan. The study, which was a class project, served as a means for gaining experience in qualitative data analysis. Since the completion of the class project, my competence and abilities in phenomenological data collection and analysis have become more sophisticated. The results of this class project are not meant to be data on the experiences of Runnin' Rebels fans, nor should they be interpreted as such. Rather, the class project was a significant step in my learning of the processes and procedures of qualitative research.

I conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews with two Runnin' Rebels fans. One of the fans, given the pseudonym Allan, was a student at UNLV and the other, given the pseudonym Katherine, was not a student. Both had been fans of the Runnin' Rebels for over twenty years and had lived in Las Vegas for the entire duration of their fandom. Allan was born and raised in Las Vegas. Allan is a close, personal friend of mine and Katherine is my mother. Both have been meaningful and significant in my own experiences as a Runnin' Rebels fan.

Prior to their interview, I asked Allan and Katherine to come up with a list of five words, phrases, or ideas that represented the meaning of being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels. During their interview, after discussing the five items, I asked Katherine and

Allan about their past and present experiences with Runnin' Rebels fandom, and about the essences and meanings of being a fan. In looking at the interview transcripts, I searched for significant statements that explained how the participants experienced being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels and what it meant to them. I became immersed in the data. Through immersion in the data, which is considered invaluable for qualitative analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), I engaged in an inductive process from which essential themes emerged. While engaging in the data I compiled numerous memos regarding my thoughts about the data and what themes might be emerging. The themes which emerged from the data, common to both Katherine and Allan, were: (a) community involvement, (b) excitement, fun, and release of tension, (c) connection to the past, and (d) the development of the institution. Katherine expressed an exclusive theme of family bonding. Allan expressed an exclusive theme where he discussed the Runnin' Rebels as a metaphor for life.

As I was searching for similarities and differences between the student fan and the non-student fan, I coded bits of text from Allan and Katherine that fit into the themes. I sought to understand how the codes belonging to each theme could be grouped together to reflect commonalities and illuminate differences. Through coding and clustering, I was able to identify that while each common theme was overarching as essential to both Allan and Katherine, they each meant something different to both.

Both Katherine and Allan discussed their experiences with community involvement. For Katherine, being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels meant being involved with the community from a perspective of social bonding. She identified with other members of the community who were also fans of the team. For Allan, being a fan of the

Runnin' Rebels was also meaningful in terms of community involvement, and he

described it terms of developing his identification with the city of Las Vegas. He noted

that for him, following the Runnin' Rebels represented citizenship and making Las Vegas

a home, and that through identification with the team he felt a sense of community.

Katherine and Allan both experienced excitement, fun, and release of tension

through identification with the Runnin' Rebels. For Katherine, being a fan meant

excitement and fun, and through this excitement and fun came opportunities for social

interactions with friends and colleagues. Katherine said that following the team allowed

her an escape from work. Katherine experienced escape and social bonding as they

aligned with cathartic release of tension and excitement. Allan expressed the excitement

of being a fan in terms of the outcome of the games and the team's success.

Katherine related her experiences as a Runnin' Rebels fan with past experiences

as a sports fan during her teenage years. She also held close her memories of coming to

Las Vegas as a young adult and developing her fandom as she continued to live in Las

Vegas. For Allan, the connection to the past was aligned with early childhood memories

and his native status as a born-and-raised Las Vegan. He remembered fondly when the

Runnin' Rebels won the national championship in the 1989-1990 season.

The final theme common to both fans was called the development of the

institution. Both Katherine and Allan experienced Runnin' Rebels fandom in terms of

seeing UNLV develop as a university. Katherine recalled various conflicts over

intercollegiate athletics and its financial fit within higher education. She remembered

debates over whether UNLV should even have athletics at all. She also believed that as

UNLV grew as an institution, the Runnin' Rebels became more popular in the

community. Allan vividly recalled the controversies associated with Jerry Tarkanian. He also expressed the delicate and sometimes controversial relationship between higher education and intercollegiate athletics, financially speaking, in the same sense as Katherine.

A theme exclusive to Katherine was called family bonding. She talked about being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels in terms of interpersonal relationships with family members. It was obvious that for Katherine, being a fan of the team served as a means for valuable family bonding. Exclusive to Allan was a theme called Runnin' Rebels as a metaphor for life. Allan talked about how being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels helped him as a person. In dealing with the team's losses, Allan learned to cope with the criticisms and rejections he faced during his own life. Being a fan was seen as a metaphor for coping with life's results.

Data Analysis

I anticipated and expected certain experiences to be talked about in the interviews, and certain experiences to be found in the data and presented in the results. These anticipations and expectations came from my personal experiences with being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, my immersion in the literature presented in the previous chapter, including social identity theory, and the class project that I had completed. Students' experiences and their social experiences that have come about were discerned from rigorous analysis of the phenomenological interviews. Students' experiences were analyzed through the framework of social identity theory. I underwent Moustakas' (1994) epoche process. During all of my phenomenological interviews, I wrote analytic

memos (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). All of my interviews were recorded on two digital audio voice recorders, and the files of these recordings were sent out to a transcription service to be transcribed. After writing the epoche, collecting the data through phenomenological interviews, and receiving the transcriptions, I engaged in seven levels of analysis which were influenced in part by certain concepts in Moustaks' (1994) phenomenological reduction. I also wrote a statement of essences, highlighting the most indispensable aspects of students' experiences. All transcribed interviews were stored and analyzed on Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis program.

Epoche

Epoche, also known as bracketing, is where I as a researcher attempt to set aside my own experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) states, "This is a difficult task and requires that we allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself" (p. 86). However, my ability to set aside my experiences was limited. As Moustakas asserts, "There are life experiences that are so severe, intense, and telling, some things that are so ingrained, and some people so attached to or against each other and themselves that clear openness or pure consciousness is virtually an impossibility" (p. 90). My personally profound experiences as a fan of the Runnin' Rebels were so ingrained into me as a person that I could only set them aside to a limited extent. My immersion in the literature, including social identity theory, and the class project also came into play. My experiences as a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, the literature, including social identity theory, and the class project all ran together to undoubtedly influence the study.

For my epoche, I developed a description of my own experiences with being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels. Also, I described the social experiences that have come about through my Runnin' Rebels identification. The following is my epoche:

I have attended UNLV since my undergraduate years, obtaining a bachelor's and master's degree from the university. Currently, I am attending UNLV as a doctoral candidate, and working as a graduate assistant in the department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education. I was born and raised in Las Vegas, and have followed the Runnin' Rebels since childhood. Some of my fondest childhood memories involve watching the team with family and friends. Naturally, then, as I became a student at UNLV, my interest in the team was alive and well. Generally speaking, I am a current fan in the same way I was a childhood fan, where social bonding is of primary importance. Watching the games, whether live or on television, or even listening to them on the radio, is of high value to me when I'm in the company of friends and family who are also fans of the team. The act of sharing the experience with people I care about is at the forefront of importance. In fact, for a while during my undergraduate years I did not follow the team very closely. It wasn't until good friends of mine became interested that I again picked-up my enthusiasm.

Being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels is an important part of my life. Being a fan of the team has greatly affected my sense of identity. I identify with the team and with other fans. It is very fun and exciting to

be a fan of such a unique sports team in the world of intercollegiate athletics. The Runnin' Rebels have distinguished themselves through high-caliber teams, a national championship in 1990, and a controversial former head coach in Jerry Tarkanian. Today, the team enjoys a resurgence in popularity and consistently reaches the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament in March. In 2007 they reached the Sweet 16.

I consider the team and the fans to be distinct, and I'm proud to be a fan myself. I am constantly re-defining my role within the group, consisting of the team and other fans, and re-defining the group itself. For example, my interest in the team can go up if the team is doing well and go down if they are struggling. Furthermore, the interest of other fans will somewhat determine my interest. If a friend or family member really wants to watch a game, my interest in watching the game goes up. I perceive Runnin' Rebels fans as not only fans of the team, but as individuals who identify with Las Vegas as a city. A sense of community pride is present with Runnin' Rebels fans.

We fans of the Runnin' Rebels have come to develop rivals. Duke University has long-been considered a rival team since we beat them in the national championship in 1990, and they so sadly beat us in the Final Four in 1991. Brigham Young University recently left the Mountain West Conference, but was indeed a rival team while they were with us. Beating them was especially important. I still always want them to lose. It's

difficult to establish a strong rivalry these days, but San Diego State

University seems to be the one team within our conference that stands out

as an important team to beat. I believe that fans of rival teams have come

to be fans, and are experiencing fandom, in much the same way as I.

More than anything, it is the social connectedness that I feel, and

the social relationships that I develop, that make being a fan important. It

is through the social connectedness and social relationships that my self-

esteem goes up. In identifying with other Runnin' Rebels fans, I feel

better about myself. Furthermore, my identification with the team is so

strong that I believe I will continue to follow the team even if I am living

in an environment where there are no other fans around. Being a Runnin'

Rebels fan means Las Vegas is my home, UNLV is my school, the

Runnin' Rebels are my team, and other fans are my beloved family and

friends.

Analytic Memos, Transcription, and Atlas.ti

During the interviews with students, I kept a notebook and pen with which I took

analytic memos. Marshall and Rossman (2011) assert, "Writing notes, reflective memos,

thoughts, and insights is invaluable for generating the unusual insights that move the

analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative" (p. 213). During the interviews, I

wrote down my ideas and intuitions about the data. After the interviews were conducted

and recorded, the audio files were sent out to a transcription service. Once I received the

transcriptions, I stored and organized the transcribed interviews on a widely-used

qualitative data analysis software program known as Atlas.ti. I then analyzed the

64

interview transcriptions on Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti contains effective and efficient functions for

storage, organization, and analysis of interview transcripts. I utilized Atlas.ti's coding

functions during the coding process. I used Atlas.ti in writing analytic memos about

meaning units and codes, and in expressing overall thoughts and ideas. Atlas.ti was also

used during the identification and generation of themes and sub-themes, and in general

served valuable in helping me understand students' experiences. Most of the data

analysis took place with the assistance of Atlas.ti.

Seven Levels of Analysis

After epoche, I underwent seven levels of analysis to arrive at a presentation of

students' experiences. Influenced in part by certain concepts in Moustakas' (1994)

phenomenological reduction, these seven levels of analysis allowed me to gain a rich and

detailed understanding of students' experiences. Typically, Moustakas'

phenomenological reduction brings the researcher to what is known as a textural

description, or what participants have experienced, and this comes in contrast to further

analysis, called imaginative variation, which results in a structural description, or how

participants' experienced what they did (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). I did not

make use of the concepts of textural and structural descriptions; rather, I gave one

presentation of students' experiences which adequately answers my research questions.

However, the seven levels of analysis utilized to arrive at the presentation of students'

experiences were influenced in part by certain concepts in Moustakas' (1994)

phenomenological reduction.

The first three levels of analysis were performed during the data collection

process. The first level of analysis involved horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994). The

65

second level was where I performed an initial open coding process on statements which were relevant to my research questions. In the third level, I compared meaning units, their initial codes, and analytic memos across participants. The third level of analysis showed me that saturation in the data had been reached. The fourth level of analysis involved an additional coding process to create a second list of codes which was more exhaustive, detailed, and nuanced than the first. The fifth level of analysis involved a multi-faceted level of analysis which resulted in the emergence of five themes in the data. The sixth level of analysis was where I identified sub-themes. In the seventh level of analysis, I used the insight and understanding that I gained from the previous six levels to give a presentation of students' experiences.

Statement of Essences

Moustakas (1994) prescribes the writing of a statement of essences. While Moustakas' prescription involves the unification of textural and structural descriptions, I modified this approach. Having not made use of the concepts of textural and structural descriptions, I derived a statement of essences from the presentation I gave of students' experiences. This was done by a reexamination of the presentation, returning to the interview transcripts and coded meaning units, generating further analytic memos, and a deep and thorough reflection upon all students' experiences. The goal of the statement of essences was to present the most indispensable elements of all students' experiences.

<div align="center">

Reliability/Dependability

</div>

Babbie (2010) states, "The basic concept of reliability, which some qualitative researchers prefer to call *dependability*, is meaningful for qualitative research" (p. 417).

Certain qualities of my study served to enhance its reliability or dependability. First, my research questions and purpose of study were clearly defined. Second, my study site was clearly explained, the participants were well-defined, and the processes by which the site and participants were identified and incorporated into the study had the potential to be replicated by other researchers. Third, the data analysis processes were clear and systematic. Overall, the clear and systematic research design and analysis processes served to enhance the reliability or dependability of my study.

Validity/Credibility

Merriam (2009) states, "Though qualitative researchers can never capture an objective 'truth' or 'reality,' there are a number of strategies that you as a qualitative researcher can use to increase the 'credibility' of your findings" (p. 215). Member checking is often discussed as a strategy for enhancing validity or credibility in qualitative research (e.g., Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994), and I undertook a version of this concept. After each student's interview, I asked for their email address. After my statement of essences was written, I sent each interview participant, via email, a copy of the statement of essences. I asked them to read the statement of essences. I asked them to let me know if they felt there was anything in the statement that did *not* reflect their experiences with being a fan, was incorrect in any way, had been misinterpreted, was missed or not addressed, or was unclear or that they did not understand. I asked them to let me know if they felt this statement accurately captured the essences of their experiences. Five students responded to the email, and all five confirmed that the statement of essences was accurate. As I did

in my undertaking of Moustakas' (1994) epoche process, describing my own experiences might also be seen as a strategy for enhancing the validity or credibility of my study (e.g., Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Human Subjects and Ethical Issues

For this study, individuals' identities were kept anonymous and the data kept confidential. On the form containing basic demographic information and the SSIS, students' names were blacked-out with a marker. All informed consent forms, students' email addresses, and the forms containing basic demographic information and the SSIS scores, were kept in a secure location on UNLV's main campus. Only I and the members of my dissertation committee had access to this information. All audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews were kept in a secure location on UNLV's main campus, with the exception of the sending out of the audio files to a transcription service. The data contained on Atlas.ti was stored on my personal computer, which was kept locked in my office on UNLV's main campus, and no individual had access to this data except myself and the members of my dissertation committee. All participants signed an informed consent form, which described the purpose of the study, why they had been chosen as a participant, and their role and activities as a participant. The informed consent form assured participants that their participation was voluntary and that data would be kept confidential, and also described the risks and benefits associated with participation. The potential risks to the human subjects of this study were extremely minimal. Students identified within the results and discussion sections of the study were given a pseudonym.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. This study used UNLV students who highly identify with the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team, which is the marquee sports team at UNLV. Nine full-time UNLV undergraduates who highly identify with the Runnin' Rebels participated in an in-depth interview about their experiences with team identification and their social experiences that have come about. The phenomenological interviews took place during the 2012-2013 NCAA Division I men's basketball regular season. The results of this study came from analyzing and presenting the data from students' interviews. Students' experiences were analyzed through the lens of social identity theory. I underwent the epoche process, although my ability to set aside my experiences was limited. Seven levels of analysis resulted in a presentation of students' experiences. I also wrote a statement of essences of all students' experiences.

Chapter four will show the results of my study. I will breakdown the seven levels of data analysis and give a presentation of students' experiences. A statement of essences will also be presented. Chapter four will be where I actually answer my research questions, showing the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. The specific research questions were:

- What are the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team?

- What are students' social experiences that have come about through team identification?

To answer these questions, a phenomenological approach was used with a framework of social identity theory. Nine full-time undergraduates at UNLV, all of whom were highly identified with UNLV's Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team, were used as participants for this study. Students were interviewed during the 2012-2013 NCAA Division I regular season, although the goal was to discover students' experiences overall, not necessarily specific to the season. Students' experiences, as described in the interviews, were analyzed through the framework of social identity theory. I underwent seven levels of data analysis, which were influenced in part by certain concepts in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction. The first three levels of analysis took place during data collection and were used, in-part, to identify a point of saturation in the data. The remaining four levels took place post data collection. The result of the seven levels of analysis was a presentation of students' experiences in their high identification with the

Runnin' Rebels. Five overarching themes emerged from the data which captured

students' experiences through a social identity theory lens: (a) unity and connectivity, (b)

pride and good feelings, (c), characteristics of the ingroup, (d) ingroup and outgroups,

and (e) emotional and psychological reactions to the game. Under each theme, different

sub-themes were presented. In addition to presenting students' experiences, a statement

of essences was also written, which highlights the most indispensable aspects all

students' experiences. See Table 1 below for a list of the pseudonyms to be referred to in

the study, and the date of their interview. All students were full-time UNLV

undergraduates and highly identified with the Runnin' Rebels. All names given are

pseudonyms.

Table 1

Student Fans/Participants' Pseudonyms

Participant Pseudonym	Interview Date
Jennifer	November 13, 2012
Stephen	November 26, 2012
Daniel	December 8, 2012
Cameron	December 12, 2012
Louis	January 8, 2013
Matt	January 22, 2013
Robert	January 23, 2013
Nick	February 21, 2013
Jacob	February 26, 2013

Seven Levels of Analysis

Level One

The first level of my analysis involved what Moustakas (1994) refers to as horizonalization. After each interview was conducted and the transcript was received, I read the transcript verbatim. I considered all statements equally, looking for meaning regarding students' experiences. I gained insight into students' experiences and the meaning of their experiences. In addition to the analytic memos taken during the interview itself, further analytic memos were generated during the first level of anlaysis.

