

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
NASCAR FAN IDENTITY

A Dissertation
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2010

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ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

Temple University, January, 2010

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The purpose of this research study was to provide a rich and thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR (National Association of Stock Car Racing) fan. Specifically, the researcher examined how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan. The participants consisted of 12 (10 male & 2 female) self-identified NASCAR fans in attendance at one of three races (Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, FL; Samsung/RadioShack 500 at Texas Motor Speedway in Justin, TX; or the Richmond 400 at the Richmond International Raceway (RIR) in Richmond, VA) during the 2006 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series season. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed, yielding four major

themes. The themes that emerged included: (a) entry into NASCAR, (b) being A NASCAR Fan, (c) "*ya'll NASCAR fans*": fan camaraderie, and (d) win on Sunday...sell on Monday.

In general, the participants expressed that their entrance into the sport of NASCAR had been facilitated by close friends and family. Whether they grew up going to the racetrack with their family or were persuaded by a close friend to attend a race, the experience of attending a NASCAR Sprint Cup event propelled them on a lifelong journey following the sport. All of the participants articulated their affinity for fellow NASCAR fans and spending time with other fans at the track, serving as a way of enhancing their sport fan identity. The NASCAR fans in this study also expressed that the amount of sponsorship within the sport was something that they viewed as having an impact on their behavior as a consumer, with many having noted they try to exclusively purchase NASCAR sponsor brands. Recommendations for researchers based on the interviews are also discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To thank the numerous people who have helped me throughout this process would be an impossible task, given both the page limitations and time constraints. This endeavor would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Dr. Emily Roper, you are more than a mentor... you are a friend. I cannot thank all of my friends and colleagues at Temple University for their patience and understanding throughout this process. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Sachs, Dr. Joseph DuCette, Dr. Jeffrey Gehris, and Dr. Michael Sitler for believing in me as both a student and researcher. I would be remiss if I did not thank Jeanette Butkiewicz and Sean Conran, the dynamic duo that always kept me "in check" at Temple and made each day better than the one before!

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family; Mom, Dad, Maura (a.k.a. *Jimmy*), Bunzer, Tim, Ellen, Connor, Maggie, Brendan, Kelly, Emily Grace, and Sophie. I also would like to thank Sara, who has been my inspiration over the years. Thank you all for leading by example and showing me how to be successful, I know that with your love and support anything is possible!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social identity theory suggests that individuals use social groups and group membership to uphold and maintain their personal identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Stryker (1968) stated that the identity of an individual can be tied to roles or positions in social relationships and often is linked to participation in social interaction. The social interaction and relationships formed between individuals lead to the construction of their identity.

Within sport studies, researchers have provided extensive attention to the study of sport fans (Dietz-Uhler, End, Demakakos, Dickirson, & Grantz, 2002; Jacobson, 2003; Poole, 2005; Melnick, Russell, & Page, 2001; Melnick & Wann, 2004; Van Leeuwen, Quick, & Daniel, 2002; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Peas, 2008; Wann, 1995, 1998; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000;). In particular, early research focused on the violent and aggressive behaviors of sport fans (Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1986; Lever, 1983; Roadburg, 1980). Researchers have also explored spectator affiliation with a sport team, satisfaction of sport fans, and levels of team

identification among sport fans (Madrigal, 1995; Miller, 1976; Wann, 1995; Wann et al., 2001, 2008).

More recently, researchers in Sport Sociology and Sport Psychology have acknowledged the existence of a gap in the literature on identity formation with regard to sport fans. Jacobson (2003) argued fan identity to be "beneficial to the individual in that it may provide a sense of community" (p. 2). Jacobson further suggested that socialization within a sporting community plays a major role in sport fan identity formation and maintenance. In 1995, Madrigal suggested that sport fans represent an association that provides the individual with a great deal of emotional significance and value. However, while researchers have discussed the significance and importance of one's identity as a sport fan, no research has specifically addressed how individuals form sport fan identities within various sport communities.

Fan identity is often linked to one's socialization into (and via) sport (Jacobson, 2003). The process of socialization has been found to differ for males and females (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). Sport is often deemed a masculine domain, welcoming and encouraging males while excluding females (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). While much of the

earlier research focused on male sport fans, researchers have suggested that differences in fan identity formation may exist between males and females (Jacobson, 2003). While boys are traditionally introduced to sport by parents at an early age, exposure for girls is often delayed - suggesting potential gender differences in the formation of sport fan identity between males and females (Jacobson, 2003). Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) found evidence of differences as women more often attributed their status as a sport fan to the associated relationships formed (i.e., watching the game with friends, family). In contrast, men were found to attribute their status as sport fans to their past athletic experiences.

The existing sport fan research focuses on college sport fans, in particular football and basketball fans (Wann et al., 2000). Researchers have suggested college students may form "natural" and possibly "temporary" allegiances to their school team, which may not be reflective of professional sport fans. The concept of sport team identification presented by Wann et al. (2001) explores the psychological connection which sport fans feel toward a sport team or athlete.

While researchers have explored the satisfaction and level of identification of basketball, football, and soccer fans (Madrigal, 1995; Wann et al., 2000, 2001), few researchers (Amato, Peters, & Shao, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Mackellar, 2006; Newman & Giardina, 2008; Newman, 2007) have examined the National Association for Stock Car Automobile Racing (NASCAR) fan. The passion and loyalty that fans of NASCAR have for drivers, automobile manufacturers and sponsors has been regaled by numerous sports writers and novelists (Blake, 1998; Howell, 1997; MacGregor, 2005; Wright, 2002). As Wright stated, "the loyalty of NASCAR fans is legendary" (2002, p. 272). The sport of NASCAR also exemplifies this identification and connection among fans. As Wright noted, "the instant camaraderie that breaks out wherever race fans congregate is the most charming of the sport's many endearing features" (p. 148). This instant connection among NASCAR fans serves to promote salience of one's sport fan identity.

The culture, or subculture, of NASCAR fans has been considered a major contributing factor in the growth of the sport. Howell (1997) referred to NASCAR fans as, "people who comprise the backbone of [Nextel] Cup stock car racing"

(p. 135). Fans do not attend races; they attend "race weekends," which are comprised of an array of both on-and off-track events (Wright, 2003). While sponsors and drivers have faded in and out of the NASCAR spotlight, the driving force behind the success of the sport has remained constant since the beginning - the fans. When NASCAR founder Bill France, a working class mechanic, laid the foundation for the association he stressed that, "plain ordinary people have to be able to associate with the cars" (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003, p. xiii). Even during developmental stages of the sport, the importance of fan interaction and association was evident by the fact that France insisted that the cars racing in this new organization must be 'stock,' that is, directly off the showroom floor (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003; Menzer, 2001). While France's vision has certainly evolved over the years, the loyalty and passion of the fans has not diminished over the past 53 years.

Researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of understanding how sport fans develop their identity. The fans of stock car racing are not "typical" professional sport fans (football, basketball); NASCAR is often defined as "more than a sport," but "a way of life" (McGregor,

2005). The NASCAR fan provides a unique focus area in which to expand the body of knowledge on sport fans. This often stereotyped and ignored population of sport fans will provide a greater understanding of how sport fans develop their identity.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich, thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. How do NASCAR fans become interested in the sport?
2. What does it mean to be called a "NASCAR fan?"
3. How do NASCAR fans develop their sport fan identity?

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study were as follows:

1. The participants consisted of 10 male and 2 female NASCAR fans in attendance at one of three NASCAR races

(Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, FL; Samsung/RadioShack 500 at Texas Motor Speedway in Justin, TX; Richmond 400 at the Richmond International Raceway (RIR) in Richmond, VA).

2. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Interviews were conducted until saturation was attained.

3. Data collection was carried out from February 2006 until May 2006.

4. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

5. Participant observations were conducted by the researcher, a 29 year old, Caucasian female.

Limitations

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. It was impossible to guarantee that all of the participants provided an honest account of their experiences.

2. The researcher conducted interviews within the confines of the selected race venues. As a result, the anonymity of the participants could not be assured by the researcher.

3. The participants were purposefully selected because of their attendance at one of the three selected races (Daytona 500, Samsung/RadioShack 500, and Crown Royal 400) during the 2006 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series Season.

4. The researcher, a 29 year old Caucasian female, conducted the observations, individual interviews, and data analysis.

5. There was no way to entirely remove researcher bias. However, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview (Patton, 1990) in order to explore her biases and assumptions as they pertain to this study.

6. Given the nature of qualitative research, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized to the entire population of NASCAR fans.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

NASCAR: National Association of Stock Car Automobile Racing (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003).

Race Weekend: The time spent at a race venue, generally lasts from the start of the first practice session until the conclusion of the final race of the weekend.

Rich, thick description: Procedure which establishes credibility to a study by describing the setting, participants, and themes of a qualitative study by providing as much detail as possible. (Creswell & Miller, 2001).

Social Identity Theory: The process by which individuals use social groups and group membership to uphold and maintain their personal identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Sport Fan: Individuals who are interested in and follow a sport team and/or athlete (Wann et al., 2001).

Sprint Cup Series: The NASCAR Championship is the championship held in NASCAR's top stock car racing series. The championship is currently known as the Sprint Cup. In 2004 it was renamed the NEXTEL Cup, but then a merger with Sprint Communications prompted a change in the series name effective January 1, 2008 (NASCAR's premiere series renamed Sprint Cup for '08, 2007). From 1972 through 2003, it was called the Winston Cup; before 1972, it was known as the Grand National (Yost, 2007).

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich, thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan, and (d) how and why people become NASCAR fans.

Within this chapter, the following sections will be addressed; (a) Social Identity Theory, (b) Social Identity Theory in Sport, (c) Sport Fans, (d) Sport Fan Identity, and (e) The Sport of NASCAR.

Social Identity Theory

Identity has been defined by Burke (1991) as, "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is" (p. 837). The role of social identity to describe the self-structure of individuals, as they are defined by categorical memberships, has been noted by previous researchers (Deaux, 1996; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985; Stryker, 1987). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory explains how people gain a sense of who

they are and how they gain self-esteem by being members in various social groups. Social identity has also been described as "the individuals knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership" (Tajfel, 1982, p. 31). The social identity theoretical perspective provides a framework for understanding how individuals develop, maintain, and manage their identities in the social context (Tajfel, 1982).

The process of identity development as proposed by social identity theory begins with self-categorization, a way in which individuals often define their place in society (Tajfel, 1978). In this process individuals must first identify themselves as a member of a social group, then understand and learn the behavioral norms of the group, and the process concludes as the values and behaviors of the individual become consistent with group norms (Tajfel, 1978).

Social identity theory emphasizes that group membership creates an in group between self, role, and society in which the "self" is made up of multiple identities (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). According to Stryker (1968), individuals have a distinct social self for each

role that they play in life and when these roles are personalized they become identities. The motivation for why individuals choose to identify with a certain group must also be considered when attempting to understand the process of social identity development (Deaux, 2000). Therefore, the self consists of many separate identities which are impacted by society and social situations and experiences provide motivation for individuals to self-identify with a group or groups.

These factors of social interactions and experiences lead to individuals developing distinct social meanings within a given identity (Deaux, 2000). Spence (1984) examined the identity labels of masculinity and femininity and presented that although people may equally endorse particular labels or categories, the meanings that each individual holds for the label or category will vary given their individual experience and perspective. The findings indicated that women may equally embrace their self-endorsed femininity, while holding contrasting views of the meaning of femininity within their own lives. While one woman may deem femininity as focusing on the home and family life, another woman may indicate her career and independence as primary components of her femininity. The

work of Spence (1984) focuses on the variations of meaning of gender identity and provides a clear indication of how individuals often carry and convey different meanings of a shared identity.

Social Identity Theory in Sport

Several researchers (Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002; Van Leeuwen, Quick, & Daniel, 2002) have utilized social identity theory in the context of sport. The researchers have taken the framework of social identity theory and applied the construct to examine and explain aspects related to sport participation and sport fan satisfaction.

Krane et al. (2002) examined the impact of participation in the Gay Games among lesbian and bisexual women from a social identity perspective. The researchers looked at how participation impacted their social identity, meaning, self-esteem, and collective-esteem upon completion of the event (Krane et al., 2002). The participants consisted of 123 female athletes competing in a variety of sports. The participants completed The Gay Games V Participation Survey, which was developed for the study. The survey consisted of two main sections. Section I contained demographic questions such as age, race, education level, occupation, sexual orientation and

previous Gay Games participation. Section II was made up of five open-ended questions which asked participants to describe their Gay Games experiences. The survey also asked participants if they had learned anything about the GLBT community while attending the games (Krane et al., 2002).

Krane et al. (2002) found that the participants responses "revealed themes consistent with social identity theory" (p. 40). Specifically, the researchers noted that the athletes discussed gaining a new knowledge about the GLBT community. The researchers also indicated that the participants identified many social identities, such as; lesbian, athlete, and women. Also, many of the participants indicated an intersection of social identities such as lesbian and athlete (Krane et al., 2002). The findings provide support for utilizing a social identity framework to study individuals of unrepresented groups. Also, by engaging persons in places where one's identity is highly prominent, such as during the Gay Games, individuals are more likely to exude characteristics, feelings and emotions relevant to their most salient identity.