Level Two

After level one, I performed an initial open-coding process on statements within the transcript, following each interview. While Moustakas (1994) recommends that statements which are repetitive, overlapping, and irrelevant to the research questions are to be discarded, I found it useful to discard only the irrelevant statements. The remaining statements were applicable to my research questions and allowed me to deeply understand students' experiences. These remaining applicable statements were called meaning units, and they consisted of applicable statements in the transcribed. All meaning units were given a code to give me the most complete insight into the data, as well as allow for options when presenting quotes. From reading and reflecting upon the coded meaning units in each interview, I generated further analytic memos.

Level Three

In the third level of analysis, meaning units, their initial codes, and analytic memos were compared across participants, in a search for patterns and similarities in order to identify saturation in the data. This comparison was done after each new

interview transcript was received. I believed that if patterns and similarities were found

after six interviews, I could claim saturation and would then interview several more

students to see if the saturation held. After the first six interviews, there were indeed

identifiable patterns and similarities. For example, after the first six interviews, I saw

patterns and similarities with students' meaning units which later made up themes such as

unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, and others. Patterns and similarities

were found after the seventh, eighth, and ninth interviews. After the ninth interview, I

felt confident that saturation had been reached and thus concluded data collection.

Level Four

After the conclusion of data collection, I returned to each interview transcript

itself, and examined them again individually. This involved an additional coding

process, where existing codes were refined, removed, switched around, and examined.

Many additional codes were also created, and at times, more than one code was assigned

to a singular meaning unit. The goal was to create a list of codes which was as detailed

and nuanced as possible. Meaning units were examined on their own, in relation to other

meaning units within the transcript, and in relation to the transcript overall. The result

was a list of codes much more exhaustive, detailed, and nuanced than the original list

from level two. This second list contained two hundred and eight codes.

Level Five

The fifth level of analysis involved looking at each interview transcript, a further

examination of the qualities of the second list of coded meaning units, a study of my

generated analytic memos, a return to the theoretical framework of social identity theory,

a return to the research questions, and consultation with other researchers. I looked at

interview transcripts overall, by themselves and in relation to each other. I further

examined the second list of coded meaning units generated in level four, looking for

qualities at a deeper level. I studied all of the analytic memos which had been generated

so far. I returned to social identity theory to find insight into the data. I also studied how

my data could be used to best answer my research questions. Finally, I engaged in

several meetings with other researchers who helped guide my thinking about the data.

Using social identity theory as a framework for data analysis and presentation served to

focus and steer my thinking toward certain concepts, taking the results in a guided and

particular direction.

The result of this multi-faceted level of analysis was the emergence of five overarching

themes:

1. Unity and connectivity

2. Pride and good feelings

3. Characteristics of the ingroup

4. Ingroup and outgroups

5. Emotional and Psychological Reactions to the Game

The five themes were intended to give a complete picture of students' experiences, as

captured by the framework of social identity theory.

Level Six

The sixth level involved examining the coded meaning units in relation to the

themes, to be able to present meaning units which indicated, revealed, or showed

evidence of the theme, as well as to understand the various components of the themes.

These various components of the themes became sub-themes. The identification of sub-

themes was done by a further examination of the coded meaning units in relation to the themes, further examination of analytic memos, and the generation of new analytic memos. While all students had meaning units indicating, revealing, or showing each theme, sub-themes typically did not reflect meaning units of all students in the study. While some sub-themes or components of them represented meaning units found in all students' transcripts, typically this was not the case. The point was not to show how many students had meaning units representing sub-themes or components of them, but just to show what emerged. Also, the meaning units presented in each sub-theme do not necessarily exhaust all of the possible meaning units for the sub-theme, or necessarily exhaust all participants to which the sub-theme pertains. The meaning units presented in each sub-theme were simply ones I felt gave adequate representation of the sub-theme.

Meaning units were made up of sentences, sentence fragments, multiple sentences, paragraphs, and multiple paragraphs. Furthermore, meaning units usually contained only part of a student's response to an interview question, or only part of their complete articulation of something. So, not all meaning units show the context, the complete answer, or the participant's words which surround the meaning unit. Although at times the entire response was considered a meaning unit. The point, though, was that the meaning units indeed indicated, revealed, or showed evidence of the theme and sub-theme. It would have been overkill and unnecessary to present every single sub-theme. Certain components of themes had more depth and description, and were more compelling, than others. Not every single component was chosen to be presented as a sub-theme. As an example, see Appendix F for a table depicting examples of meaning units contained in the sub-theme the school, under the theme of pride and good feelings.

Level Seven

The seventh, and last level of my analysis, was the presentation of students'
experiences. From the previous six levels of analysis, I was able to gain a full
understanding of students' experiences, and was able to answer my two research
questions. These six levels of analysis provided me with vivid insight into the
experiences of these nine college students, all of whom were highly identified with the
UNLV Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team. I was able to deeply understand their
experiences being a fan and their social experiences that have come about through team
identification. Moustakas' (1994) approach makes use of textural and structural
descriptions of participants' experiences. I chose not to specifically make use of these
concepts. The themes and sub-themes which were identified, I felt, could be given one
presentation which would adequately answer my research questions and show the depths
and nuances of students' experiences. The following is a presentation of students'
experiences:

Unity and Connectivity

The theme of unity and connectivity is where students' meaning units indicate or
reveal unification and connection with others, or to something outside themselves. All
students had meaning units indicating or revealing unity and connectivity. The following
sub-themes are examples of students' meaning units which indicate, reveal, or show unity
and connectivity, and the different kinds of perceptions, perspectives, understandings,
and senses of unity and connectivity. These meaning units also indicate or reveal
students' various connection points, various settings or environments for unification and

connection, various situations revealing unity and connectivity, and unification and connection with various groups of people.

A Common Bond

While discussing the other people he watches the game with, Stephen says, "I would say it's a bond that we all have…we're all emotionally attached to the team." Stephen's words indicate an understanding of unification and connection with others, with the common bond being Runnin' Rebel fandom. In discussing the essence or meaning of being a Runnin' Rebels fans, Jacob reveals a sense of unification and connection with the team and with others:

> I think one of the biggest things is enjoying that feeling of being a part of it all, you know, being that sixth man or that common denominator that helps push the team over the edge, really feeling like you're part of the team…. Really engaging yourself in making an attempt to go all-out, you know, like any diehard fan, you're all-in, all-out type of thing and there's no one-foot-in, one-foot-out. You're all in and, like I said, you go through the ups-and-downs and, at the end of the day, win or lose, you're gonna stick with your team…regardless of the outcome, it's your team and, like I said, taking pride in it and really buying into the idea that you're part of that, part of this exclusive group…the people that share the same interest as you, that type of thing.

In talking about Runnin' Rebel fandom as being important to him as a person, or part of his identity, Cameron talks about connection. He says, "I think becoming part of a group

kind of gives you something…something to do, like when you're not working or you're

not going to school….It gives you a connection to something."

The Team

Obviously, there were indications of connection with the team. Jennifer says, "I

feel almost like a part of them. I kind of feel like I've grown with them. And seeing their

success is almost like having success with us." When asked why being a fan of the

Runnin' Rebels is an important part of who he is, Jacob expresses strong team

identification in saying:

> Man, at this point, you would honestly – I would have to say I'm just
>
> obsessed. It's that thing that I look forward to all year. As soon as the
>
> season's over I start anticipating the start of the next season and that's
>
> probably the hardest part is just going through the summer when there's
>
> really not much out there, outside of the occasional recruiting report that
>
> you might get with regards to the team, you know? You're sitting out for
>
> about five months and just waiting for October to roll around when you
>
> first start practicing, waiting for the Midnight Madness event when you
>
> get your first look at the team and then anticipating the first game in early
>
> November and really enjoying that time from November to mid-March.

All students have very strong identification with the team, and reported that being a fan is

important to them, and that they would always be a fan. This is presented in depth and

detail under the theme pride and good feelings.

The School

A sense of connection to the school was revealed. Jennifer mentions, "I feel more connected to the school because of our sports." When asked if he felt more connected to the school because of the team, Cameron replied, "I think so, yeah. I like being on campus....I like being around this area….I think it just gives you a new perspective; I think just getting into your school."

Other Students

Meaning units indicate social connections and activity with other students through team identification. When asked if he is engaging with other students about the team, the following was Jacob's response, showing social activity and connections with other students:

> Yeah, definitely....We all, at one point or another, worked on campus and I
> think that's pretty much where we first started discussing our interest or
> our passion for the team. We all sit in the student section. We all meet up
> at PT's when they're away and, from time to time, if it's close enough and
> we have the resources available, we'll follow the team all around.

In discussing who she talks about the team with, Jennifer mentions that she talks with her sorority sisters about the team:

> I'll talk to my sorority sisters about it….We'll just talk about, "Oh my
> gosh, that was such a great game." And then shoot out little reminders,
> like, "Hey, get your ticket for the next game. Let's sit with each other.
> Let's try and save seats; try to get there early.

Fan Community as Part of the College Experience

It was expressed that the socialization and community aspect of being a fan, as it pertains to being a student at UNLV, is actually a meaningful part of the college experience. Louis sums it up nicely with these sentiments:

Part of the college experience is experiencing it with your fellow student, whether it is a social event on campus with a fraternity or sorority, whether it is…an academics interest club that you're a part of…or whether it is an athletic event that brings an entire university and local community together. To not experience that during your four years, five years, three years, whatever, to not really put a valued interest to that at some point you're throwing dollars away. You will probably do amazing things with your degree without seeing one UNLV game. How, I don't know? But to me it's a staple of a college experience to bring all those things together to meet more people, to grow with those people and to say I was a part of that.

The Las Vegas Community

In discussing what being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels means to him, Robert notes how the Las Vegas community is united around the team:

Yes, The Strip is one thing. But that's all Vegas is really about, The Strip, the casinos. So, having something other than The Strip, the casinos, our basketball team brings us closer. It's 18,000 people in that arena for one team. I think that's amazing.

Daniel talks about the team in relation to the Las Vegas community, showing his

perception of the team being good for the city, his positive attitude toward the city, and

the sense of community through the team. He says:

> I think that most importantly, having a good team…it's really good for
> Vegas as a whole….There's a lot of people that talk trash about Vegas or
> you know, "I hate Vegas, can't wait to get out of here",
> whatever….There's pros and cons to everywhere; I think there's some
> things in Vegas that maybe aren't…as great as other places.
> However, I appreciate the city for what it is and it's fun to have a good
> sports team and have a community. Kind of give that community sense.
> Yeah, I think it's great for the community though and I like it, it's fun. I
> like watching us play basketball and it has actually made me a sports fan.

When asked if there was anything about the Runnin' Rebels that speaks to something

outside the university, like the city, the state, and the community, Jennifer's response

indicates a perception of the team bringing the community together:

> I think it brings our community a little bit closer together, 'cause I know
> we've never really had too much – we're kind of a busy town, and kind of
> off on our own. I mean, it's The Strip, and then it's the communities. But
> I feel like everyone definitely comes together.

She continues, relating a situation revealing social connectivity through the team:

> And you could see anyone – my dad met this guy the other day who had a
> UNLV sticker on his car, and we were just like, "Oh, did you see the game
> last night?" And we ended up being great friends, and I made him a huge

vinyl sticker of a mustache to put on his smart car. And now he got a

license plate that says "Little Rebs." So, it's kind of nice, because you see

– you can definitely tell who's a Rebel fan….But I definitely think it

builds kind of like a community, because you could even just see someone

in the grocery store with a UNLV shirt, and you could start talking about

the game.

The Live Home Game

The live home game emerged as an environment for unification and connection.

When asked to sum up the essence or meaning of being a Runnin' Rebels fan, Jennifer's

response indicates a sense of connection to something outside herself, in which there are

many components making up the whole. She says:

It is hard to sum it up. But – I mean, kind of their new slogan, "Run as

One." I think I feel like that kind of sums it up in a way, because – like,

how I mentioned, they are more of a team rather than one person making

the shots. I feel like the fans, the team, all of – just everything that makes

up Runnin' Rebel basketball. I feel like it is kind of just one.

She continues, expressing the connection felt during the live home game:

Like, you feel a part of it when you're there. I know – I'm sure the fans

definitely feel part of it when they're there, especially when something

major happens, like they get a slam dunk, and then the entire Thomas &

Mack just gets up and cheers. That's – I would say it would be their new

slogan. Especially, like, the new video they came out with, totally

sentimental. It's definitely feeling, like, together; like a whole.

82

When asked if that whole is just the university, or if it goes outside the university, Jennifer's words show unification and connectivity, with various people coming together, during the live home game:

> I think it's more than just the university. For the students, actually, it is the university, but then the community builds off of it, too. Because I know the student section stands up most of the game, but when something like last night, when Carlos got that big slam dunk, the entire stadium just got up on their feet and started cheering, and that was – that's what makes Runnin' Rebel basketball, is when everyone's on their feet. And you can just hear everyone screaming. That's what makes it more exciting.

In discussing standout experiences or moments he has had as a fan, Louis describes the Thomas & Mack during a win the team had the previous year, showing the unified and connected environment of the live home game, and how it made him feel:

> There's video of like the confetti and the celebration on those students face when we finally beat San Diego at home and closed that game out. I mean I still watch that video online of just how the students reacted to us winning. And even before we won the game just the entire stadium, 18,000 plus during the San Diego State introductions just going…with the Rebels chant, just you could not even hear Dick Calvert whose voice you can hear from Reno. It's just you hear it and you're just "Rebels!" The whole arena just blasting that. I got chills….It was one of the most surreal moments I've had on campus.

When asked what it was about everyone at the game doing the chant that made him feel so good, Louis related the experience to something similar that happened at a recent notable NFL football game. Louis' words indicate a perception of unity and connectivity at the live home game, and the powerful feeling of being in that environment:

> I look back to just this Sunday when Ray Lewis for the final time at M & T Bank Stadium got on the field, did his pre-game dance, got the entire stadium jacked up. Just that energy, that raw emotion that feeds through the players and into the fans…be louder, be stronger, just to pick up the energy in that place at that time. And for that to translate in the players on that field at that time, whether it's on our side, the other side. There's in my mind…there's a few other sensations that can beat it in the world and…it's just so empowering, just such a collective human sort of energy going towards one thing, to me it just blows my mind.

The Student Section

The student section emerged as a powerful environment for unification and connection. Jacob describes the students and the student section before the game begins, revealing a unified and connected setting:

> It's definitely changed especially during the last 2 or 3 years. Man, at one point, you could show up 30 minutes before a game and sit within the first 10 rows if you really wanted to. Nowadays during big games you show up 2 hours before, you sit on the steps of the COX Pavilion and, little by little, the students start to trickle in and everybody outside is discussing the potential outcome, their take on what's gonna happen….Five minutes

84

before those doors are set to open everybody just pushes together and it

really turns into – the scene really becomes a bit hectic, everybody

pushing in an attempt to be the first person through that door and, once

you pass security, you run up those steps, run down the concourse, and

down to the section where you wanna sit down with your friends and

countdown begins….The environment's just unrivaled.

When asked what's different about being in the student section as opposed to watching

the game at a bar or on a sports app, Cameron's response indicates a perception of

unification and connectivity within the student section. He says, "I think the fact that

you're there in that environment and just feeding off of other people's energies and just

seeing your team play live is really cool." In talking about what the student section is

like, Daniel's response reveals a unified and connected experience and setting:

It's way more fun watching the game standing up, because when you get a

good play or make a three pointer everyone just kind of starts bouncing

around and screaming. I like that energy. I like being really into it. If

you're going to come down to watch the game, you might as well be like a

fan, not just sit in a seat.

Robert says he always sits in the student section for home games, and his words show

unity and connectivity within the student section:

Home games is always student section. And I think that's the experience

of being a student. You get to be with your own peers, first of all. And

you get to be yourself….There's only college students, and you can do and

say whatever you want. You can say the taunts that you want. And some

might catch on, some might not….So, taunts are becoming popular, and it's only the student section. It's not other sections. So…that's the place where you hear these strange taunts. And it's gotten media attention. Some people might consider the student section disrespectful. But, in the end, we're just having fun.

Jennifer describes a situation where she learned a traditional chant. The situation reveals unity and connectivity, and social connections made, within the student section environment:

And all of the movements and songs we do. And I know my favorite thing that I learned from someone…I think I was with my boyfriend at a game, and we were sitting next to people we didn't know. And I think it was last year; my freshman year. And you know when a player gets fouled out on the other team, and they do the "Left, right, left, right," and then they sit down. That was the first time I've ever done that, and that was so cool to learn. And they were like, "Yeah, yeah, just wait 'till the next player. We'll make you do it again." And that was exciting for me. And it's really cool because you may not know the person sitting next to you, but then you'll get really close with them over just funny stuff that happens throughout the game.

The Live Away Game

The live away game was also an environment for unity and connectivity. In talking about some standout moments or standout experiences he has had as a fan, Jacob

86

describes a couple of situations at trips to away games. One of the situations shows

unification and connections made with other fans:

> Traveling with a group of friends to Chicago that same year to attend the
>
> first round of the NCAA's. And staying in the same hotel where the
>
> majority of boosters, fans and the team were located and just talking to
>
> other Rebel fans and sharing your passion for the game and more so than
>
> anything hearing the stories from the old-timers, the guys that have been
>
> around the team since the '70s, the '80s and also being able to take in that
>
> experience first-hand from them.

He continues, revealing unity and connectivity with his girlfriend and other fans at an

away game:

> A few years ago traveling down to San Diego State with my girlfriend. It
>
> was her first time attending a UNLV game….and just noticing the amount
>
> of the support that the team received from fans and boosters alike there,
>
> almost filling up the entire visitor's section and although we lost that game
>
> just walking outta there with a sense of pride, you know, seeing the
>
> support of the fans.

Stephen describes a standout meaningful moment at an away game, revealing unification

and connection with other fans:

> They were the better team. They were ranked – they were favored to win
>
> that game. And that was the game that Kendall Wallace hit seven threes
>
> in….It was like six in the second half. And it was just funny because there

was about two rows of Rebel fans. We were all just going crazy and screaming.

Non-Live Environments

The non-live environment was also a place of unity and connectivity. Stephen talks about watching away games at official spots as a means for social connectivity. He says, "When there's an official away game spot, I go to those to associate with people, to meet new people, 'cause it's an easy way to meet new people, 'cause we all have the same, common thing, the Rebels." Daniel says about an away game, "The first away game I went over to *Born and Raised*. That was fun being around other fans….You feel like you're part of a community." Daniel's words reveal unification and connection with other fans in a non-live environment.

Jacob talks about experiences with other people as he is watching the game in a non-live environment, revealing unification and connection with other fans:

> I think some of my best experiences have come at the bar or at local bars around town with random people, people you've never met, you've never talked to but, during the course of the game, especially when the team is doing good…just celebrating or living in that moment with them, you know, high-fiving somebody that you've never met in your life but the fact that you share that common interest brings you together even for that short period of time.

Family

Meaning units revealed unification and connection with family members through team identification. In talking about past experiences with his dad, Matt says:

I can recall going to games in the late 90's and in the early 2000's with my

dad and, as far as I can remember, sitting pretty high up most of the time,

cheap seats right at the very top, nosebleeds, and as a little kid it may or

may not have meant a whole lot to be actually watching the team but it

was the experience of being out at the game with my dad when I was

seven, eight, nine, ten years old, and at that time it was all about spending

time with my dad and realizing he liked to do this and he got enjoyment

out of this. So if I paid attention maybe I would too and eventually I did.

Matt's words show a profound connection made with his father. In discussing how she

became a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, Jennifer talks about family tradition, showing a

connection to her family. She says:

When I was a little girl, my parents would take me to the basketball

games, and that just became kind of a tradition in our family; to go to the

basketball games all the time. So, when I came around to college, my

senior and junior year of high school, they took me a lot more. And they

took me on tours; nearly almost every time they had a tour, my parents

would drag me. But I was in love with UNLV before I even – I mean, just

because of the games when I was a little kid. It just became a part of me,

almost….It kind of just became a family tradition.

Online and Social Media

The world of online and social media was also a place of unity and connectivity.

In discussing others he engages with in following the team, Stephen says:

Rebel-Net is a big thing that I engage with….It was my junior year in high

school when I got a Rebel-Net account. That's basically the message

board…a message board for fans to kinda connect with each other, talk

about the team, talk about meet-ups, away trips.

His words show unification and connection with others within the realm of online and

social media. In talking about others he engages with in following the team, Daniel, who

is mainly an online student, gives responses revealing unification and connection with

others within the realm of online and social media. He says:

I think a lot of my engagement is online, Twitter and blog. I read like

Rebel Blog and listen to the Runnin' Ramble and get on Rebel Net and

listen to the radio in there. I'd say a lot of my like keep up with

everything is online and Twitter, especially from the players. I'm not

really a big Twitter fan, but I'll follow all the Rebel stuff so I can keep up

with what's going on.

In discussing social media further, Daniel says:

I got on the Rebellion's Twitter feed and then pretty much followed

everyone on there that was like a blog or website or something like that or

the players. So during the game it's fun to get on the phone like at a time

out and read what people are saying. It's pretty entertaining, but also like

I said I'll listen to the radio shows and I'll look on Twitter and it'll tell me

once the people have posted new things and looking at what the players

have posted on Twitter. I don't know, it's something fun to do and keeps

you in the loop, I guess.

When asked what it is like following the team through social media, and how it makes him feel, Daniel replied:

> I like the fact that we have…a pretty big fan base and a lot of
> followers….It's like you're part of a community. Everyone wants to
> see…the Rebels do well and everyone enjoys the games. I really like the
> fact that there is a good fan base and I feel like there's other fans around
> me, even if it's on the internet.

Pride and Good Feelings

This theme is where students' meaning units indicate or reveal pride and good feelings associated with their Runnin' Rebel fandom. Students' experiences with team identification often took on qualities where there was something, someone, or a group of others being held in high regard, a sense of pride was experienced, or there were experiences with or related to good feelings. All students had meaning units indicating or revealing pride and good feelings. The following sub-themes are examples of students' meaning units which indicate, reveal, or show pride and good feelings, and the different kinds of perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and senses of pride and good feelings. These meaning units also show various things, people, and groups about which there are pride and good feelings, and various situations revealing or indicating pride and good feelings.

Strength of Identification

All students expressed that being a fan was important to them. They also all expressed that they would always be a fan of the Runnin' Rebels. In expressing the

strength of their identification, there was undeniable pride and good feelings regarding their recognition of the importance, salience, and endurance of their fandom. Note how Louis, in talking about how important fandom is in defining himself as a person, connects his fandom with two other positive qualities about himself: "When people know me, the ones that really know me, they'll say that he is funny, he is smart and he is a huge UNLV fan." Stephen, during a discussion of a standout and meaningful moment, asserts about his fandom: "This is something that I love." Stephen also talks about the importance of his fandom in relation to other aspects of his life:

> I plan my class schedules around games….I almost quit my job because they weren't gonna give me days off….When I was about to put in my two weeks, they let me…said, "Okay. We'll work around your schedule a little bit." I would quit my job for – if they tried to not let me go to NCAA tournaments or anything like that. I feel like that's more important….I just basically plan my life around the Rebels. I want to, one day…when I get married, I want to propose in the Thomas and Mack Center.

This quote from Jacob makes reference to his fandom being part of his identity:

> I am constantly checking blogs, websites for information, anything I can gather. When time permits I attend practices, make it out to every game, when I'm in town, you know, and in all honesty, at this point, I would say it's part of my identity and a lot of people would know me as that diehard fan, that person that's gonna go to the game. Some of my friends that are more casual fans, when there's a big game around the corner, will contact

me and ask me to save them a seat or something along those lines because

they know without asking that I'm gonna be there.

All students also expressed that they would always be a fan of the team. While

discussing his enduring fandom, Robert says, "Always. No matter what. We can be the

worst team. I don't care. I really don't…I will always bleed scarlet and gray." Daniel

notes that his enduring fandom is wrapped up in his good feelings about his school, the

team, and his hometown of Las Vegas:

> I'm from Vegas. I went to school here. I like the team and I like my
>
> school. I like where I'm from and I'm a loyal fan, so win or lose I'm still
>
> a fan. It's not like I'm just here, because we are doing really well this
>
> year. Have a good team. I'll definitely support them forever, always my
>
> number one college basketball team.

Jennifer talks about her future plans with following the team:

> I just feel like I definitely want to be a fan. I could definitely see myself
>
> when I'm older taking my own kids, and carrying on that tradition. And I
>
> know when I graduate, I'll definitely be one of those people that buy the
>
> season tickets, 'cause I don't know what I would do if I wasn't watching
>
> the games. It's something I definitely want to carry on in my life.

All of the above meaning units in the sub-theme strength of identification indicate

students have pride and good feelings regarding their strong team identification,

and all students had such meaning units.

The Team

Meaning units indicate or reveal pride and good feelings regarding the team itself.

Daniel captures this in his response when asked about the difference between the Rebels

team and other teams. He says:

> I feel like our team, I feel like watching us play is more fun, like we're
>
> really in the game. I like our players. I like how we play basketball. I
>
> like our coach. I like Coach Rice. I think now that Rice is our coach I
>
> think we definitely play a faster paced game….You know I think we
>
> always come out as aggressive. We're never just kind of out on the court.
>
> We're always into the game looking for steals, looking for plays. I think
>
> our defense needs a little bit of work, but I don't think it's because they're
>
> not into the game or they're not energized. I think it's just some
>
> experience. We have a lot of new players and I think we're a pretty flashy
>
> team and I like that.

Louis notes the national attention the team gets in saying, "There's maybe 20 or 30

programs around the country that have that same sort of buzz year in year out." Louis'

words indicate pride and good feelings toward the national attention.

The School

In their fandom of Runnin' Rebels basketball, students experience a considerable

amount of school pride. When asked why he is a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, Cameron

responded, "I think I can chalk it up to school pride, I guess. Because I was born and

raised here, so I feel like just that kind of connection with it." Cameron, in another part

of the interview, says:

I think it's showing support for the school you chose to go to, to spend

your college years at….I think it's maybe like this is the place I chose to

go, so I feel like that's important in some way.

When Nick was asked why he was a fan of the team, he said, "I think I'm a fan for the simple fact that I come to this school. I take pride in my university and supporting the Rebels." The following is an example of school pride as expressed by Louis:

And it was part of the reason I came here 'cause I knew I'd find a school

where I could say…I'm proud to say that I graduated from. I'd be proud

to say that is my team. I would probably name my kids after a handful of

players if my future spouse would let me. And I'd probably get branded

with school name somewhere on me at some point….I don't know if I'll

ever actually get branded. I really hope that's not the case. But that's just

how much my four years here have kinda meant to me.

Jacob talks about his pride in the university: "For me more than anything it just represents, I guess you would call it a sense of pride, taking pride in the university."

The City of Las Vegas

Meaning units show pride and good feelings for the city of Las Vegas. In talking about why he is a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, Stephen says, "I have a lot of pride in the city, and I plan on spending the rest of my life here." In talking about what being a fan of the team means to him, Robert notes, "It's become more of a pride thing within my state, within my city. And also the team – of course the team – but I think it's been more about pride about my city." Cameron relates about pride, "Not just school pride, but city pride and I've always wanted to go to UNLV, even as a kid." When asked what he thinks

about Las Vegas, Cameron replied, "I like it. I like that everything is 24/7." In discussing what all fans of the Runnin' Rebels have in common, Louis says, "I think every fan believes in the City of Las Vegas, how it is one of the greatest cities in the world. And for those who live there and love living there, UNLV can be a symbol for that."

Runnin' Rebels Fans

Stephen says, "They have the number one attendance on the west coast for I don't know how many consecutive years…We're passionate about our team. We travel well." Stephen also says about Rebel fans, "Rebel fans that have given me discounts, or have helped me out with something just because, okay it's a Rebel fan. So I feel like we're a loyal, close-knit group of people." Such words indicate pride and good feelings toward Runnin' Rebels fans. In talking about what all fans of the Runnin' Rebels have in common, Robert notes, "They all bleed scarlet and gray…They support their school. They support the team." Robert's words indicate pride and good feelings toward the passion and support shown by other fans.

The Live Home Game

Meaning units indicate or reveal pride and good feelings toward the live home game. Nick says about the live home game, "I mean it's great. I mean anybody who would go to a game here…even if they're not UNLV students, UNLV graduates, they're going to enjoy it no matter what." Nick's words reveal pride and good feelings toward the live home game, as he believes that anyone would enjoy the live home game. Jacob talks about the Runnin' Rebels home games in comparison to the venues of other college teams: "I've been to games at other universities…and the atmosphere just doesn't

compare, you know?" Such a comparison reveals pride and good feelings toward the live home game.

The Student Section

Students also have a sense of pride and good feelings toward the student section. In talking about how the live game of the Runnin' Rebels is different from other universities' live games, Jennifer relates how she feels about the student section, revealing pride and good feelings toward it:

> I know the Rebellion's kind of new, but I think they're really trying to make it a big deal and get more exposure to it. Because I know even when we were waiting yesterday, we were waiting to get inside with our student tickets and they were trying to teach us the new song they came up with. And I thought, "That's really cool. They're really putting a lot of effort into this." And having all those posters and everything really, I think, makes a difference with the fans.

Daniel's words about the student section reveal pride and good feelings:

> I think the Rebellion is really good. I like going there and sitting in the student section and I think it's good for the school and it's fun. I think it's really, really good for the school and it's good for the students.

Jacob says, "It's the way to go....There's nothing like it in my opinion."

History

Meaning units indicate pride and good feelings toward the history of the program, as well. Louis talks the history of the program as it relates to Jerry Tarkanian. His words indicate a sense of pride and good feelings toward the former Runnin' Rebels coach:

97

What Tark meant to everything UNLV was about, about how he stood up

to the NC2A despite everything that went against him, despite the massive

institution that he went up against. I think what Tark did also adds in my

mind to a legacy of being a Rebel, standing up for something. And he

really…embodied it and I think true Runnin' Rebels fans, true UNLV fans

are forever indebted to him for doing something like that, just standing up

to the bigger foe, to being the David in the fight against Goliath. UNLV

has represented that. I mean 22,000 students is not a small academic

institution but compared to the elite academic institutions of the country

we're a David. What Jerry did in standing up to all, that truly was a David

slew the Goliath and it's something that we need to believe in more and

something we continue to represent. I don't ever want us to be a Goliath.

I like being the David. David lived.

Jacob relates an experience he had being exposed to historical memorabilia:

I came to a concert earlier that year that was held at the Thomas & Mack

and just walking through the concourse, looking at all of the

memorabilia…right as you enter through the main entrance seeing the All-

American display that they have right there, looking up, looking through

the banners, the titles, the retired jerseys, you know, just that allure,

buying into that and, at the time, Lon Kruger had just been hired and

knowing his track record at his previous stops, just a sense of optimism. I

wanted the full university experience, you know, not only the academics

but also the ability to cheer for you school, to take pride in it.

Jacob's words reveal an experience of prideful and good feelings toward the program's history. Daniel mentions the pride he gained from watching a documentary on the team:

> When that HBO special about the Rebels came out and that kind of
>
> introduced me to the history and I was like wow, this is really cool. We're
>
> national champions. That kind of gave me a sense of pride, definitely in
>
> the team.

Success and Winning

Meaning units indicate that students feel it is important for the team to be successful and to win, which can be viewed as being related to their pride and high regard in which they hold the team and their fandom. It can also be viewed as related to a desire to maintain or bring about good feelings. In discussing Runnin' Rebel fandom as an aspect of his identity, and how it is important to him, Matt talks about how a win or a loss affects his mood:

> On a game day, on a Saturday afternoon or whatever, the game is at 2:00,
>
> say by 5:00 win or lose, the rest of Saturday is already determined….If it's
>
> a win I'll be, you know, jubilant. But if it's a loss I'll probably be walking
>
> with a little scowl on my face, you know, just, "Oh man!"

Jacob talks about wanting the team to win another national championship. He says, "I hope I live long enough to watch this team win another championship so I can do cartwheels up and down Maryland Parkway." Jacob's words indicate a desire for good feelings through the team's success and winning. It was expressed that the student section was a means for supporting the team and helping them win. Cameron says, "When we're cheering for our team it gets them going. It gets them playing better."

Wanting More Students to Identify With the Team

Within pride and good feelings were meaning units revealing a desire for more students to identify with the team. Nick says, "I just wish more of the students that I associate with were as involved as me or would be…more of a fan….It's kind of disappointing in a way." Nick's quote perhaps indicates that seeing more students becoming bigger fans would bring about good feelings in him, or perhaps a desire for other students to experience the same prideful and good feelings that he has about the team. Louis tries to get other students to identify with the team and go to the games. He mentions as important, "Getting fellow students to come, to bring their friends, bring their fellow students whether they're in the same college or the same classes or what have you, to just have them go." Daniel relates how he felt when he saw the lack of filled seats in the student section following an important regular season loss, revealing a not-so-good feeling from the situation:

> I was bummed….the student section was just empty and that was just depressing. I was like are you kidding me? Oh, this is pathetic. We lose one game and then it was just like I felt like that maybe that it was, I don't know, it was kind of disappointing, because the night before it was packed and I don't know if it was because it was earlier in the afternoon or if was because people were just deflated because we lost or everyone wanted to see us play…[another team]but it was like empty and I was like this is just oh, it wasn't good.