In 2002, Van Leewen et al. presented a framework for understanding how to assess the satisfaction level of sport

spectators. Although this study was conducted in the field of sport management, the application of social identity theory in the analysis serves as a means for direct application of the theoretical concepts of social identity to sport fans. The researchers directly looked at how social identity impacted consumer behaviors of these fans. They stated that persons not only identify with the products they possess and consume and also identify with the organizations that produce and sell these products (Van Leewen et al., 2002). The ability of sport fans to identify themselves with products or merchandise worn by or sponsored by their favorite athlete or sport team will have a direct impact on their social identity as a fan. The impact of sponsorship and marketing on a sport fan's social identity and related behavior can be critical when attempting to understand why various companies spend extravagant amounts of money to sponsor sports teams or events. It is by association and assimilation that sport fans are able to reinforce their social identity as a fan by drinking the same cola or using the same razor as their favorite athlete or sport team uses (Van Leewen et al., 2002).

Sport Fans

According to Wann and Hamlet (1995), less than five percent of research in sport psychology and sport sociology has focused on the study of sport fans. It is initially important to note that the term "fan" has been derived from 'fanatic,' meaning, "a person marked or motivated by extreme unreasoning enthusiasm, as for a cause" (dictionary.com). Anderson (1979) expanded upon the concept of fanatic, by stating that a fan is an ardent devotee of sport who is often and frequently possessed by an extreme enthusiasm for sport. Spinard (1981) further defined the sport fan as a "person who thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when he or she is not actually observing, or reading, or listening to an account of a specific sports event" (p. 354).

More recent researchers (Guttman, 1986; Wann et al., 2001) have further conceptualized the "sport fan" by distinguishing the sport fan from sport spectator. Guttman (1986) defined a spectator as anyone who watches a sporting event, in person or through the media and a fan as one who relates to the overall emotional commitment of the sporting event. According to Wann et al. (2001):

Sport *fans* are individuals who are interested in and follow a sport team, and/or athlete. Sport *spectators* (also called sport consumers) are those individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media (radio, television, etc.) (p. 2).

In the modern day era of multimedia and information-technology it may be hard to find a sport fan who would not be considered both a fan and spectator. However, researchers have indicated that within sport psychology and sport sociology the terms sport fan and sport spectator are often used interchangeably (Wann et al., 2001). Conversely, Crawford (2004) has chosen to ultimately abandon the notion of defining a sport fan. As Crawford (2004) stated, "being a fan is not just a label or a category, it's also an identity and a performance...it is extremely problematic to attempt to provide an overall definition of what does (and does not) signify a 'fan'" (p. 21). Crawford further argues that sport fandom is a dynamic that stretches beyond the scope of any current definition or label. Whether referred to as sport fans, sport spectators, or sport consumers, the one aspect that aligns these individuals is sport.

Sports teams and events draw people to arenas and stadiums on a daily basis and this attraction stretches

beyond just going to a game. Kahle, Kambara, and Rose (1996) echoed this notion by stating, "Sport has a special role in contemporary society that goes well beyond mere entertainment" (p. 51). There are numerous aspects which propel being a sport fan beyond the mere act of attending a game or watching the event on television. Many sport fans have been known to have a high emotional attachment to their favorite team and/or athlete (Kahle et al., 1996). These fans often will immerse themselves in the event or game, by wearing a team jersey/shirt or colors and enthusiastically cheering for their team throughout the event (Wann et al., 2001). The extent to which a sport fan feels psychologically connected to a team is referred to as team identification (Guttman, 1986; Wann et al., 2001). The psychological connection between a sport fan and his or her favorite team may impact one's overall sport fan identity.

In 1993, Wann and Branscombe developed the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) as a tool to assess levels of team identification for sport fans. The SSIS (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) is a seven-item questionnaire with an 8-point Likert-type scale in which questions are referenced to the individual's favorite sport team.

The scores on SSIS range from 7 to 56, a higher score indicating higher level of team identification. The scale also serves as a means to classify fans into three separate categories based upon the score obtained from the SSIS: Low Identification Fans score below 18; Moderately Identified Fans score between 18 and 35; and High Identification Fans score 36 or higher (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The role of an individual as a supporter of a team/athlete can be a central component of his/her identity for fans that have high levels of team identification (Wann et al., 2001). Much of the research and literature on sport fans has focused on collegiate sport fans (Jacobson, 2003). Collegiate fans are often revered for their dedication and loyalty to their alma mater.

Sport Fan Identity

Several researchers (Jacobson, 2003; Melnick & Wann, 2004; Wann & Hammet, 1995) have addressed the lack of research devoted to the identity formation of sports fans. There have been several researchers (Jones, 1997; Madrigal, 1995; Spinrad, 1981) who have undertaken the task of defining sports fans. For example, a fan has been defined as, "person who thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when he or she is not actually observing, or

reading, or listening to an account of a specific sports event" (Spinrad, 1981, p. 354). It is important to note the term fan has been derived from the word 'fanatic' meaning, "a person marked or motivated by extreme unreasoning enthusiasm, as for a cause" (dictionary.com). Anderson (1979) expanded on this concept by surmising that a fan is an ardent devotee of sport who is often and frequently possessed by an extreme enthusiasm for sport. In 2001, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Page defined a sport fan as, "individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team, and/or athlete" (p. 2). Although no research has examined NASCAR fans or the identity of these persons, it is important to address the current literature on sport fans and sport fan identity.

Jacobson (2003) undertook the task of examining the issues and theoretical concepts involved in how individuals develop and maintain their identity as a sports fan. The term identity has been defined by Burke (1991, p. 837) as, "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is." Attending, watching, reading, thinking about, or discussing a sport team or specific athlete is a means by which persons are able to reaffirm their fan identity (Jacobson,

2003). Jacobson (2003) stated "the identity of a sport fan can be looked at as having roots in both identity theory and social identity theory" (p. 5). Identity theory focuses on the notion of roles people play and the identity associated with these roles (Jacobson, 2003). Sports fans are constantly playing roles, as either spectators at an event or observers from afar. The identity that individuals associate with this role behavior becomes important in the creation of their fan identity (Jacobson, 2003). Social identity theory emphasizes group processes and inter-group relations of individuals, rather than focusing on role and role behaviors (Jacobson, 2003). Jacobson (2001) suggested that by looking at fan identity from both an identity and social identity theoretical perspective, a more complete understanding of sport fans can be gained.