Characteristics of the Ingroup

The theme of characteristics of the ingroup contains meaning units which indicate or reveal students' understanding or recognition of characteristics of the Runnin' Rebels team and fans. This is where students understand who or what the group is. The meaning units indicate or reveal students' understanding or recognition of characteristics about the team and fans which are noticeable, characteristics which make them identifiable and stand out, or characteristics which make them distinguishable from other teams and fans. All students had meaning units indicating or revealing such understanding or recognition. The following sub-themes are examples of students' meaning units which indicate, reveal, or show students' understanding or recognition of the characteristics, and the different kinds of perceptions, perspectives, understandings, or recognition of the characteristics. The meaning units also show various ingroup characteristics understood or recognized by the students, and various situations indicating or revealing an understanding or recognition of ingroup characteristics.

Team as Representing the University

Meaning units indicate an understanding or recognition of the Runnin' Rebels representing UNLV as a university. Jacob's words show evidence of this as he says, "I think most people, especially on the East Coast, are familiar with UNLV because of that basketball team, if nothing else." Robert talks about how the team's status and success attracts students, and how not every school enjoys this distinction:

It puts us on the radar for students to come here, either athletes, or just students in general who want to be a part of a sport that is exciting. Top 25….And there's a lot of schools that aren't on that list.

Robert's words indicate an understanding or recognition of status and success as a meaningful and distinct team characteristic.

Emerging Identity of the University

In regard to UNLV as a university, meaning units reveal a recognition of the school's identity as one that is emerging and still developing. Jennifer notes, "We're a growing school." Daniel relates some differences between UNLV and teams back east, and among them he says, "We're also such a young school." Jennifer and Daniel's words show an understanding of the emerging identity of UNLV. Louis mentions how there are things being done to make UNLV more campus oriented:

> The efforts that we've tried make to really, begin to really create a more
>
> campus centrist feel for not just the athletics but just the little things that
>
> the administration has tried to begin to do to….And it's something that I
>
> as a student completely support.

Separate From Other More High-Profile Programs

Meaning units reveal a recognition of the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team as specifically separate from other programs which are more high-profile. In talking about the meaning or essence of being a Runnin' Rebels fan, Stephen mentions:

> To be a Runnin' Rebels fan, I would say you have to be loyal and
>
> passionate, because they're not in the ACC. They're not in the Big East.
>
> They don't, in essence, nationally attract the attention that…[another
>
> team]or…[another team]does.

Daniel talks about differences between UNLV and other more high-profile programs:

I think that it's a lot easier for…[certain other teams]…I think it's a lot

easier for them to recruit players for different reasons. I think

that…[certain other teams], they're definitely held to more regards,

especially academically. And then I think…[another team]just has this

reputation of being such a great basketball school and they get so many

people to go to the NBA. I think that's a big pull for recruitment.

A Rebellious Program

One characteristic of the ingroup was related to the nickname of the school and

team, The Rebels. In his discussion of what it means to him to be a fan of the Runnin'

Rebels, Stephen mentions the past reputation of the team and the team today:

The rebellious past of how maybe they didn't go quite – they weren't on

great terms with the NCAA. Some of the players were seen as thugs and

that, and it kinda embodies the whole Vegas mentality of just being flashy,

and going above and beyond….All the attention was on you. So I feel like

that's what UNLV has always done, and is continuing to do.

Jennifer makes mention of the "rebellious" team, revealing a recognition of others'

perception of the team, and a sense of pride in this characteristic. She mentions,

"Everyone kind of thinks of us as like, "Oh, the rebellious basketball team"….But I kind

of take pride in that; that we're different." In talking about the essence or most

fundamental meaning of being a fan, Daniel mentions something which reveals he feels

that they're an outsider program and that others are against them:

I always feel like everyone is kind of against us, like we really are the

rebels. I don't know, maybe I'm biased, but I always feel like the calls are

always against us….We're kind of on the outside challenging the norm.

Las Vegas' Team

It was revealed that there was understanding or recognition of the Runnin' Rebels

as a team for Las Vegas, or as Las Vegas' team. The team was considered something

special that the city had. Stephen has insightful things to say about this. He says, "The

Runnin' Rebels are basically the one thing that Las Vegas can call its own….With so

much changes, new hotels, new casinos, everything going up, the Runnin' Rebels are the

one thing that will always be here." He also says:

You can be a Rebel fan, and that's your team. You don't have

the…[certain professional team]. You don't have the…[certain

professional team]. You don't have the…[certain professional team].

You have the Rebels. People really make the most out of that. And I feel

everyone is okay with that. Not having a pro team, at least you got the

Rebels.

Las Vegas Community Support

Students' meaning units also indicated recognition of the Las Vegas community

showing its support for the team. Cameron's words indicate this as he says, "At my work

I see people come in with even all the gear….I see it around town a lot." Nick mentions:

Let's say I go to like a bar or something, I always ask them, "Are you a

Rebels fan?" "Oh, yeah." That's what I noticed. A lot of the community

is very involved with the Rebels, and I like that.

When asked about community members, Jacob tells a story of a local barber shop with ties to the team, showing his understanding and recognition of support from a local business. In telling this story, he says, "I think the thing that ultimately led me to go there on a regular basis or choose that place as my barbershop was their connection with UNLV."

The Live Home Game

The live home is a meaningful and notable event for students, and a special characteristic of the ingroup. Matt says that he has been to NBA games, but makes clear:

> I don't think anything can compare to the same type of atmosphere you
> get at a UNLV basketball game….There's really nothing that can compare
> to a UNLV men's game and I don't know, once you're there long enough
> and you start to be familiar with what to expect it's just a let-down to be
> anywhere else.

Matt's words show recognition of the live home as an important characteristic. Jennifer talks about the celebrities that come to the game: "I know a lot of people get excited when they see Chumlee from Pawn Stars. And Flavor Flav always comes, and everyone freaks out."

The Student Section

The student section is understood and recognized as something with characteristics that make it identifiable, noticeable, and stand apart from other student sections. For example, the giant cutout of a star player, known as Mozilla, was mentioned. The student section's fathead cutouts are noticed as distinctively Las Vegas, as Louis mentions, "Siegfried and Roy and the tigers, Frank, Dino, Sammy….Greg

Anthony with the face mask, Larry with the bling, and Flavor Flav." When talking about the student section, Daniel says:

> I think it puts us up there with all of these other schools that have really good basketball programs like...[a certain team]and…[a certain team]and…[a certain team]. They have some pretty devout fans. So it's nice to see a good fan base.

Team Style of Play

The Runnin' Rebels style of play was recognized as a noticeable and identifiable characteristic. Stephen says:

> On the court…their best teams are ones that just – they just want to beat you by – they want to score 150 points on you, and they want to dunk all over you, and they don't care. It doesn't matter if they're up by 20, they want to be up by 40. They don't let up, essentially. And it's basically that mentality of, "I'm going out to, not only win, but we're gonna do it, and look good while we win.

Jennifer notes a distinction when she says, "You can tell there's a difference between when you watch them play, and a different team play."

Symbols and Traditions

Meaning units also indicate a recognition or understanding of certain symbols and traditions of the Runnin' Rebels. Louis talks about experiencing certain symbolic aspects of the team as he first became a fan:

> I became a fan of the Runnin' Rebels before I even really knew that UNLV existed. It honestly was the colorways on the jerseys from old

106

clips of the 1990 national championship run. And just the name of the

team kinda just drew me to it; Runnin' Rebels just had a nice ring to it.

Jacob talks about UNLV's old mascot as relevant to the development of his fandom:

The first memory I have probably goes back to when I was about five

years old and I received a sweater from a cousin as a gift. At the time I

really wasn't aware of what UNLV was. I just really liked the mascot, the

logo itself.

Robert says that UNLV's fight song contains the essence or meaning of being a Rebels

fan:

I think our fight song sums it up. I think every lyric of it – it might be

generic – but I think that's who we are. I think that's who we are. We

live in a valley from mountains that surround us. That's who we are.

From far across the sea, fans are all over the world. And the common

purpose of being a fan is to win with the Rebels. I think that song is who

we are, as fans….I think that's something that I've always thought about.

But I think I've never, until now, put into perspective. I think that fight

song sumps up perfectly. You're here to win with the Rebels. And you

expect to have a victory today. Yeah. The fight song. The fight song is

what sums up and is what – who were are, to the core. We'll fight to the

end….We're the Rebels. It's just that – just that word. The Rebels. You

rebel against what's normal. And we rebelled from the north. But yeah. I

think that's who we are. The fight song.

History

An understanding and recognition of the history of the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team was revealed. When asked about differences between the Runnin' Rebels and other teams, Louis expresses an important part of UNLV's history when he says, "A national championship." Matt talks about legendary coach Jerry Tarkanian as being someone that all big-time fans know:

You can't claim to be a really extreme Runnin' Rebel fan without knowing a guy – knowing of Jerry Tarkanian. That would be I think impossible. You can't say you're a really huge fan and not know who Coach Tark is.

Ingroup and Outgroups

The theme ingroup and outgroups is where meaning units indicate or reveal intergroup experiences related to the Runnin' Rebels and their rivals. All students had meaning units revealing recognition of rival teams of the Runnin' Rebels. The following sub-themes are examples of students' meaning units which indicate, show, or reveal intergroup experiences, and the different kinds of intergroup perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and senses. These meaning units also indicate or reveal various outgroups.

Identification of Outgroups

All students identified various rival teams of the Runnin' Rebels. Meaning units show various descriptions of outgroups. Descriptions of various rival teams encompass indicators of positivity, appreciation, or respect, and recognition of their talent and

success. For example, in a description of a rival as "a great team", or in expressing things like "you have to give credit, extremely disciplined and well-coached", or that "they have so much potential." Meaning units also indicate opposition to various rivals, such as in saying a rival team is one that "you should never favor", or in saying that they "despise" a rival team, or in saying that "we…obviously, do not like them." There were meaning units indicating positivity, appreciation, or respect for rival fanbases. This is exemplified in descriptions such as "the most loyal fans that I have ever come across, some of the classiest people you could interact with", or "great fans. They're great", or in saying that they are "enjoyable people to be around", or in mentioning that when they saw a fan of a rival team that just had a big win, they "congratulated him." A few students had meaning units with strong expressions in disfavor toward fans of certain rival teams. This was exemplified in descriptions such as "stuck up and arrogant for, in my opinion, no apparent reason", or in beginning to talk about a certain rival fanbase, saying, "How can I say this without using 100 curse words?" or in saying that "they're just annoying to be around."

Intergroup Differences and Separateness

Meaning units indicate perceptions of the Runnin' Rebels as different and separate from outgroups. This is exemplified as one student compares style of play, saying, "UNLV just has a certain swagger about them. Especially in recent years, I think a lot of the players have begun to embrace the history of the program, the run-and-gun style of play." UNLV's national championship was also noted as separating them from their rivals. One student says:

We have a history….We have a legendary coach, Tarkanian….We have

an alumni of UNLV…who now is coaching the basketball team….Other

teams….There's no history. I don't think there's a backbone. Yeah,

you're doing very good within the season. But there's nothing really to

back it up….We have a history, and that's what creates a backbone. Other

teams really don't.

As one student compares a rival fanbase to Runnin' Rebels fans: "They have a pretty

good fan base but not as good as ours."

Intergroup Similarities

While there were meaning units indicating differences and separateness from

outgroups, there were also meaning units indicating perceptions of similarities. As one

student says:

I'll be honest with you, I think what makes the rivalry with…[a certain

rival team]so great is that we're so much alike, whether you're talking

about the city, the university, the student body, it's the fact that we share

so many things or we have so many things in common and, you know,

some fans that are biased won't admit that but if you really look at all

those characteristics between the teams, between the schools, even

between the cities, there's just so much in common there.

As one fan mentions similarities between rival fans and Runnin' Rebel fans:

I think every school's the same. You're there to support a team that you

believe in….We're here to support a team that has historically been good,

ranked, won championships. But other schools, it's different. I believe

110

it's hoping, just like we are – I guess it's the same thing. We're all hoping

for another championship, and that's what they are. Unfortunately other

schools, other rivals, the ones that I mentioned, are hoping for their first

championship. But we're hoping for a second one. And I think we all –

we're all alike. We really are. We all have one common goal, whether

that's win our conference championship and then our national

championship.

There was recognition of reciprocal attitudes or perceptions between the Runnin' Rebels

fanbase and others. One student says, "They do not like us, just as much as we do not

like them." There was recognition of other fans having similar experiences as them as a

Rebels fan. One student says, "If you asked…10 people who are similar to me but

instead go to school at…[other schools in the same conference]…in terms of the

opposing fans you'd probably get a lot of similar answers." There were also meaning

units revealing an understanding that all fanbases have fans who might be perceived

poorly. Such examples include expressions such as, "Of course, like any fanbase, they

have a couple of knuckleheads but, for the most part, they're classy", or in talking about

the differences between fans of the Runnin' Rebels and fans of rival teams, saying, "not

too much difference, so there's some good ones, some bad ones, some jackasses, some

cool people."

Competition With Outgroups

Meaning units indicate a sense of competition with outgroups. This is

exemplified in sentiments such as, "I'd be happy if they lost every game in a season, but

it's not like I want anyone to get hurt, you know", or in saying that they "have a passion

against" a rival team. As one student says, "It feels good that…[a certain rival team] isn't ranked and we are." One says about a rivalry, "It's one of those rivalries where it's more than just a rivalry. I think it's a competition of pride, the north and the south." One student say about the season after the Runnin' Rebels beat a rival team in both their games, "Even if we don't win a championship in conference or in tournament at least we swept…[a certain rival team]." As one student indicates the desire for competition with a certain rival team:

> We haven't played them in almost 20 years....Every year, when the NCAA
>
> brackets come out, we see where…[a certain rival team]is, and see how
>
> we can get to playing them, cause that is what we want to do, is play…[a
>
> certain rival team].

Meaning units indicate an enjoyment of rivalry and competition. As one student says, "That's what makes that game day experience so much fun, when you can go back and point to your all-time record against the team showing how much you dominated them or how close the rivalry's been." Meaning units also showed rivalry with student sections. For example, as one student says when talking about rivals, "Especially…[a certain rival team]when it comes to student sections…they have a student section that's very popular nationwide."

Emotional and Psychological Reactions to the Game

The theme of emotional and psychological reactions to the game is where students' meaning units indicate or reveal emotional and psychological reactions that arise from watching the Runnin' Rebels play games. All students had meaning units

indicating or revealing emotional and psychological reactions to the game. The following sub-themes are examples of students' meaning units which indicate, reveal, or show emotional and psychological reactions to the game, and the different kinds of reactions. These meaning units also indicate or reveal various settings or environments in which emotional and psychological reactions to the game occur, and various situations revealing emotional and psychological reactions to the game.

Fun and Excitement

Meaning units indicate that the live home game is experienced as fun and exciting. Daniel talks about the fun and excitement of the live home game making him become a fan. He says:

Once I went to the games it was pretty exciting and I had a lot of fun, so that's what got me into wanting to follow the team and come to the games and have fun and watch us win.

Jennifer talks about the fun and excitement within the student section as a standout moment or experience:

I was in the Thomas & Mack….They call it the Rebellion….I guess that experience of being there, and the game, within the crowd, and everyone shouting and screaming. And you could tell that everyone had that spirit for UNLV. And it's a lot of fun, because normally I'm not the outgoing person who's screaming at games. But during Runnin' Rebel games, I'm definitely the one screaming.

Cameron says about the student section environment and other students, "I think it's fun, just screaming with them, cheering with them."

The above meaning units help illuminate internal experiences of watching the game, showing fun and excitement at the live home game.

Eustress

Meaning units indicate an experience of eustress while watching games. In talking about what it is like watching the games, Jacob says:

It's like a rollercoaster….There's ups-and-downs and there's games where they blow teams out and you can sit back and, honestly, get distracted in random conversations because that margin of error is so comfortable, there's such a cushion there that you pretty much know that there's no way they're gonna lose. Other times make you feel like your heart's gonna stop, especially during a very close game and when we lose it's the worst feeling ever.

Daniel indicates an experience of eustress in his recollection of game, saying, "That first half gave me a scare."

Catharsis

Stephen says, "Those are some of my best memories, is watching away games with other fans, and just screaming as loud as we can, yelling at the TV, even though nobody can hear us." Stephens words indicate an experience of catharsis while watching the away game with others on TV. Robert talks about watching games in the student section and his words indicate a cathartic experience:

It's fun. It's tiring. You lose your voice….You rarely sit down. You sit down for time outs, sometimes maybe at half time….So by the end of the day your knees hurt, because you're jumping, and you're yelling. So you

114

go out without a voice. But it's well worth it. Well worth it. Even if we lose. It's just the fact that we're there supporting a team that really works their but off, a lot. Sometimes yeah, we lose. But that's part of the game. You're not gonna win every time.

Intense Focus

Meaning units also indicate that the game is watched with intense focus. Matt reveals having intense focus, saying, "If I'm with my brother I'm completely zoomed in on the game, rarely pay any attention to the guys around me in the student section unless there's some funny chant or something like that that comes up." Louis admits intense focus, saying, "I will watch the game like no one else in that arena. Because I'll be analyzing players' emotions. I'll be analyzing like our players' emotions, their players' emotions, our coach's emotions, their coach's emotions." In talking about what he is doing while watching the game and how he is feeling, Cameron says, "Just watching the players and who is not covered on the opposing team and then yelling about it." When asked why he yells about it, Cameron's response indicates intense focus:

> Because they – I don't know. I'm always just, I think I'm a little hyper aware of who is not being covered, because I just, lately they have not been the best defensively as I've said before, but I just find it frustrating that someone goes to cover another person who is already covered and they're not watching their guy.

Escape

Matt says that going to the home games provides him with escape. He says:

Let's put it this way, if there's a home game that's usually what I'm

looking forward to that week. That's the big activity for me. It's a chance

to go out, see those guys do work on the court, it's a chance for me to –

you know – get outside of my work, work, school, work, work, school.

It's just a little bit different activity, something I super, super enjoy and

while I'm there it's like a – you know – it's like a completely different

mindset going in maybe, you know, just totally escape whatever is – if – I

don't know. I don't freak out big on tests or anything, but for instance if I

had a test the next day, the test goes away for the two and a half hours I'm

at the arena.

The Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat

Meaning units also reveal intense joy felt after a win, and heartache experienced

after a loss. Stephen talks about his emotions after a big win, saying, "I don't even know

how to explain that feeling. It seemed like nothing else mattered." Daniel expresses how

a first-round loss in the previous year's NCAA tournament made him feel, admitting it

was one of his worst moments as a fan:

Last year when we lost in the first round of the tournament, I was just, I

was devastated….I was about ready to kick my TV, because we had more

talent and at the end we played so well. If we could have just maybe

switched our strategy a little bit sooner and just stopped taking so many

three point shots, I think we could have won that game and then who

knows what would happen after that.

116

Statement of Essences

In Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, the researcher writes a statement of essences of participants' experiences. While Moustakas' approach to the statement of essences unifies what's known as textural and structural descriptions, I have given a presentation of students' experiences which does not specifically make use of these concepts. Therefore, I have modified Moustakas' approach to derive a statement of essences from the presentation of students' experiences that I have given. I reexamined the presentation of students' experiences. In the presentation, I presented five themes with various sub-themes. I reexamined all five themes and the sub-themes. I also returned to the interview transcripts and coded meaning units, generated more analytic memos, returned to social identity theory, and deeply and thoroughly reflected upon all students' experiences. It was my goal to understand and present the most indispensable elements, to present the essences of all students' experiences with being a highly identified fan of the Runnin' Rebels, through the framework of social identity theory. The following is the statement of essences:

These highly identified student fans of the Runnin' Rebels connect very strongly with the team. Being a fan is part of their identity; it is part of who they are as a person. Being a fan is important to these students, and they will always be fans of the Runnin' Rebels. Their high identification with the team coincides with powerful and meaningful experiences which help define what their fandom is and is about, and who they are as a fan. Within their team identification there are experiences with unification and connectivity. As fans of the Runnin' Rebels, students feel unified and connected to

others, or to something outside themselves. Students feel that they are a part of something or are a part of a group. Students feel like they belong. For these student fans, being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels is aligned with a sense of pride for UNLV as an institution. Team identification is experienced in such a way where pride, esteem, or positive and good feelings are abundant. Through their identification with the Runnin' Rebels students are holding something, someone, or a group of others in high regard, are experiencing a sense of pride, or have experiences with or related to positive and good feelings. The Runnin' Rebels are viewed as being part of the identity of the city of Las Vegas. Students, in belonging to something or to a group, understand that there are distinct characteristics that make-up this group. These are characteristics of the Runnin' Rebels and the fans which help students understand who and what the group is. These characteristics pertain to the Runnin' Rebels and the fans, and are distinct in that they are noticeable, make them identifiable and stand out, or distinguish them from other teams and fans. As students recognize that they belong to a group, the Runnin' Rebels and Runnin' Rebels fans, they also recognize that there are groups to which they do not belong. The groups to which students do not belong are significantly realized through the recognition of rival teams. The recognition of rivals, within the realm of intercollegiate athletics, brings with it intergroup experiences. Students have perceptions, attitudes, or feelings towards the rivals. Runnin' Rebels games themselves can bring on meaningful situational experiences. Emotions and psychological reactions can result from the game experience. The experience of "what it's like" watching or attending games can be a powerful aspect of fandom. Being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels is a meaningful part of these students' lives.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. Nine UNLV students participated in the study, all full-time undergraduates and all highly identified fans of UNLV's Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team. Students were interviewed and social identity theory was used as a framework through which to analyze their experiences.

Seven levels of analysis resulted in a presentation of students' experiences. Five overarching themes emerged: (a) unity and connectivity, (b) pride and good feelings, (c) characteristics of the ingroup, (d) ingroup and outgroups, and (e) emotional and psychological reactions to the game. For each theme, sub-themes were presented which gave examples of meaning units which indicated, revealed, or showed evidence of the theme, and gave examples of various components of the theme. See Table 2 below for the themes and their corresponding sub-themes. After the presentation of students' experiences, a statement of essences was developed. The statement of essences reflects the most indispensable elements of all students' experiences. The next chapter will be a discussion of the results.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	_Theme_	_Theme_	_Theme_	_Theme_
Unity and Connectivity	**Pride and Good Feelings**	**Characteristics of the Ingroup**	**Ingroup and Outgroups**	**Emotional and Psychological Reactions to the Game**
Sub-Themes	_Sub-Themes_	_Sub-Themes_	_Sub-Themes_	_Sub-Themes_
A Common Bond	Strength of Identification	Team as Representing the University	Identification of Outgroups	Fun and Excitement
The Team	The Team	Emerging Identity of the University	Intergroup Differences and Separateness	Eustress
The School	The School	Separate From Other More High-Profile Programs	Intergroup Similarities	Catharsis
Other Students	The City of Las Vegas	A Rebellious Program	Competition with Outgroups	Intense Focus
Fan Community as Part of the College Experience	Runnin' Rebels Fans	Las Vegas' Team		Escape
The Las Vegas Community	The Live Home Game	Las Vegas Community Support		The Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat
The Live Home Game	The Student Section	The Live Home Game		
The Student Section	History	The Student Section		
The Live Away Game	Success and Winning	Team Style of Play		
Non-Live Environments	Wanting More Students to Identify With the Team	Symbols and Traditions		
Family		History		
Online and Social Media				

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study provides an exploration of the depths of student experiences with team identification. This chapter will start out with a brief overview of the study, followed by a discussion of students' experiences and answers to the research questions. Answers to the research questions will be in regard to the emergent themes found in the study, and focused on significant, meaningful, compelling, and interesting aspects, in hopes of informing readers of insightful elements of consideration in understanding students' fandom. This discussion will also include implications for the theoretical lens, limitations of the study, and considerations for future research.

Overview of Study

Qualitative research is lacking on the topic college student sports fans' team identification. This qualitative phenomenological study helps to provide a starting point from which to understand students' experiences with team identification. Incorporating students' social experiences is appropriate and warranted in a study such as this, and helps shed light on the topic of social connections and team identification found in the literature on sports fans (e.g., Chen, 2006; Clopton, 2010; Melnick, 1993; Wann, 2006; Wann, Waddill, Polk, and Weaver, 2011). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification. This study's specific research questions were:

- What are the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team?

- What are students' social experiences that have come about through team identification?

Participants in this study were full-time undergraduate students at UNLV who highly identify with the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team, which is the marquee sports team at UNLV. During the 2012-2013 regular season of NCAA Division I men's basketball, nine students were interviewed regarding their experiences with team identification and their social experiences that have come about. Students' experiences were analyzed through a social identity framework. A presentation of students' experiences was given, with five overarching themes: (a) unity and connectivity, (b) pride and good feelings, (c) characteristics of the ingroup, (d) ingroup and outgroups, and (e) emotional and psychological reactions to the game. Under each theme, sub-themes were presented. A statement of essences was also written.

The Lens of Social Identity Theory

In looking into the research questions, it is clear that there are many lenses through which "experiences" could have possibly been analyzed and presented. The questions of "what are the experiences" and "what are students' social experiences" are open ended and general enough to allow for a very wide, perhaps inexhaustible range of theoretical lenses. In viewing these questions from a social identity lens, and understanding the answers, the concept of ingroup comes into play. Four out of the five themes (unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, characteristics of the ingroup,

and emotional and psychological reactions to the game) are explored from the standpoint of ingroup experiences. The theme of ingroups and outgroups is where outgroups are specifically explored. Also, the notion of one's social identity as the aspects of one's self-concept which come from group or category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986) should be understood. It is important to remember that in answering the questions "what are the experiences" and "what are students' social experiences", this study employs a theoretical lens and is not intended to present an ultimate and definitive description of students' experiences. Furthermore, the nature of the study was exploratory and the themes were emergent.

Answers to the Research Questions

In answering these research questions, the themes, sub-themes, meaning units, and statement of essences capture students' experiences. To answer these questions with complete detail would require an examination of every essence, theme, sub-theme, and meaning unit. However, in focusing on certain significant, meaningful, compelling, and interesting aspects, readers should be able to take away insightful elements of consideration. The following will be a discussion of answers to the research questions; that is, it will be a discussion of students' experiences and social experiences, focusing on certain significant, meaningful, compelling, and interesting aspects. Students' experiences and social experiences will be discussed as they relate to each of the five themes.

Unity and Connectivity

Team Identification and Social Identity

To understand students' experiences, it first needs to be understood that the team is indeed something with which all students connect very strongly. Being a fan of the team is part of their identity, which is not surprising and almost a given, considering the literature on the nature of being highly identified with a sports team (e.g., Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). All students certainly have identity salience, which is discussed in the sports fan literature (e.g., Laverie & Arnett, 2010), given that this identity is important to them as a person and routinely exhibited. The qualities of enduring and situational involvement, also discussed in the literature (e.g., Laverie & Arnett, 2010) are present with all students, as they express that they will always be a fan of the team, and experience meaningful situations such as watching the game, etc. Their combined experiences or overall experience contribute to their identity as a fan and define what their fandom is and is about. Fandom as being part of students' identity can be viewed as a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986).

Various Connections

Students are unified and connected to others, or to something outside themselves. The most obvious connection, applicable to all students, is strong team identification; however, this study reveals a diverse array of connections. Haridakis' (2010) discussion of the various social identities in sports, in which he cites and incorporates a variety of research, is reflected in students' various expressions of unity and connectivity. Indeed, while the ingroup in this study is viewed as the team and other fans, it can be hard to separate the team and other fans from other connections. Students have a strong

124

connection to the team, but there are also other connections, such as connections to the school, the city, the live game and the student section, etc. In regard to other fans, there are also various connections, such as other students, community members, family members, and online identities. All the connection points are related to team identification, although this study reinforces the discussion by Haridakis (2010) and the notion that team identification cannot be simply understood as one dimensional, as it comes with a variety of connections. The theme of unity and connectivity also illuminates situations of unity and connectivity, and the environments in which they take place. These situations and environments, too, are varied, such as experiences in the school, community, non-live environments, student section, live home game, and in the online and social media world.

Students' strong identification with the team is looked at through the lens of social identity theory, and thus students' team identification is seen as part of their social identity. This study finds that students have strong ingroup connections. Students' unity and connectivity is seen as a kind of connectivity to an ingroup and to ingroup members. Bringing the conversation back to the various social identities in sports (Haridakis, 2010), students' various connection points have the potential to be studied independently as social identities.

Unification and Connection with Others

Students' unity and connectivity also have direct relevance to other people, involving unification and connections to other ingroup members. These ingroup members may be other fans in a general sense. Also, the ingroup members may encompass other qualities, further connection points, and belong to additional ingroups.

125

This shows that ingroup unity and connectivity is not of the same nature across the board. For example, in some instances, the relationships with ingroup members can take on additional, more personal and intimate qualities. Take for example students' who talk about social experiences with family members. While these family members are fans of the team, the relationships students have with them go beyond the bond of team identification, presumably of more personal, intimate, and nuanced quality. Such a concept is fleshed out in Hogg's (1992) discussion of the differences between personal and social attraction, where both can exist at the same time. Hogg states that social attraction stems from self-categorization and is depersonalized, and that this depersonalized social attraction "is attraction to the group as that group is embodied by specific group members" (p. 100); positive feelings are toward the prototype embodied by individuals. Personal attraction, according to Hogg (1992), is an attraction to the individual themselves, and takes into account the whole individual and one's interpersonal and historic relationships with them. Hogg asserts that depersonalized social attraction is a group phenomenon, and personal attraction an interpersonal phenomenon. Also, he states that social attraction and personal attraction toward others can often exist at the same time (Hogg, 1992). Students' relationships with family members, through the prism of social and personal attraction, would be an example of both personal and social attraction existing at the same time. Various nuances of this sort may be seen in the various connection points related to students' team identification (e.g., other family members, community members, students, etc.).

Situations of Unity and Connectivity

The theme of unity and connectivity also shows situations of unity and connectivity. Students' talk about various situational social experiences pertaining to unity and connectivity, such as experiences with other community members, experiences with family members, live home game experiences with others in the student section, experiences with other people online, etc. Take for example the quotes in which students talk about the environment of the student section. These quotes take on a quality of social unification and connection to others within the student section. A good example of this is when Daniel talks about what the student section is like, saying, "It's way more fun watching the game standing up, because when you get a good play or make a three pointer everyone just kind of starts bouncing around and screaming." Louis' words about the feeling of a live home game, too, illuminate this social unification and connectivity which is powerfully present in the live game environment:

> Just that energy, that raw emotion that feeds through the players and into
> the fans…be louder, be stronger, just to pick up the energy in that place at
> that time. And for that to translate in the players on that field at that time,
> whether it's on our side, the other side. There's in my mind…there's a
> few other sensations that can beat it in the world and…it's just so
> empowering, just such a collective human sort of energy going towards
> one thing, to me it just blows my mind.

Additionally, Melnick's (1993) exploration of social interaction at live sporting events is particularly reinforced through the powerful social unity and connectivity at live games and in the student section. It is clear that the social component of attending the game is a

meaningful and significant part of students' experiences as a fan. In students' various expressions of the importance of the live game, social qualities and meaningful social interaction experiences emerged. Further, social connections stand out in the sports fan literature, and social connections found in this study follow-up with social connections found and explored in previous studies, such as in connections with family members (e.g., Gibson, Wilming, & Holdnak, 2002; Tonetti, 2010), connections at watch parties or non-live environments (e.g., Aden et al, 2009), and campus social connections (e.g., Clopton, 2008; Clopton & Finch, 2010).

Summary: Unity and Connectivity Experiences

Students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, take on qualities of unity and connectivity. Students connect very strongly to the team, where such a connection is part of their identity. Identity salience, and enduring and situational involvement are present in students' fandom. Students are unified and connected to others, or to something outside themselves, and a variety of connections are shown to be present. There are also various social connections with other people, or unification and connection with ingroup members. There are various social situations of connectivity, and various environments in which social connectivity takes place.

Pride and Good Feelings

Prideful and Good Team Identification

It is clearly evident that students feel proud of their team identification; being a fan is experienced as a prideful and good thing. As students talk about their fandom, they

talk about it with a sense of pride. It is clear that they are proud to be fans. What needs

to be understood here is that for these students, being a fan is experienced in a good way.

They love being fans. For them, being a fan is not trivial or unimportant, but a powerful,

meaningful, and valuable part of their lives which is experienced with pride and good

feelings. The literature explores a variety of potential benefits for the existence of

college sports, such as its contribution to the identity, traditions, and status of an

institution (Toma, 2003), a belief that athletics can increase campus community (Kelly &

Dixon, 2011), the question of whether or not athletics increases social capital (Clopton,

2011; Clopton & Finch, 2010), etc. The profound pride and good feelings experienced

by the students in this study provides evidence of the benefits of college sports for the

students at the school, as told from their point of view with depth.

As the term "pride" has the inherent connotation of a sense of belonging by the

one feeling prideful, students' prideful feelings can be viewed as being associated with a

sense of belonging to the ingroup. Students' ingroup identification, or team

identification, is the focus of this study. Students' prideful and good feelings are aligned

with their belonging to the ingroup, and may show evidence of strong identification; in a

sense these feelings can be viewed as enhancing or strengthening this identification.

Plentiful and Wide-Reaching Pride and Good Feelings

Pride and good feelings are plentiful and wide-reaching. For example, there were

expressions of prideful and good feelings toward the live game and the student section,

the history of the program, the team, the school, the city, etc. This study shows various

prideful and good feelings toward things or groups, and toward other people. Students

experience school pride related to their team identification, which reinforces Wann and

Robinson's (2002) finding that students with high team identification see the university in a more positive light. Also, people involved with points of prideful and good feelings factor into the experiences. Take for example pride and good feelings toward the history of the program. Part of the program's history involves a well-known coach, for whom prideful and good feelings were expressed.

In understanding students' pride and good feelings, it is important for readers to grasp what aspects of social identity theory were not explored. According to social identity theory (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986), individuals are motivated by a desire for a positive self-concept, and derive a positive social identity through favorable comparisons to relevant outgroups. While meaning units indicating pride and good feelings sometimes contained references to or comparisons with something else, students' pride and good feelings were not explored, nor analyzed, in the context of intergroup comparisons, ingroup favoritism, or positive distinctiveness. Students' prideful and good feelings were only explored as the feelings themselves. The most important thing to understand is that team identification is experienced in a prideful and good way.