The formation of a fan identity of an individual will occur through the development of either a personal identity, a social identity, or a combination of both of these (Jacobson, 2003). The major socialization components of fan behavior can play an integral part of fan identity. Wright (2002) discussed this same socialization component in the sport of NASCAR as the, "instant camaraderie

wherever race fans congregate is the most charming of the sports features" (p. 148).

The Sport of NASCAR

The roots of stock car automobile racing reach farther back than December 12, 1947, when The National Association of Stock Car Automobile Racing (NASCAR) was formed during a meeting at the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach, Florida (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003). The legacy of the sport has been infamously linked to outlaw bootleggers who ran whiskey to hundreds of areas across the Southeast as a means to earn money during 1930's and 1940's (Hagstrom, 1998). Racing was more than a way of life for these bootleggers, who often modified and upgraded the engines in order to gain an advantage of a few more horsepower over law enforcement, who constantly sought to put an end to their trade (Hagstrom, 1998). For these racers and their families, running whisky was the only source of income during the winter months and to lose a race had greater consequences than coming in second (Hagstrom, 1998).

Running whisky became a full-throttle game of cat and mouse in which to stay out of jail the cars these men drove had to be perfect in every way (Hagstrom, 1998). The recklessness these drivers displayed on the road rival that

of anything ever seen on a racetrack, such as making 180 degree turns and driving off in another direction to avoid being apprehended (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003). According to Tim Flock, a bootlegger later turned NASCAR champion, the first actual race to take place between this group of bootleggers, "occurred in the mid 1930's in a cow pasture in the town of Stockbridge, Georgia, about 15 miles outside Atlanta" (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003, p. xii). It is from these roots of moonshine and recklessness that the sport of NASCAR has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry driven by corporate sponsorship.

In 2005, NASCAR signed an eight year television contract with SPEED, Fox, TNT, and ABC/ESPN worth a reported \$4.8 billion, which guaranteed not only broadcast time, but increased promotional exposure on these networks ("Eight-year, multi-network TV deal announced," 2005). The sport also thrives from over \$2 billion in annual sales of NASCAR licensed merchandise (Lowry, 2004). In 2003, NASCAR ended its 33 year partnership with R.J. Reynolds Winston cigarettes as the primary sponsor for the top racing series (NASCAR.com). June 19, 2003, amid the neon lights of Times Square in New York City, NASCAR announced that Nextel Communications Inc. signed-on to be the new sponsor for the

cup series beginning in 2004 (Yost, 2007). The terms of the 10-year deal with Nextel, reportedly worth over \$750 million, entitled the communications company exclusive title sponsorship rights of the cup racing series (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003). The series was renamed the Sprint Cup in January of 2008, as a result of a \$35 billion merger between telecommunications companies Sprint and Nextel (NASCAR's premier series renamed Sprint Cup for '08, 2007). The financial and corporate surge that NASCAR has experienced over the past 10 years has been seen by many to come at the expense of those who have supported the sport from day one, the fans.

While sponsors and drivers have faded in and out of the NASCAR spotlight, the real driving force behind the success of the sport has remained constant since the beginning. When NASCAR founder Bill France, a working class mechanic, laid the foundation for the association, he stressed that, "plain ordinary people have to be able to associate with the cars" (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003, p. xiii). During the developmental stages of the sport, the importance of fan interaction and association was evident by the fact that France insisted that the cars racing in

this new organization must be 'stock' right off the showroom floor (Goldenbrock & Fielden, 2003). France's vision of fans being able to associate with the sport has certainly evolved over NASCAR's 54 year history.

"You don't have to go to many races to realize that stock car fans are, well, *different*" (Wright, 2002, p. 144). The culture, or subculture, of NASCAR fans has been considered a major contributing factor in the sports growth. The passion and loyalty that these fans have for drivers, manufacturers, and sponsors has been regaled by numerous sports writers and novelists (Blake, 1998; Howell, 1997; MacGregor, 2005; Wright, 2003). Howell (1997) referred to these fans as, "people who comprise the backbone of [NASCAR Sprint] Cup stock car racing." (p. 135). This backbone is held together by the bonds which the sport helps form between strangers, friends, and families that gather at the track. As noted by Judith Scott from New Jersey, "This is our family sport and everyone in the family roots for a different driver...NASCAR brings our family together" (Center, 1998, p. 129). Fans do not attend races, they attend race weekends, which are comprised of an array of both on and off track events this weekend (Wright, 2003). This umbilical link between NASCAR and its fans was

most recently echoed in a major advertising campaign by Anheuser Bush Company, which is a major sponsor of NASCAR racing. The advertisement, which appears on television and radio and in print advertisements, focuses on the fans at races with the saying, "NASCAR, speed ruled...fan fueled" (www.bush.com/bush.html, 2005). Although this is a sponsorship driven advertising campaign, it reinforces the sense of assimilation and association that NASCAR fans have for the sport. This advertising concept was recently revived by the sport itself in a television campaign "Our NASCAR", which ran throughout the 2009 Sprint Cup Season (NASCAR begins campaign that targets core fan base, 2008). The campaign was designed to reach out the sports 'core fan base' as a response to the second straight year of declining TV ratings, which posted an 11% drop TV ratings during the 2007 season (NASCAR begins campaign that targets core fan base, 2008). The sport of NASCAR has gone from a small market southeastern sport to a major spectator sport attracting over 100 thousand fans across the country and as the numbers fall they look to the fans that got them off the starting grid from day one to put them back on top.

Others have even gone so far as to say that there may be a cultural boundary that exists between NASCAR fans and

other fans from major sports (Wright, 2003). Some writers and journalists have described their experience with NASCAR fans as a sense of 'culture shock' (Blake, 1998; Rushin, 1999). The fans of stock car racing are not your typical pro football or basketball fans. NASCAR is more than a sport to them, it is often a way of life. NASCAR has been characterized as having the threads of American values (competition, triumph, devotion, family, teamwork, spirit) woven within the sports core (Center, 1998). It is the paradoxical relationship to other sports that creates such an opportunity to explore this population of sports fans.

The sport of NASCAR has been documented in various media sources depicting the culture of the sport as having a "redneck identity" (Hawaleshka, 2005; Poole, 2005). According to Roebuck and Hickson (1982), "the term 'redneck' was used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to refer to poor white subsistence farmers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers who eked out a living in the rural areas of the South" (p. 5). However, others have noted that the term 'redneck' has evolved into a derogatory description of poor working-class whites who work in a variety of low-class and maintain manual labor employment (James, 2003). It is this connotation of the term 'redneck' which has

become associated with the sport due to either it's rural Southern roots, occasional stories of alcohol over-indulgence, or the ever present Confederate flag that often blankets the infield at NASCAR events (Hawaleshka, 2005).