Situations of Pride and Good Feelings

Situations can be experiences of pride and good feelings. Take, for example, the various situations of the live home game and the student section. Such situations can influence prideful and good feelings toward the live game and the student section, and prideful and good feelings can be felt during the situations themselves. Situations of the live home game and the student section are social situations, where other people factor into the experience. Hogg (1992) asserts that individuals have positive feelings toward

those who belong to their ingroup, and that such feelings are accentuated in contexts where an intense sense of belonging is experienced. As an example of his assertion, Hogg mentions the increased positivity sports fans feel toward other fans of the same team when watching a game (Hogg, 1992). Unity and connectivity, as a social experience, has been discussed for these kinds of situations, and situations of unification and connection can be experienced with profoundly good feelings.

Summary: Prideful and Good Experiences

Students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, are of a prideful and good nature. Team identification is experienced as prideful and good, and they are proud to be fans. Team identification is a powerful, meaningful, and valuable part of students' lives, and experienced with pride and good feelings. Pride and good feelings are plentiful and wide-reaching, and apply toward things or groups, and others. Students have pride in their university, or school pride. There are also situations in which pride and good feelings are experienced. Others may very well factor into the situation of pride and good feelings, such as those experienced at the live home game and within the student section.

Characteristics of the Ingroup

Understanding the Ingroup

In looking at students' understanding of the team, it is apparent that there is an understanding of characteristics which are meaningful to their fandom and the ingroup. It was reported that the team represents the university. Characteristics of the university

were discussed. Students' expression of the meaningful characteristics of the ingroup

also delve into the relationship between the team and the city, community support for the

team, the team's environment in which they play and in which students' watch and

support them, the school's history, and the school itself. Ingroup characteristics can

involve people, such as in the Runnin' Rebels receiving community support, being a team

for the city, the characteristics of the live game and student section, etc. The

characteristics which the students understand and appreciate help them understand who

and what the group is. While in the statement of essences it is said that these

characteristics pertain to the Runnin' Rebels and the fans, it is clear that these

characteristics also reinforce the multidimensional nature of students' team identification;

they are not confined to strict and isolated discussions of the team and fans but go beyond

to include the school itself, the city, community support, and the game environment like

the characteristics of the student section.

No matter which characteristics were talked about by which students, the

important thing to understand is that there are indeed meaningful characteristics of the

ingroup which are significant to their fandom, and these characteristics help students

understand who and what the ingroup is. While meaning units indicating students'

recognition and understanding of ingroup characteristics sometimes referred to something

distinct, distinguishable, or stand out about the ingroup, in this study students'

recognition or understanding of these characteristics were not explored, nor analyzed, in

regard to the concepts of positive distinctiveness, intergroup comparison, ingroup

favoritism, or positive social identity in social identity theory. The important thing to

take away from students' recognition or understanding of ingroup characteristics is that this is where they understand who or what the group is.

Traditions, Symbols, History, and Status

Various components harken back to the literature. As there is a tight-knit connection between sports and universities, a phenomenon unique to the United States (Chu, 1982), we can conceptualize traditions, symbols, and history of marquee college sports teams as university traditions, symbols, and history. Toma's (2003) discussion of college sports as contributing to an institution's identity, tradition, and status is relevant to the findings of this study. Meaning units indicate that identity, traditions, and symbols are wrapped-up in students' understanding of the ingroup. Students talked about the team's history, the national championship team, the mascot, the logo, the fight song, team colors, team reputation, style of play, etc.

Situations and Ingroup Characteristics

Situations, too, reveal students' understanding or recognition of ingroup characteristics. Take for example the understanding of Las Vegas community support, and Jacob's story of finding a barbershop that supports the team. Jacob has had social experiences through finding and patronizing the barbershop, and in coming to understand the relationships between the barbershop, the team, and the community. Situations of watching or attending the game can influence students' understanding of ingroup characteristics. For example, discussions of the student section as a meaningful ingroup characteristic have undoubtedly been influenced by situations of watching the live home game from within the student section.

Summary: Experiencing Understanding and Recognition of Ingroup Characteristics

Students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, are rich with an understanding or recognition of ingroup characteristics, which help them understand who or what the group is. There are various ingroup characteristics reported, and characteristics go beyond strict and isolated discussions of the team and fans (e.g., characteristics of the school itself, game environment, etc.), which reinforces the multidimensional nature of students' team identification. Characteristics can involve things and groups, and other people. Identity, traditions, and symbols can be a part of students' understanding of the ingroup. Situations can also reveal students' understanding or recognition of ingroup characteristics, and such situations may be social experiences.

Ingroups and Outgroups

Recognition of Outgroups

Rivalries are a meaningful part of students' experiences. From a social identity standpoint, the recognition of rivals brings with it a recognition of groups to which students do not belong. One of the tenets of social identity theory is that individuals seek a positive social identity through intergroup comparisons and perceptions of positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Social identity theory also claims that ingroup members have a tendency toward ingroup favoritism (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and such has been demonstrated in the sports fan literature (e.g., Wann & Dolan, 1994). This study did not explore the concepts of positive distinctiveness,

134

ingroup favoritism, or outgroup derogation in a robust way, and threats to social identity were not explored, so discussions and conclusions about such concepts are limited.

Meaning units show various descriptions of outgroups. Phua (2010) cites Wann and Branscombe (1993) and Wann and Dolan (1994) in stating that highly identified sports fans more likely exhibit ingroup favoritism. It is difficult to draw conclusions about ingroup favoritism, positive distinctiveness, or outgroup derogation from this study. There were meaning units indicating appreciation or respect for rival teams, and recognition of their talent and success, and also appreciation and respect for rival fanbases. There were meaning units indicating an opposition to rival teams, (e.g., in saying a rival team is one that "you should never favor"), which might be seen as the "us versus them" nature discussed in the literature on social identity theory and sports fans (e.g., Phua, 2010), and which is certainly present in all big-time sports fans and part of the nature of sports itself. A few students had meaning units with strong expressions in disfavor toward fans of certain rival teams, which is certainly natural and a common occurrence in sports fandom and amongst big-time sports fans. This might be seen as outgroup derogation to achieve a positive social identity (e.g., as Branscombe & Wann, 1994 cite the position of Tajfel, 1982). Such outgroup derogation should not be taken as bad or malicious. Studies using social identity theory as a framework have shown the occurrence of outgroup derogation to protect social identity (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Meaning units which indicate perceptions of the Runnin' Rebels as different and separate from outgroups might be seen from the social identity theory perspective as a perception of positive distinctiveness in some way. There were also meaning units indicating perceptions of intergroup similarities, which do not fall in-line with social

135

identity theory's concepts of positive distinctiveness. These meaning units reveal a non-bias and students' insightful recognition of the nature of team identification and sporting competition. Competition, of course, is an inherent aspect of sports, and meaning units indicating a sense of competition with outgroups can also be seen through a social identity theory framework. Beating or having a better record than a rival team can be seen as an ingroup status being elevated above an outgroup, resulting in an elevated positive social identity. Tajfel and Turner (1979) talk about intergroup comparison and social competition, giving an example of two football teams.

In looking at the results of this study in regard to intergroup experiences, some very intriguing findings emerged. As one would expect to find in a study on highly identified sports fans, there were meaning units indicating opposition to various rival teams and a sense of competition with rivals. Only a few students had meaning units with strong expressions in disfavor toward fans of certain rival teams. It is not surprising to find strong expressions in disfavor of rival fanbases in a study on highly identified sports fans. However, it is a very interesting and powerful finding that descriptions of various rival teams showed positivity, appreciation, or respect, and recognition of their success and talent. It is also a very interesting and powerful finding that there was positivity, appreciation, or respect toward rival fanbases. Meaning units which indicate perceptions of intergroup similarities were also certainly interesting and powerful. The real power in this study's finding are in the positive, appreciative, or respectful perceptions of outgroups which were found, and in the perceptions of similarities between the ingroup and outgroup.

136

Importance of Rivalries

One should understand from this study that the existence and nature of rivalries is an important part of students' experiences as a fan. Issues dealing with rivalries in sports have been previously studied in college student populations (e.g.,Luellen & Wann, 2010; Wann & Dolan, 1994). Luellen and Wann (2010) studied the impact of the awareness of a rival team on students' level of team identification. While this study did not examine any increase or decrease in team identification level, one thing that can be gleaned from the results is that rivalries are an important part of students' fandom. With rivalries come perceptions, attitudes, or feelings toward rivals. On a more general note, students' perceptions, attitudes, and feelings toward rivals, whether they be toward rival teams or fanbases, speak to the nature of sporting competition and the meaningful existence of rivalries which appears to be an ever-present part of intercollegiate athletic competition. Students' perceptions, attitudes, and feelings toward rivals encompass many components. There are perceptions, attitudes, and feelings regarding the rival teams or fanbases (e.g., recognition of their talent and success, perceptions of fanbase, etc.). Also, these perceptions, attitudes, and feelings pertain to the competition of the game or sport itself, such as in wanting to beat the rivals in sporting competition, wanting the rival teams to lose, etc.

Rival athletic competition has been around since the dawn of college sports, when Harvard and Yale went head-to-head in crew racing (Covell & Barr, 2010; Lewis, 1970). Rivalries in intercollegiate athletics are promoted by institutions, cities, and states themselves. At Runnin' Rebels home games, videos or skits promoting intercollegiate athletic rivalry are shown on the jumbotron at the Thomas & Mack Center. The

University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and The University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) have an in-state athletic rival competition known as the Governor's Cup or Governor's Series (UNLV Rebels, 2014; Vogel, 2013). The results of this study reinforce the importance of rivalries, and the positive value in promoting them.

Summary: Intergroup Experiences

Students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, take on an intergroup nature in the realm of rivalries. Rivalries are a meaningful part of students' experiences. Through the lens of social identity, students' recognition of rivals is accompanied by a recognition of groups to which they do not belong. There are intergroup experiences, and students have perceptions, attitudes, or feelings toward their rivals. Such perceptions, attitudes, or feelings encompass many components, and may pertain to rival teams or fanbases, and to the competition of the game or sport itself.

Emotional and Psychological Reactions to the Game

Powerful and Meaningful Situations

For these student fans, watching the games can bring on powerful and meaningful situations. The results of this study illuminate the situations of watching or attending games, particularly in regard to the psychological or emotional reactions to the game. Situational involvement is discussed in the sports fan literature (e.g., Laverie & Arnett, 2010). The situational experiences of watching or attending games seems to be related to the concept of situational involvement, as students are certainly involved at a high level as they have powerful and meaningful psychological and emotional reactions during the

situation of watching or attending the game. This study helps show students' emotional

and psychological experiences that arise from the situation of watching or attending

games. These experiences can be a powerful aspect of students' fandom.

Of course, emotional and psychological reactions to the game have been widely

written about in the sports fan literature (e.g., Beyer & Hannah, 2000; G.J. Smith, 1988).

The fact that students have meaningful situations with watching or attending games is not

surprising, neither is the fact that such experiences can be a powerful aspect of students'

team identification. The results of this study are interesting in that students describe with

depth and detail these internal experiences. Students have various emotional and

psychological experiences, such as fun and excitement, eustress, catharsis, and escape.

This study, then, allows readers to better understand students' reactions to the game from

an emotional or psychological standpoint.

The Environment

The environment in which students watch or attend games must be highlighted.

The game watching environment is explored in the sports fan literature (e.g., Aden et al,

2009; Melnick, 1993; Toma, 2003). Meaning units indicated that the environment could

be a meaningful component of the emotional and psychological experiences of game

watching. For example, fun and excitement was mentioned within the context of the live

home game and the student section. Watching the away games at local spots was also

discussed. Given the environment as a potentially meaningful part of the game watching

experience, and taking into account the ingroup experiences of other themes – unity and

connectivity, pride and good feelings, and ingroup characteristics, it can be assumed that

the emotions and psychology of game watching experiences can potentially be influenced

139

by the environment, and that the environment can be influenced by students' emotions and psychological experiences.

Strong Ingroup Identification

Highly identified sports fans have been discussed as having powerful reactions to the game (e.g., Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Thus, students' powerful emotional and psychological reactions are not surprising, and related to strong ingroup identification. Such reactions themselves can be seen as reactions to the ingroup. A good example of this is the feelings associated with the team winning or losing, where meaning units reveal intense joy felt after a win and heartache after a loss. As Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) state, "The team's successes become the fan's successes and the team's failures become the fan's failures" (p.4).

As already discussed, the environment of watching or attending the game can involve strong ingroup unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, and be an ingroup characteristic. Students' psychological and emotional reactions to the game, then, while specifically pertaining to the game itself, can also involve ingroup experiences. For example, the excitement of the game might be influenced by other ingroup members in the crowd, and other ingroup members in the crowd might be influenced by the excitement of the game. Another example is catharsis, which may also be reinforced by surrounding ingroup members. This is not to say that powerful psychological and emotional reactions cannot occur without the presence of ingroup members.

Summary: Game Experiences

Students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, are

140

profound and powerful as they pertain to emotional and psychological reactions to the game. Watching the games can be powerful and meaningful situational experiences, particularly in regard to students' emotional or psychological reactions. The game watching experience is a very powerful part of students' team identification, and there are various emotional and psychological reactions that can occur. Students' profound and powerful emotional and psychological reactions to the game are related to their strong ingroup identification, and can be seen as reactions to the ingroup. The environment in which students watch the game can be a significant component of their emotional and psychological experiences. The presence of ingroup members has the potential to be influential in students' emotional and psychological reactions to the game, and emotional and psychological reactions to the game has the potential to influence other ingroup members.

The Fluidity of the Themes and Sub-Themes

In understanding students' experiences with being a highly identified college student sports fan, and their social experiences that have come about through team identification, it is important and interesting to point out that the nature of the themes, sub-themes, and meaning units within are not necessarily mutually exclusive; that is, students' meaning units, while presented within a particular theme and sub-theme, may contain elements of other themes or sub-themes. Take, for example, Jennifer's meaning unit expressing connectivity during a live home game:

Like, you feel a part of it when you're there. I know – I'm sure the fans

definitely feel part of it when they're there, especially when something

major happens, like they get a slam dunk, and then the entire Thomas &

Mack just gets up and cheers. That's – I would say it would be their new

slogan. Especially, like, the new video they came out with, totally

sentimental. It's definitely feeling, like, together; like a whole.

This particular meaning unit is presented under the theme unity and connectivity, and

Jennifer's words clearly indicate unity and connectivity. Feeling "a part of it" or

"together" or "like a whole" are expressions of meaningful experiences of unity and

connectivity during a live home. The actions of others, too, represent unity and

connectivity, as in her description of how "the entire Thomas & Mack just gets up and

cheers." However, her words also indicate emotional and psychological reactions to the

game, like fun and excitement. It can also be assumed that such situations are

experienced with prideful and good feelings. Furthermore, the expression of this live

game experience might indicate a recognition or understanding of the live home game

environment as a meaningful characteristic of Runnin' Rebel basketball. The new video,

as "sentimental" might indicate a recognition or understanding of the program's history.

The fluidity of the themes and sub-themes speaks to a human quality of the phenomenon

of students' team identification, where experiences intertwine to make the phenomenon

not a set of segmented and compartmentalized experiences, but rather a fluid and holistic

experience overall.

Limitations

This study took place over the course of one season. While this study was

intended to assess students' experiences overall, and not limited to their experiences with

one season, it is safe to assume that the context of the season was influential. The nature of the interview and the reported experiences might likely have differed if done during a different season. A team's wins and losses, fan expectations, coaching, players, rivalries, etc., can all be assumed to be influential when interviewing sports fans about their experiences with team identification. The context of the institution and the city must also be taken into account, and the results should be understood within these contexts.

Concepts of positive self-concept, positive social identity, positive distinctiveness, intergroup comparison, and ingroup favoritism were not explored in regard to the themes dealing with ingroups (i.e., unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, characteristics of the ingroup, and emotional and psychological reactions to the game). For the theme of ingroup and outgroups, concepts of positive distinctiveness, ingroup favoritism, and outgroup derogation were not explored in a robust way, and threats to social identity were not explored, so discussions and conclusions about such concepts are limited.

Implications for Theory

This study analyzed and presented students' experiences through the lens of social identity theory. As Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) note, social identity theory is concerned with groups, intergroup relationships, and one's social self. The term "social identity" is used to refer to the apsects of one's self-concept which come from group or category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986). In regard to groups, social identity theory posits ingroups, or groups to which one feels they belong, and outgroups, or groups to which one feels they do not belong. In regard to intergroup

143

relationships, for social identity theory, Turner and Oakes (1986) said "The basic hypothesis of which is that people are motivated to seek positive social identity by comparing in-groups favourably with out-groups" (p. 240).