The cultural identity of the sport has also been associated with one which lacks ethnic and racial diversity. Hawaleshka (2005) noted:

It's hard not to notice the lack of a visible minority at the track. Maybe blacks can't relate to all the lily-white drivers. Maybe it's that Stars and Bars, the Confederate flags that blanket NASCAR infields, testament to stock car racings strong southern roots. Pretty much the only African-American in sight at Pocono were two NASCAR officials and the guy who handed out paper towels in the toilet (p.4)

This perception has not halted the sports growth over the past several years, as NASCAR has been referred to as the fastest growing sport in the United States, with over 75 million fans (Amato et al., 2005; Yost, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich, thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan. This methodology chapter is presented in the following sections: (a) Research Design, (b) Participants, (c) Description of the Participants, (d) Procedures, (e) Interviews, (f) Pilot Interview, (g) Data Analysis, (h) Trustworthiness, and (i) Bias Statement.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined:

1. How do NASCAR fans become interested in the sport?
2. What does it mean to be called a "NASCAR" fan?
3. How do NASCAR fans develop their sport fan identity?

Research Design

The qualitative methods of semi-structured interviewing and participant observation were chosen for

this study. The main instrument in qualitative research is the researcher (Glesne, 1999). The purpose of the researcher is not to seek the ultimate truth or 'lone' answer to a question, but to seek the many truths and answers that may exist and find meaning in those truths (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). Within this type of methodology, larger themes of human experience emerge and "others'" realities can be embraced (Risner, 2002). Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted in an attempt to demonstrate how NASCAR fans develop their sport fan identity and what it means to be a NASCAR fan.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 12 self-identified NASCAR fans in attendance at one of three races (Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, FL; Samsung/RadioShack 500 at Texas Motor Speedway (TMS) in Justin, TX; or the Richmond 400 at the Richmond International Raceway (RIR) in Richmond, VA) during the 2006 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series season. The three race track venues were purposefully selected by the researcher for two primary reasons; (a) geographical location, and (b) type of race track. The geographical locations of FL, TX, and VA provided the researcher the opportunity to draw from a more

geographically diverse population of NASCAR fans. The three different race venues also allowed the researcher to sample fans attending three different types of race tracks. Daytona International Speedway is a superspeedway, which is a racetrack that is greater than two miles in length; Texas Motor Speedway is an intermediate track, which is an oval that is greater than one mile in length, but less than two miles in length; and Richmond International Raceway is a short track, which is an oval racetrack that is less than one mile in length (Track types, 2009). This provided the researcher the opportunity to obtain participants in attendance at three of the four types of racetracks that the NASCAR Sprint Cup competes on, the other being a road course which consists of both left and right turns and is not an oval (Track types, 2009). More specifically, the participants consisted of 10 male and 2 female self-identified NASCAR fans. Each of the participants was at least 18 years of age. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 65 years of age ($M = 40$). All of the participants self-identified as Caucasian/White. Six of the participants identified as single and six as married or in a committed partnership/relationship. The participants attended an average of three races per year and reported attending an

average of nine races in the past 5 years. The participants also represented a diverse range of occupations, including: driving truck, bank teller manager, sales, automotive mechanic, telecommunications engineer, administrative assistant, and retired. The length of time the participants had been NASCAR fans ranged from 0 to 48 years ($M = 15.7$), see Table 1.

Procedures

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Temple University, the researcher arranged travel to each of the selected race venues. The researcher arrived at the race venue approximately 5 to 8 hours prior to the scheduled starting time of each race. Driving a nondescript rental car, she positioned herself within the general parking area provided. The researcher was accompanied by a 29 year old female who served as her assistant. The assistant provided the researcher with assistance throughout the data collection at all three race venues. Specifically, she held paperwork, file-folders, clipboards, and provided the researcher with new audiotapes when needed. The researcher (and assistant) wore nondescript t-shirt and jeans, purposefully choosing not to wear the NASCAR merchandise of a specific driver

Table 1. Participant Demographic & Fan Information

Name	Gender	Age	# Years NASCAR Fan	# NASCAR Races Attend Per Year
Ralph	Male	47	47	4
Earl	Male	49	18	5
Jeff	Male	26	1	1
Scott	Male	23	3	2
Deb	Female	43	4	2
Bob	Male	46	10	3
Barney	Male	65	48	3
Wendy	Female	52	11	2
Carl	Male	24	5	2
Marty	Male	31	28	3
Steve	Male	50	10	2
James	Male	24	4	1

(e.g., Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jeff Gordon, Jimmy Johnson). In doing so, the researcher did not want to present a biased appearance which may detract or influence potential participants. However, as Emerson et al. (1995) suggested, when observing participants in their natural setting it is important for an observer to blend in with the environment.

Therefore, a black baseball-style hat with a Nextel Cup series logo on the front was worn as a way in which to connect to the sport (and other fans), but not potentially alienate potential participants based upon the driver supported by the researcher (or assistant).

Upon arriving at the race site, the researcher and assistant walked the grounds surrounding the race track. Participants were recruited by approaching fans in attendance outside the race venue prior to the start of each race. Each potential participant was approached by the researcher and provided with a description of the investigation and explanation regarding his/her potential involvement. This process was conducted by walking the parking lot and tailgate area adjacent to each race track. The researcher would make eye contact and engage potential participants by asking them about their favorite driver and where they were from, information that could easily be gathered by the researcher observing their dress, décor, or license plate. The researcher used these obvious questions to gain a social connection with the potential participants and then informed them of her research study.

Once provided with a description of the investigation, each individual was asked if she/he would be willing to

participate. Interested fans were asked to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix B), permission to audiotape form (see Appendix C) and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). Demographic information, including age, race, ethnicity, relationship status, occupation, favorite drivers, and NASCAR fan background and experiences was obtained through the use of the demographic questionnaire. Once each participant provided consent (signing consent form and permission to audiotape form) and completed the demographic questionnaire, the researcher immediately began the interview process with that particular participant. It is important to recognize that due to the setting (race venue) in which the interviews were conducted, anonymity was not guaranteed.

Interviews

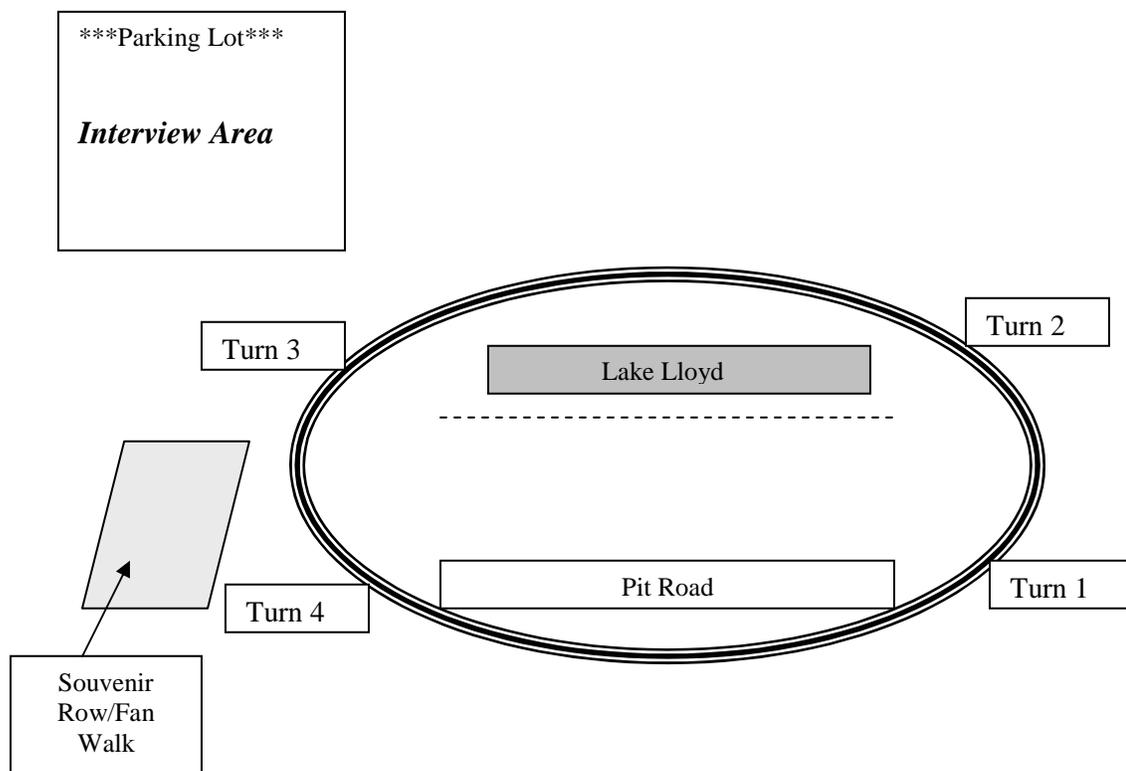
A semi-structured interview guide format (see Appendix E) was utilized (Patton, 1990). The interview guide focused on exploring the following areas relative to the experience of being a NASCAR fan: (a) the process of becoming a fan of NASCAR, (b) the meaning associated with being a NASCAR fan, (c) how being a NASCAR fan influences one's identity, and (d) the culture of NASCAR fans. The interview guide was developed by the researcher and was

based upon extensive review of the literature on social identity development, both in and outside the sport (fan) setting. Two research experts in fan identity were provided a copy of the interview guide and asked for recommendations/feedback (see Appendix E). The researchers provided minimal feedback, suggesting a reorganization of the order of questions.

The interview process at each race venue provided different obstacles and challenges, ranging from weather to political advocacy groups campaigning for upcoming local elections. At the first venue, Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, FL (see Figure 1) the weather was the only obstacle facing the researcher. The rainy and cloudy conditions provided a less than ideal situation for the researcher to walk the adjacent parking area outside of the speedway recruiting participants. The weather limited the amount of outdoor tailgating that took place before the race. This limited the number of potential participants the researcher had the opportunity to approach prior to the race. The researcher approached approximately 10-12 individuals at the first race venue at Daytona International Speedway and was granted only five

interviews. The most difficult challenge that the researcher faced was at Texas Motor Speedway in Justin, TX (see Figure 2).

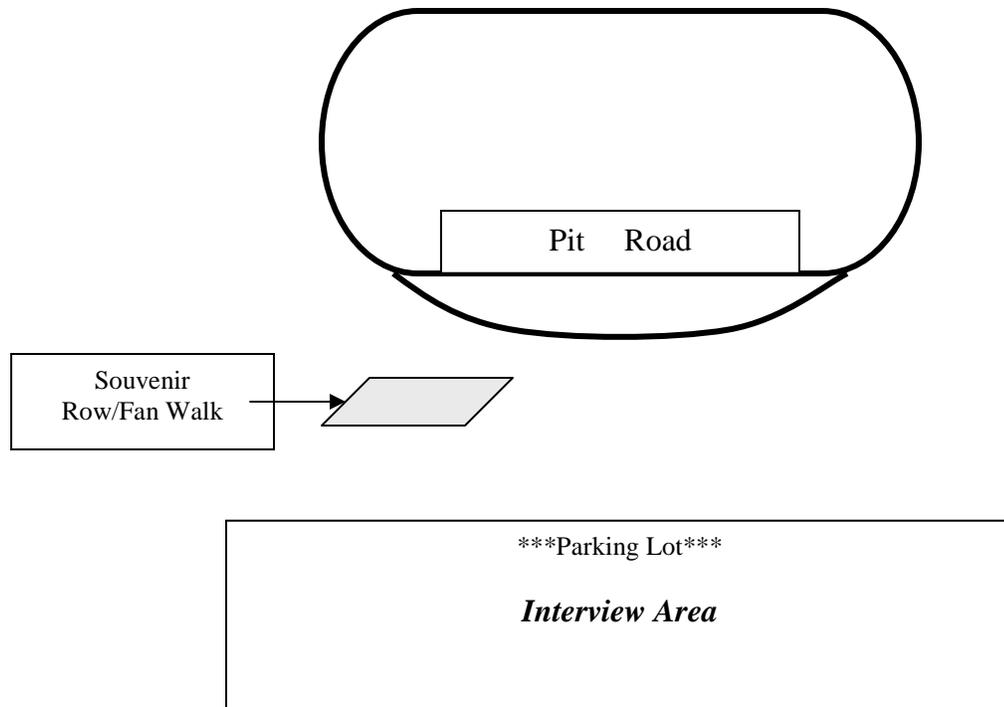
Figure 1. Diagram of Daytona International Speedway



While at Texas Motor Speedway, the researcher was immediately struck by the lack of interest in participation by the fans she approached. The researcher approached approximately 15-20 individuals but was granted only three interviews. Many of the fans would talk with the

researcher, but would not consent to an interview, a significant change from the previous race venues in which