The concepts of ingroup and social self were the most useful and significant for this study. Students' team identification and various components of unity and connectivity were meaningful revelations, as was their social identity. The notion that team identification is laden with various connections (e.g., Haridakis, 2010) is particularly reinforced. The concept of social identity as the aspects of one's self-concept which come from group or category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Oakes, 1986) was helpful in understanding students' experiences, and was in-line with students' identity as a fan. Four out of the five themes (unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, characteristics of the ingroup, and emotional and psychological reactions to the game) were explored from the angle of the ingroup. In this study, the goal was to discover students' experiences in an exploratory, broad, and general sense. Thus, as students talked about unification and connection, pride and good feelings, ingroup characteristics, and reactions to the game, it was important to let these experiences be discussed in the natural flow of the interview. Explorations and discussions of intragroup experiences, rather than intergroup experiences, were the directions to take and went with the interview current. Students' discussions of these themes were meaningful and relevant as ingroup experiences on their own. Furthermore, the themes explored from the ingroup angle provide a contribution to the sports fan literature which utilizes social identity theory, which often employs intergroup comparison, ingroup favoritism, outgroup derogation, positive social identity, and positive distinctiveness. This study

sheds much more light on the intragroup or ingroup experiences, as opposed to intergroup experiences.

The fact that the intragroup or ingroup experiences were meaningful to students and appropriate to be studied on their own has interesting implications for social identity theory. The early developments of social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) dealt with intergroup relationships. Later developments and discussions looked at the concept of self-categorization (e.g., Hogg, 1992). As Hogg (1992) states about self-categorization theory as opposed to social identity theory, "It elaborates in much greater detail the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behavior, and focuses more on intragroup processes than on macrosocial intergroup relations" (p. 93). Perhaps the significant intragroup or ingroup experiences explored in this study, as they were meaningful to students and appropriate to be studied on their own, support the idea that social identification can be meaningful as an ingroup or intragroup experience, and can be explored as such.

In looking into rivalries, it was appropriate to employ intergroup concepts. However, the psychology and motivational aspects of the intergroup concepts in social identity theory were not appropriate, and could not be fleshed out, in a study of this nature. Concepts such as positive distinctiveness, ingroup favoritism, or outgroup derogation were not explored in a robust way, and threats to social identity were not explored, so discussions and conclusions about such concepts are limited.

An interesting note on intercollegiate athletic competition is how the competition, or game itself, can be seen as an ingroup versus outgroup scenario, and the strengthening of ingroup identification. Social identity theory is often used to explore intergroup

relationships. From a social identity theory perspective, any sports spectator watching a game and rooting for one team over the other is, in effect, rooting for an ingroup over an outgroup. From this perspective, the ingroup-outgroup competition can also be seen as solidifying the meaning of the ingroup, or even strengthening the spectator's ingroup identification.

Future Research

The Identity of the City

An interesting element of students' experiences with team identification is the way in which the team is viewed as being part of the identity of the city of Las Vegas. Students had at least some sense of the team being part of the city. Students discussed the team-city relationship in various ways. For example, there were expressions of the city being united around the team, the team bringing the community closer together, the team as being the city's team, etc. Related to the discussion of various connections involved with team identification (Haridakis, 2010), students viewing the team as part of the city's identity shows further the complex nature of team identification. The team, then, is not viewed in exclusion or isolation to the city. Future phenomenological studies on students' experiences with team identification, and their social experiences, might specifically factor in the team's community or city, to explore with more detail community or city experiences.

School Pride

Aligned with students' team identification is school pride, which emerged as relevant and meaningful. It may not be surprising that highly identified college student

sports fans would have pride in their university. This finding may hold particular significance for UNLV, a commuter institution and a relatively young institution. The emerging identity of UNLV is even seen as a sub-theme of the theme characteristics of the ingroup. Students' pride for UNLV reinforces the quantitative findings of Wann and Robinson (2002), and shows that students' identification with their university's marquee sports team comes with prideful feelings toward the school itself. This study did not explore whether team identification causes school pride or school pride causes team identification. The direction of the relationship is not of concern for this study. It is, however, important to understand the existence of school pride alongside team identification, and to understand students' experiences of school pride. Because school pride emerged as prevalent and meaningful, future phenomenological studies on students' experiences with team identification, and their social experiences, might specifically look into the relationship between team identification and university identification, or even perceptions of the university. A phenomenological study on college student sports fans with specific emphasis on the university is warranted.

The Live Home Game and the Student Section

The live home game and the student section emerged as environments and connection points which were represented in all themes. In the theme unity and connectivity, the student section and the live home game are environments of unity and connectivity. The live home game and student section are also points of connection and identification, meaning that in addition to being environments of unity and connectivity, they also serve as connections that coexist with team identification, as discussed earlier. In the theme pride and good feelings, meaning units reveal a sense of pride and good

feelings toward the student section and live home game. Also, situations that take place

within the live home game and student section bring about good feelings. In the theme

characteristics of the ingroup, the live home game and student section are shown as

having characteristics or attributes that make them identifiable or stand-out. In the theme

ingroup and outgroups, rivalry between student sections is shown. Finally, in emotional

and psychological reactions to the game, the live home game and student section serve as

environments of the live game experience in which profound emotional and

psychological reactions occur. Future phenomenological studies on college student

sports fans' experiences should include the live home game and student section as

relevant components to students' team identification. The student section, in particular,

has been left out of the scholarly literature on college student sports fans. In addition to

being studied through a phenomenological method alongside students' team

identification, the student section has the potential to be studied on its own, as a

qualitative case study.

Summary

In the literature on college student sports fans, qualitative research is severely

lacking. Students' experiences with team identification are not explored with depth;

students' voices are not being heard. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to

discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's

marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about

through team identification. This study attempted to discover students' experiences with

thick description and meaningful depth, to illuminate the phenomenon of college student

sports fandom at a deeper level than is currently available in the scholarly literature. A phenomenological analysis was conducted, using social identity theory as a framework, and five overarching themes emerged: (a) unity and connectivity, (b) pride and good feelings, (c) characteristics of the ingroup, (d) ingroup and outgroups, and (e) emotional and psychological reactions to the game. Sub-themes also emerged. This study revealed that students connect very strongly to the team, and being a fan is part of their identity. Students are unified and connected to others, or to something outside themselves, and there are various connections. Within their team identification there are experiences with unification and connectivity. Students experience team identification in a prideful and good way, and prideful and good feelings are plentiful and wide-reaching. Students also understand and recognize significant characteristics, which help them understand who or what their ingroup is. Students also recognize groups to which they do not belong. Such groups are significantly realized through the recognition of rival teams. Rivalries are a meaningful part of students' team identification, and with rivalries come intergroup experiences. Finally, students have powerful situational experiences watching or attending games, where emotional and psychological reactions occur. Watching or attending games can be a powerful aspect of fandom. There is a notably human quality to students' strong team identification, where it is not made up of segmented and compartmentalized experiences, but of intertwining experiences to make the experience of the phenomenon fluid and holistic. Being a fan of the team is a meaningful part of these students' lives.

Essences, Reflections, and Post-Epoche

This study can be seen as a sort of an evolution of my understanding of students' experiences, and as an evolution of my understanding of myself. In presenting the results of this study, I have presented themes and sub-themes, as well as a statement of essences. However, I am still analyzing all aspects of this study, even as I write this discussion portion. Perhaps this is the personal nature of myself as a researcher. My continual analysis may be something quite natural in qualitative research altogether. I nonetheless believe that the fact that I myself am a highly identified college student fan of the Runnin' Rebels has contributed to what seems to be a never-ending process of analysis, refinement, and re-working. I understood the sports fan literature, social identity theory, and the phenomenological method when I began this study. Throughout the course of this study my understanding of these things grew deeper. In all of this was my attempt to understand students' experiences, in the best way that I could, through the given methodology and theoretical framework. I understand that it is impossible for me to really "know" or "understand" students' experiences, or anyone's experiences for that matter, except my own. Only those who are experiencing or have experienced the experience, if you will, can really know or understand what it is like. This study was my attempt to more deeply understand student fandom; I did the best I could. It is difficult for me to continue discussing students' experiences at this point because, at some point, I do need to finish the study and if I discuss it more, I will keep finding more analysis, refinement, and re-working that could potentially be done.

The statement of essences that I wrote was my attempt to present what I felt were the most indispensable elements, or essences of all students' experiences. The statement

of essences presents a very broad picture, where the themes and sub-themes are detailed and nuanced. In trying to reflect on the overall picture of students' experiences, I look at the statement of essences, the themes and sub-themes, and try to reflect on how my understanding of students' experiences has evolved from the start of this study to its conclusion. The starting point of being a highly identified sports fan; that is, the strong connection to the team, is profound on its own. Four out of the five themes – unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, characteristics of the ingroup, and emotional and psychological reactions to the game – are in regard to ingroup experiences, and explored as such. The theoretical notions of ingroup and identification tie the majority of this story together. I cannot discount the importance of rivalries, or the outgroups, and I have stated their importance and value, although even the rivalry stuff comes with ingroup and identification components. This story is rich with fascinating and compelling elements, all leading back to team identification. The various themes and sub-themes show experiences of team identification, and it probably bears repeating the multidimensional nature of team identification, and the various connection points, as team identification can encompass so many other identifications and connections, like with the school, the city, the live home game and the student section, other fans, family members, etc. To me, this entire picture of highly identified college student sports fandom points to something meaningful and important, and I will say it is a good thing.

I wrote an epoche where I described my experiences as a highly identified fan of the Runnin' Rebels, and my social experiences that have come about through team identification. Now that the study has been completed, I feel compelled to write about my experiences again. My reasons for writing the following have nothing to do with

attempting to set-aside my own experiences, as was the case with the epoche. Instead, I

believe that since I myself was a meaningful part of this study, since I myself am such a

big-time fan of the Runnin' Rebels, it feels only natural, and may indeed be quite

insightful to the reader, to see where I am now. I call the following a "post-epoche":

> I collected data for this study during the 2012-2013 season. As I currently
>
> write this post-epoche, the 2013-2014 season has been completed. Over
>
> the last two seasons I have attended more Runnin' Rebels home games, by
>
> far, than I have in my entire life. Since I have completed this study, I can
>
> very easily say that my identification with the Runnin' Rebels has only
>
> grown stronger…much stronger. I was a highly identified fan before, but I
>
> am even more so now. I love that this is the case, and I thank the students
>
> in this study for it! The students in this study gave me so much to think
>
> about, and had so many intriguing, thoughtful, intelligent, and insightful
>
> things to say. I simply cannot write this post-epoche without spending
>
> time thanking them. Their participation in this study has been so valuable,
>
> not only to the ongoing scholarly research on sports fandom, but to me as
>
> a fan…to me as a person. Being a Runnin' Rebels fan is part of my
>
> identity; it is part of who I am as a person. I am so very proud to be a fan
>
> of the Runnin' Rebels, and the students in this study have made me feel
>
> proud to be experiencing the same thing as them. I am honored to be
>
> amongst them.

Today, I follow the team more closely, wear more UNLV or Runnin' Rebels apparel, follow recruiting more closely, attend many more games, and the aspects of my fandom pertaining to rivalries have become more robust and passionate. My friends, I believe, now look upon me as the one who knows all about the Runnin' Rebels. When they have questions about something going on, or they want to discuss something, they quickly turn to me. The students in this study have provided me with plenty to think about in regard to my own experiences. In reflecting on the five overarching themes – unity and connectivity, pride and good feelings, characteristics of the ingroup, ingroup and outgroups, and emotional and psychological reactions to the game – I can proudly say that I, too, experience them.

I believe that my social connections in regard to Runnin' Rebels fandom have grown stronger, particularly with my friends and family. It seems that a lot of the time Runnin' Rebels basketball is the topic of conversation between myself and others. The Runnin' Rebels are a means for social bonding between myself and my friends and family, and I want that to continue. I want to watch the game with others and talk about the team with others. I want to feel the intense unification and connection at the live game. I want to be right there in the crowd supporting my team. Speaking of the live game, I think there is nothing better than watching the game in the student section, The Rebellion.

Completing this study has made me think more deeply about sports as a human phenomenon. I love sports in general. I believe that being a highly identified sports fan can be good and healthy, and I think the students in this study embody that goodness and health. I believe that the students in this study have shown the fascinating and profound depths of healthy sports fandom. I think there is something about sports fandom or high team identification, as exemplified in this study, which makes it good and healthy to promote. Go Rebels!

Appendix A

Basic Demographic Information and Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)

Basic Demographic Information

First Name: _____   Age: _____

Enrollment Status at UNLV: (circle one)   Part-Time   Full-Time

                                            (circle one)   Undergraduate   Graduate

Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)

Instructions: Please list your favorite sport team: UNLV Runnin' Rebels men's basketball

Now answer each of the following questions with this team in mind by circling
the most accurate number (i.e., response) to each item.

1. How important is it to you that the team listed above wins?

Not Important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Very Important

2. How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the team listed above?

Not at All a Fan   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Very Much a Fan

3. How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the team listed above?

Not at All a Fan   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Very Much a Fan

4. During the season, how closely do you follow the team listed above via
ANY of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, or televised
news or a newspaper?

Never   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Almost Every Day

5. How important is being a fan of the team listed above to you?

Not Important   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Very Important

6. How much do you dislike the greatest rivals of the team listed above?

Do Not Dislike   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Dislike Very Much

7. How often do you display the above team's name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?

Never   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Always

Reprinted and used with permission from:
Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of
       identification with the team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 24,* 1-17.

Appendix B

Sample Script for Classroom Announcement

Joe Ervin and Dr. Vicki J. Rosser, in the department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education, are looking for undergraduate students who are big-time fans of the Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team to participate in a research study. Participation will take ten minutes to one hour of your time, and will include answering a questionnaire and possibly an interview. If you are interested in participating in the research study, please see the flyer posted on the bulletin board for Joe Ervin's contact information. I also have a flyer that I can give you. Thank you.

Flyer

WANTED: STUDENT RUNNIN' REBELS FANS!

Are you a UNLV undergraduate student and a big-time fan of Runnin'

Rebels men's basketball? For my research study, I'm looking to discover

your experiences as a devoted fan of the Runnin' Rebels. Participation will

take ten minutes to one hour of your time.

Please contact Joe Ervin at 702-278-4003

or

ervinj@unlv.nevada.edu

Share your experiences being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels!!!

If you have any further questions, please contact: Dr. Vicki J. Rosser, vicki.rosser@unlv.edu

Appendix D

Consent Form

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS
INFORMED CONSENT

Department of <u>Educational Psychology and Higher Education</u>

TITLE OF STUDY: <u>Runnin' With the Rebels: A Phenomenological Analysis of the</u>
<u>Experiences of Highly Identified College Student Sports Fans</u>
INVESTIGATOR(S): <u>Joe Ervin, M.Ed.; Dr. Vicki J. Rosser</u>
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: <u>Joe Ervin, M.Ed.:702-278-4003; Dr. Vicki J. Rosser: 702-</u>
<u>895-1432</u>

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the experiences of college students who highly identify with their university's marquee sports team, and to discover students' social experiences that have come about through team identification.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you have identified yourself as being a UNLV student who is a fan of UNLV's Runnin' Rebels men's basketball team.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Complete a form containing basic demographic information and a measurement of your level of identification with the Runnin' Rebels. Depending upon your score on the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS), which will measure your level of identification with the Runnin' Rebels, you may or may not be asked to participate in an interview.

Benefits of Participation
There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. If you are asked to participate in an interview, I hope to discover your experiences identifying with the Runnin' Rebels and your social experiences that have come about through this Runnin' Rebels identification. You will get a chance to share your experiences as a fan, which may be a fun and interesting process.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. *The potential risks are extremely minimal, and may include discomfort in answering interview questions. You may feel uncomfortable answering questions that might be perceived as personal or sensitive information.*

Cost /Compensation
There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take anywhere from ten minutes to one hour of your time.

Page 1 of 2

Deemed exempt by the ORI-HS and/or the UNLV IRB. Protocol 1210-4272M
Exempt Date: 10-18-12

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Joe Ervin at **702-278-4003**, or **ervinj@unlv.nevada.edu.,** or Vicki J. Rosser at **702-895-1432**. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed and deleted.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Participant Name (Please Print)

I agree to be audio or video taped for the purpose of this research study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Participant Name (Please Print)

Deemed exempt by the ORI-HS and/or the UNLV IRB. Protocol 1210-4272M
Exempt Date: 10-18-12

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Experiences Identifying with the Runnin' Rebels

- How did you become a fan of the Runnin' Rebels?

- Why are you a fan of the Runnin' Rebels?

- What does being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels mean to you?

- What are some standout experiences or moments you've had following the Runnin' Rebels?

- Where do you watch the games?

- What is it like watching the games?

- Describe the environment in which you watch the games.

- How else do you follow the team besides watching the games?

- Will you always be a fan of the Runnin' Rebels? Why or why not?

- Is being a fan of the Runnin' Rebels an important part of who you are? Why or why not?

- What might lessen your interest in the team?

- What might increase your interest in the team?

- If you could sum up the essence or meaning of being a Runnin' Rebels fan, what would it be?

- Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experiences identifying with the Runnin' Rebels?

Social Experiences

- As you became a fan of the Runnin' Rebels, who else was involved?

- Who inspired you to become a fan of the Runnin' Rebels?

- As you follow the team now, what other people do you engage with?

- Describe your experiences with other people as you follow the team.

- Are you engaging with other students about the Runnin' Rebels?