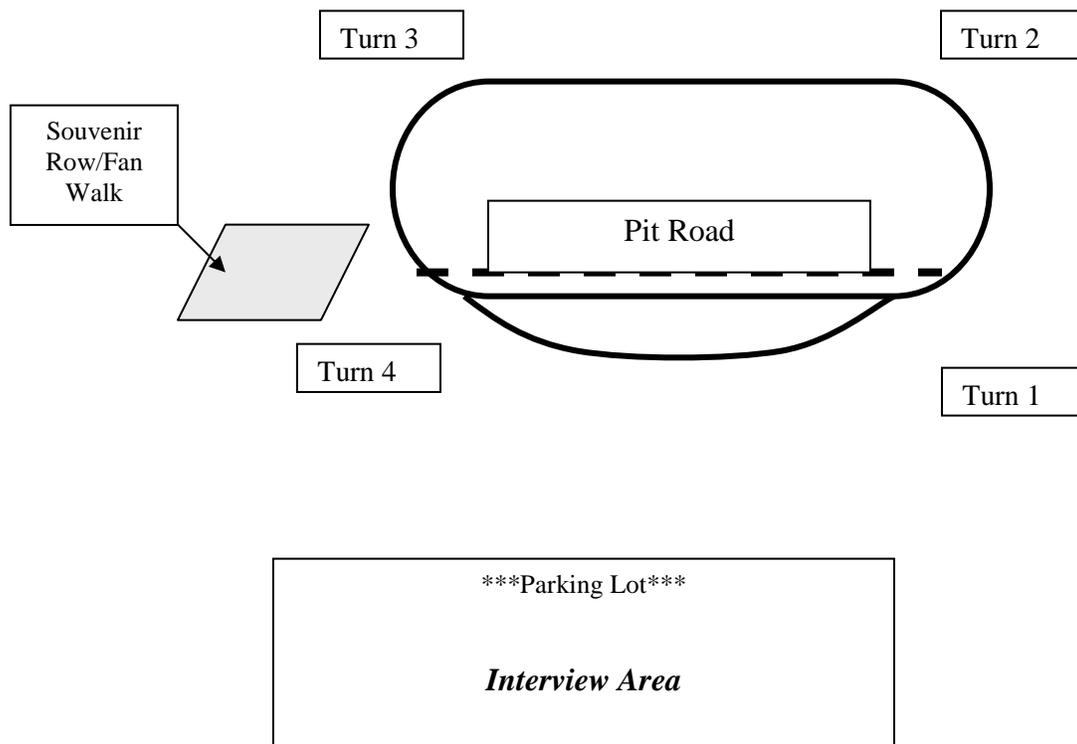
Figure 2. Diagram of Texas Motor Speedway



she found most fans especially hospitable and open to conversation. As the day went on she noticed that even as she approached people, they tended to shy away and not make eye contact. Later in the afternoon, one participant informed the researcher that there were numerous people walking around with clipboards trying to solicit signatures for a political candidate running for local office. This immediately explained the lack of hospitality shown to the researcher. It is possible that potential participants may

have assumed that the researcher was a political volunteer attempting to solicit signatures. There were no major obstacles faced by the researcher at the final race venue, Richmond International Raceway in Richmond, VA. Approximately 10-15 individuals were approached by the researcher and four interviews were granted by race fans in attendance. (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Diagram of Richmond International Raceway



The actual interview process was very informal in nature; it was a fluid conversation between the researcher and the participants. In a few cases, there were other friends nearby who would sometimes interject to make a comment or comment on something that a participant said in a joking or affirmative nature. All of this was reflected both in the transcripts and the corresponding field notes taken by the researcher.

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Any revealing information (i.e., name, occupation, geographical location) was removed from the transcription to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Observations

The researcher also conducted observations as a way of triangulation. According to Emerson, Fritz, and Shaw (1995), "the purpose of observational research is to study people and groups as they go about their everyday lives" (p. 4). At each of the three race venues the researcher observed NASCAR fans for approximately 4 hours prior to each race, the actual race, and 3 hours post race. The majority of the observations occurred in the parking area outside of the race track. Observing NASCAR fans within their 'natural' setting served to enhance the ability of

the researcher to understand fan identity among NASCAR fans. Using participant observation allowed the researcher to obtain a deep immersion into NASCAR fan culture (Emerson et al., 1995).

According to Patton (1990), the data obtained through observations "consists of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience" (p. 4). The researcher utilized a field notebook as the main recording tool. According to Emerson et al. (1995), the researcher creates an accumulating written record of the observations and experiences within the observed setting. At the completion of each race weekend, the researcher transcribed her field notes from each observation period. The field notebook provided the researcher with an additional arena for reflection of the experience. Field notes allowed the researcher to take note of her initial impressions which included details pertaining to the physical setting (e.g., size, space, noise), movement and interaction among the fans, and demographic make-up of the fans (i.e., gender, race, appearance, dress) (Emerson et al., 1995). The field notes also provided the researcher an additional outlet in

which to identify and control her biases. As the researcher immersed herself in the physical setting at each tailgate, she was able to focus on the interview experiences while also maintaining a detailed record of the surrounding environment at each participant's interview venue (i.e., tailgate). This process allowed the researcher the ability to capture not only the interview data with each participant, but also the surrounding environment (i.e., NASCAR flags, banners, etc...). This technique allowed the researcher to look back at her field notes as a source of data to provide a more all encompassing perspective of the participants and reduce any bias of the researcher while analyzing the data.

Pilot Interview

Prior to the onset of the present study, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a 19 year old, female NASCAR fan. The pilot interview was used to provide the researcher with a "practice" interview and to determine the organization and flow of the interview guide.

The pilot interviewee was interviewed face-to-face using an initial draft of the interview guide (see Appendix A). The interview lasted approximately 45 min and was transcribed verbatim. A copy of the interview was provided

to the researcher's advisor and together the transcript was inductively coded line-by-line (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). What follows is a summation of the pilot interviewee's experiences and perceptions of being a NASCAR fan. To maintain confidentiality, the participant was given a pseudonym - Amanda.

Amanda indicated that her entrance into NASCAR began at an early age. In particular, it was her father - a passionate fan of NASCAR - who introduced her to the sport. Interestingly, her mother, who had initially disliked the sport, emerged as a major catalyst in maintaining Amanda's (as well as the rest of her family) identity as a NASCAR fan. She indicated that the sport has become one of the main ways in which her family "comes together," providing a sense of community among her family members.