- Are you engaging with friends, family members, community members, etc. about the Runnin' Rebels?

- When you watch the game, what are the experiences you have with other people in that environment?

- Who are the rivals of the Runnin' Rebels? Describe them and their fans.

- What are the differences between the Runnin' Rebels and the rival teams?

- What do fans of the Runnin' Rebels have in common?

- What do fans of the rival teams have in common?

Appendix F

Examples of Meaning Units

Theme: **Pride and Good Feelings** *Sub-theme:* **The School**
Oh, kind of proud. I mean going back to school pride. Like I said school pride. Okay. That's what I was going off of. The fact that they're representing the school kind of makes me feel good. Like even if they didn't go here or if they're, like I said, when they're older I think it's – I like the fact that they are wearing something and like promoting a school I go to or a team I cheer for or something like that. I have pride for my school. I have pride for my team. *Interviewer:* How does it make you feel when you see this campus community rally around the team?   *Interviewee:* It makes me really proud. The Thomas & Mack, which is one of the best arenas in college sports. I always, well of course liked them, because of the school I go to. I'm a fan of the Runnin' Rebels because of the school that I go to and it's from my hometown. Going here has been a good experience. Like I said, I'm from here, so it's affordable. I enjoyed going here. I have friends that go here. So, I mean I like the school, so I guess that just kind of easily transfers over to supporting the team. It's my school, so I take pride in my school. It's my school, so you want to see them win. It means the way to support my school, a way to support my town. I think I can chalk it up to school pride, I guess. Because I was born and raised here, so I feel like just that kind of connection with it. I think it's showing support for the school you chose to go to, to spend your college years at....I think it's maybe like this is the place I chose to go, so I feel like that's important in some way. I continue to want to finish up and graduate and say I was a Rebel.

And it was part of the reason I came here 'cause I knew I'd find a school where I could say…I'm proud to say that I graduated from. I'd be proud to say that is my team. I would probably name my kids after a handful of players if my future spouse would let me. And I'd probably get branded with school name somewhere on me at some point….I don't know if I'll ever actually get branded. I really hope that's not the case. But that's just how much my four years here have kinda meant to me.

I would say that I connect a lot with basketball as a whole but specifically UNLV because it's, you know, my school kind of thing.

If it comes down to basketball and I can combine that with UNLV that seems like a perfect win-win.

I will always rock UNLV.

It's just having pride in my school, and I just love the team.

I think I'm a fan for the simple fact that I come to this school. I take pride in my university and supporting the Rebels.

I take pride in the school.

I wanted the full university experience, you know, not only the academics but also the ability to cheer for your school, to take pride in it.

For me more than anything it just represents, I guess you would call it a sense of pride, taking pride in the university.

References

Aden, R.C., Borchers, T.A., Grim Buxbaum, A., Cronn-Mills, K., Davis, S., Dollar, N,…Amato Ruggerio, A. (2009). Communities of cornhuskers: The generation of place through sports fans' rituals. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 10*, 26-37.

Ahmed, A. (2012, February 29). Las Vegas-centric heady distractions unify UNLV student section. *Las Vegas Sun*. Retrieved from http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2012/feb/29/vegas-centric-heady-distractions-unify-student-sec/

Babbie, E. (2010). *The practice of social research* (12th ed.). California: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Bern, T. (2012, November 12). Blog: Bennett debuts with 22 points in UNLV's 92-54 win against NAU. *Las Vegas Sun.* Retrieved from http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2012/nov/12/live-blog-unlvs-highly-anticipated-2012-13-season-/

Beyer, J.M., & Hannah, D.R. (2000). The cultural significance of athletics in U.S. higher education. *Journal of Sport Management, 14*, 105-132.

Bichelman, J.E. (2012, February 23). Student section is second to none. *The Rebel Yell*. Retrieved from http://www.unlvrebelyell.com/2012/02/23/student-section-is-second-to-none/

Boyle, B.A., & Magnusson, P. (2007). Social identity and brand equity formation: A comparative study on collegiate sports fans. *Journal of Sport Management, 21*, 497-520.

Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L. (1992). Physiological arousal and reactions to outgroup members that implicate an important social identity. *Aggressive Behavior, 18*, 85-93.

Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L. (1994). Collective self-esteem consequences of outgroup derogation when a valued social identity is on trial. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 24*, 641-657.

Braubacher, J., & Rudy, W. (1958). *Higher education in transition, an American history: 1636-1956*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

Carp, S. (2005). *Runnin': UNLV rebels, a basketball legacy*. Las Vegas, NV: Stephens Press.

Chen, P.J. (2006). The attributes, consequences, and values associated with event sport tourists' behavior. A means-end chain approach. *Event Management, 10*, 1-22.

Chu, D. (1982). The american conception of higher education and the formal incorporation of intercollegiate sport. *Quest, 34*, 53-71.

Clopton, A.W. (2008). College sports on campus: Uncovering the link between fan identification and sense of community. *International Journal of Sport Management, 9*(4), 343-362.

Clopton, A.W. (2011). Social capital and college sport: In search of the bridging potential of intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 4*(2), 174-189.

Clopton, A.W., & Finch, B.L. (2010). Are college students 'bowling alone?' Examining the contribution of team identification to the social capital of college students. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 33*(4), 377-402.

Covell, D., & Barr, C.A. (2010). *Managing intercollegiate athletics*. Scottsdale, Arizona: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Dietz-Uhler, B., & Murrel, A. (1999). Examining fan reactions to game outcomes: A longitudinal study of social identity. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*, 15-27.

Gibson, H., Wilming, C, & Holdnak, A. (2002).' We're gators…not just gator fans': Serious leisure and university of florida football. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34*(4), 397-425.

Guttmann, A. (1986). *Sports spectators*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Haridakis, P.M. (2010). Rival sports fans and intergroup communication. In H. Giles, S. Reid, & J. Harwood (Eds.), *The dynamics of intergroup communication* (pp. 249-262). New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Dynamics_of_Intergroup_Communication.html?id=FOJErZQA8d0C

Hirt, E.R., Zillmann, D., Erickson, G.A., & Kennedy, C. (1992). Costs and benefits of allegiance: Changes in fans' self-ascribed competencies after team victory versus defeat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 724-738.

Hogg, M.A. (1992). *The social psychology of group cohesiveness: From attraction to social identity*. New York, New York: New York University Press.

Hogg, M.A., & Abrams, D. (1988). *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. London: Routledge. Available from http://site.ebrary.com/lib/unlv/docDetail.action?docID=10017652

Hogg, M.A., Terry, D.J., & White, K.M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 58*(4), 255-269.

Kane, M.J. (1988). Media coverage of the female athlete before, during, and after title IX: Sports illustrated revisited. *Journal of Sport Management, 2*(2), 87-99.

Katsilometes, J. (2011, February 19). HBO's 'runnin' rebels of UNLV effectively captures a moment in time. *Las Vegas Sun.* Retrieved from http://www.lasvegassun.com/blogs/kats-report/2011/feb/19/hbos-runnin-rebels-unlv-effectively-captures-momen/

Kelly, D., & Dixon, M.A. (2011). Becoming a "real university:" The strategic benefits of adding football for NCAA division I institutions. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 4*(2), 283-303.

Laverie, D.A., & Arnett, D.B. (2000). Factors affecting fan attendance: The influence of identity salience and satisfaction. *Journal of Leisure Research, 32*(2), 225-246.

Lewis, G. (1970). The beginning of organized collegiate sport. *American Quarterly, 22*(2), 222-229.

Lipsky, R. (1983). Towards a political theory of american sports symbolism. In J.C. Harris and R.J. Park (Eds.), *Play, games, and sports in cultural contexts* (pp. 79-92). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Luellen, T.B., & Wann, D.L. (2010). Rival salience and sport team identification. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 19*, 97-106.

Madrigal, R. (1995). Cognitive and affective determinants of fan satisfaction with sporting event attendance. *Journal of Leisure Research, 27*, 205-227.

Madrigal, R. (2000). The influence of social alliances with sports teams on intentions to purchase corporate sponsors' products. *Journal of Advertising, 29*(4), 13-25.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mauss, J. (2012). NCAA basketball rankings: UNLV ranked 19, SDSU 20 in preseason coaches poll. Retrieved from http://www.mwcconnection.com/2012/10/17/3518108/ncaa-basketball-rankings-usa-today-preseason-poll

Melnick, M.J. (1993). Searching for sociability in the stands: A theory of sports spectating. *Journal of Sport Management, 7*, 44-60.

Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Moehring, E.P. (2007). *The university of nevada, las vegas: A history.* Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2010). *About the NCAA: History*. Retrieved from http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/ncaa/about+the+ncaa/who+we+are/about+the+ncaa+history

Phua, J.J. (2010). Sports fans and media use: Influence on sports fan identification and collective self-esteem. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 3*(2), 190-206.

Real, M.R., & Mechikoff, R.A. (1992). Deep fan: Mythic identification, technology, and advertising in spectator sports. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 9*, 323-339.

Richins, M.L., & Bloch, P.H. (1991). Post-purchase product satisfaction: Incorporating the effects of involvement and time. *Journal of Business Research, 23*, 145-158.

Rinehart, R. (1998). Inside of the outside: Pecking orders within alternative sport at ESPN's 1995 "The eXtreme Games." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 22*, 398-415.

Rudolph, F. (1962). *The American college and university*: *A history*. New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Sheldon, H.D. (1901). *Student life and customs*. New York, New York: D. Appleton and Company.

Shelton, H., Loucks, N., & Fallica, C. (2008). ESPN men's basketball: Counting down the most prestigious programs since 1984-1985. Retrieved from http://sports.espn.go.com/ncb/news/story?id=3501739

Sloan, L.R. (1989). The motives of sports fans. In J.D. Goldstein (Ed.), *Sports, games, and play: Social and psychosocial viewpoints* (2nd ed., pp. 175-240). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Smith, E.R., & Henry, S. (1996). An in-group becomes part of the self: Response time evidence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22*, 635-642.

Smith, G.J. (1988). The noble sports fan. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 12*, 54-65.

Smith, R.A. (1988). *Sports and freedom: The rise of big-time college athletics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stein, M. (1983). Cult and sport: The case of Big Red. In J.C. Harris & R.J. Park (Eds.), *Play, games, and sports in cultural contexts* (pp. 299-309). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Stewart, D., & Mickunas, A. (1990). *Exploring phenomenology: A guide to the field and its literature* (2nd ed.). Athens: Ohio University Press.

Sun Staff (2011, October 1). UNLV launches 'let's run' marketing campaign as 2011-12 season approaches. *Las Vegas Sun*. Retrieved from http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2011/oct/01/unlv-launches-lets-run-marketing-campaign-2011-12-/

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33*, 1-39.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey: Brooks-Cole.

Toma, J.D. (2003). *Football U: Spectator sports in the life of the american university*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Tonetti, L.J. (2010). The experience of being a sports fan: A qualitative, phenomenological analysis of the causes and impact of sports team identification. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest dissertations and theses. (3455592).

Turner, J.C., & Oakes, P.J. (1986). The significance of the social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism, interactionism and social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 25*(3), 237-252.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2013). *UNLV History: Our Beginnings*. Retrieved from http://www.unlv.edu/history/beginnings

UNLV Rebels (2012). *Traditions: Jerry tarkanian court.* Retrieved from
       http://www.unlvrebels.com/trads/unlv-trads-tark-court.html

UNLV Rebels (2014). *Governor's Series*. Retrieved from
       http://www.unlvrebels.com/governors-series/

Vogel, E. (2013, June 7). UNLV tops UNR to win first 'Governor's Cup.' *Las Vegas
       Review Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.reviewjournal.com/sports/unlv-
       rebels/unlv-tops-unr-win-first-governors-cup

Wann, D.L. (1997). *Sport psychology.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wann, D.L. (2006). Understanding the positive social psychological benefits of sport
       team identification: The team identification – social psychological health model.
       Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 10, 272-296.

Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of
       identification with the team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 24,* 1-17.

Wann, D.L., & Branscombe, N.R. (1995). Influence of identification with a sports team
       on objective knowledge and subjective beliefs. *International Journal of Sport
       Psychology, 26*, 551-567.

Wann, D.L., & Dolan, T.J. (1994). Spectators' evaluations of rival and fellow fans.
       Psychological Record, 44(3), 351-358.

Wann, D.L, & Dolan, T.J. (1994). Attributions of highly identified sports spectators.
       Journal of Social Psychology, 134(6), 783-792.

Wann, D.L., Dolan, T.J., McGeorge, K.K., & Allison, J.A. (1994). Relationships between
       spectator identification and spectators' perceptions of influence, spectators'
       emotions, and competition outcome. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 16*,
       347-364.

Wann, D.L., Metcalf, L.A., Adcock, M.L., Choi, C.C., Dallas, M.B., & Slaton, E. (1997).
       Language of sport fans: Sportugese revisited. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 85*,
       1107-1110.

Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). *Sport fans: The
       psychology and social impact of spectators.* New York: Routledge.

Wann, D.L., & Robinson, III, T.N. (2002). The relationship between sport team
       identification and integration into and perceptions of a university. *International
       Sports Journal, 6*, 36-44.

Wann, D.L., Royalty, J., & Roberts, A. (1999). *The self-presentation of sport fans: Investigating the importance of team identification and self-esteem.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

Wann, D.L., Royalty, J., & Roberts, A. (2000). The self-presentation of sport fans: Investigating the importance of team identification and self-esteem. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 23*(2), 198-201.

Wann, D.L., & Schrader, M.P. (1997). Team identification and the enjoyment of watching a sporting event. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 84*, 954.

Wann, D.L., & Schrader, M.P. (2000). Controllability and stability in the self-serving attributions of sports spectators. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 140*(2), 160-168.

Wann, D.L., Schrader, M.P., & Adamsom, D.R. (1998). The cognitive and somatic anxiety of sport spectators. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 21*, 322-337.

Wann, D.L., Waddill, P.J., Polk, J., & Weaver, S. (2011). The team identification-social psychological health model: Sport fans gaining connections to others via sport team identification. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 15*, 75-89.

<div align="center">

Vita

Joseph S. Ervin
4516 Nolan Lane
Las Vegas, NV 89107
ervinj@unlv.nevada.edu

</div>

Education

Ph.D.   Higher Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas. To be conferred, May 2014
Research Emphases: Intercollegiate Athletics; College Student Sports Fans; Higher
Education Disability Policy and Practice

M.Ed.   Special Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas. 2008
History, philosophy, policy, and pedagogy of special education

B.A.   Philosophy
University of Nevada, Las Vegas. 2004
Neon Stoa – Philosophy Club; Phi Sigma Tau – National Honor Society in Philosophy

Professional Experience

- **Instructor of First Year Seminar Courses**   2013 – Present
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education
    o   Instruction of essential skills, concepts, and
        components related to college success. Instruction,
        assignments, and assessments related to UNLV's
        University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes;
        promotion of student interaction with peers and
        faculty; promotion of university connection,
        appreciation, and engagement; instruction of college-
        level academic skills, and of other important
        components of the collegiate experience

- **Graduate/Research Assistant**   2012 – Present
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education – EPHE
    o   Collaboration with faculty on research; survey
        development; data collection; editorial assistant for
        peer reviewed journal – Sport Marketing Quarterly;
        graphic design; development of presentations;
        conference attendance and departmental
        representation; general assistant duties

- **Gondolier; Supervisor**   2000 – Present
  Best Agency – Venetian Hotel/Casino
    - o   Operation of gondolas; entertainment; singing of Italian
          songs; supervisor duties

- **Training Developer** (Employment and Volunteer Work)   2009 – 2011
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Disability Resource Center
    - o   Development of training on disability services; office
          work; data entry; test proctoring and scribe service;
          special events

- **Substitute Teacher**   2005 – 2008
  Clark County School District
    - o   Inclusive and self-contained special education

Volunteer Experience

- **English as a Second Language Instructor**   2004 – 2005
  Las Vegas/Clark County Library District
    - o   Individual and small group tutoring; whole class
          instruction

University Involvement and Membership

- **Phi Sigma Tau – UNLV: Co-founder and Treasurer**   2002 – 2004
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Department of Philosophy
    - o   UNLV's chapter of the National Honor Society in
          Philosophy; a founding member; treasurer;
          organization of presentations and workshops;
          presenter

- **Neon Stoa – UNLV: Member**   2002 – 2004
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Department of Philosophy
    - o   UNLV's philosophy club; preparation and organization
          of meetings; preparation and discussion of academic
          readings and topics

Presentations and Research

- **Doctoral Dissertation: Runnin' With the Rebels: A**   2014
  Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Highly
  Identified College Student Sports Fans
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education – EPHE

- **Course Research and Presentation for EPY 729: This is our Home and Through Sports We're Together: A Tale of Two Rebels**
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education – EPHE

  2012

- **Course Research and Presentation for EDH 737: The Ethics of Extra Time as an Accommodation in Higher Education: A Case Review and Theoretical Perspectives**
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education – EPHE

  2010

- **Course Research and Presentation for EDH 705: Is This Reasonable? Mandates of Postsecondary Disability Policy and a Look at Reasonable Accommodations**
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas – College of Education – EPHE

  2010