Amanda indicated that she did not typically disclose her identity as a NASCAR fan with people outside of her family or "circle of race friends." Her secrecy was related to the stereotypical assumptions surrounding the sport of NASCAR. In particular, Amanda noted that there was a perception that those unfamiliar with the sport "wouldn't understand" and would say, "'ah that's just a redneck sport.'" One way in which Amanda maintained her

disconnect from NASCAR was by not wearing NASCAR apparel outside the racetrack venue. At the racetrack, however, Amanda indicated a sense of comfort in wearing NASCAR paraphernalia (e.g., t-shirt, visor, pin), as others were dressed similarly. Amanda also noted that when she does encounter another NASCAR fan outside of the race venue, such as at school or out socially, she readily discloses her love of the sport and often finds herself, "making a new friend."

Conducting the pilot interview provided the researcher with important information about the interview guide. Based upon the pilot interview, several interview questions were reworded and reorganized. More specifically, the questions were reorganized to create a more specific line of questioning pertaining to the participants' experiences and feelings regarding their NASCAR fandom.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was organizing the field notes from each race venue. The second step of the process was transcribing the interviews verbatim. The interview transcripts and field notes were repeatedly reviewed and read by the researcher to better acquaint her with the data.

According to Patton (2002), the process of qualitative analysis serves to transform data into findings. The researcher then began to analyze the data by assigning preliminary codes as a means to develop potential themes or categories which may emerge from the data. This process, known as coding, was also conducted with the field notes. According to Glesne (1999), "coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining those scraps of collected data" (p. 135). Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to the initial process of coding as 'open coding;' meaning the researcher is open to the data. The researcher then utilized 'axial coding' to analyze the data. Axial coding is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (p. 96). The process of axial coding allowed the researcher to connect the related codes within the data.

The researcher collaborated with another individual experienced in qualitative research throughout the data analysis process. Both the researcher and her colleague independently coded the data (interviews and field notes) and met several times to discuss their findings. Patton

(2002) stressed the importance of this process of peer collaboration as important insights can emerge from the various ways in which two people may look at the same data set.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or research validity, is critical to address as a qualitative researcher. There are various methods researchers can utilize to enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative investigation. Glesne (1999) suggested several methods, such as triangulation, peer review and debriefing, clarification of researcher bias, and external auditing.

The present study attempted to triangulate the data by conducting both interviews and observations. The observational data were utilized as a way in which to support (or negate) the interview responses provided by the participants. The researcher also engaged in peer review and debriefing. As previously noted, a bracketing interview (and subsequent bias statement) was conducted as a way for the researcher to expose her personal biases and assumptions which could potentially influence or skew the process of data collection and analysis.

At the onset of this investigation, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview with a colleague educated in qualitative interviewing. The bracketing interview served as a means to explore the researcher's biases and assumptions as they related to the present study. As Glesne (1999) stated, "continual alertness to [one's] own biases [and] subjectivity assists in producing more trustworthy interpretations" (p. 151). The following bias statement evolved from the bracketing interview.

Bias Statement

I am a 30 year old female doctoral candidate in the Exercise and Sport Psychology program at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. My mother and father have both worked in education, my father as a School Superintendent in Massachusetts and my mother as a grade school teacher and stay-at-home mother. I am the youngest of 5 children, three brothers and one sister.

I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in Athletic Training from Springfield College (MA) in 2000. I played four years of varsity tennis at Springfield and after taking my first sport psychology course my junior year, I was able to realize the importance of psychology within the game of tennis, thus sparking my interest in the field of

sport psychology. Upon completion of my undergraduate degree I decided to pursue my interest in the area of sport psychology. I returned to Springfield College to pursue a Master's Degree in Exercise Science and Sports Studies with a concentration in Sport Psychology. Throughout my time as a graduate student at Springfield College I served as both a graduate teaching assistant in the Physical Education Department and assistant women's tennis coach.

I earned my Master's of Science in Exercise and Sport Studies from Springfield College in 2002. Upon completion of my degree I decided to explore doctoral programs in sport psychology that had a strong emphasis on the psychosocial aspects of sport. My area of focus throughout my master's program rested heavily within the area of sport sociology and my eventual thesis topic examined the gender differences in self-reported aggression of intercollegiate student-athletes. I had decided to pursue a doctorate because I quickly realized that I wanted to teach at the college/university level and in seeking the advice of many advisors and mentors I quickly learned that I would need to earn a doctorate to realize my goal.

After taking a year off from school, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in the Exercise and Sport

Psychology program at Temple University. My first year at Temple opened my eyes to the many aspects of sport sociology. My original interests became focused on women in sport and issues of sexuality in college athletes. As time went on I began to think more and more about my dissertation topic. Without knowing specifically what my topic would be, I immediately came to the realization that I wanted it to be something other than what I had done in the past, I wanted to open the doors to a new line of research and exploration.

I had originally pondered the idea of focusing my research on the dedication and commitment of professional football fans in the Philadelphia (PA) area. Having come from the New England area I was immediately struck by the dedication, passion, and overall encompassing nature of the emotion individuals felt for their beloved Philadelphia Eagles football team. However, after having the opportunity to attend a NASCAR race at Dover International Speedway, I was overwhelmed by the passion and commitment that fans in attendance displayed both for favorite drivers and sponsors. I spent the day walking the venue taking to fans about their tailgating set-up, devotion to the sport of NASCAR, and loyalty to their favorite drivers. After this

initial experience with the sport of NASCAR I began to look at the existing literature which examined this seemingly unique and dedicated group of sport fans. It did not take me long to realize that the domain of sport psychology and, more specifically, research on sports fans did not include automobile racing fans. I decided that pursuing a research study to examine NASCAR fans would serve as a unique area of exploration.

My impression of the NASCAR fan after attending my first race was one of amazement and intrigue. The ninety-thousand plus fans lined the parking roads to get into the race venue parking lots well before the sun rose on the day of the race. I was also amazed by the elaborate nature of the campsites/tailgates which often included generators with satellite TV, large BBQ's, and enclosed restroom facilities. While I had attended many other sporting events (NHL and MLB games), the fans I observed at my first NASCAR race seemed to have a deeper passion for the sport that went beyond the actual sporting event itself. This was so fascinating to me because I attended the race only because a friend had received tickets through her employer and thought it might be fun to say, "I went to a NASCAR race." Yet, as I found myself overwhelmed with every

aspect, from the amount of merchandise being bought by the spectators to the community feel of the entire event, my experience provided me with a whole new perspective on sports fans and I immediately found myself wanting to explore this newfound environment and culture. I must say that I also became a fan of the sport and found myself watching races on television each week, following the sport on the internet and even attended another race later that same season.

I am aware that it is impossible to completely eliminate researcher bias in a study of this nature. However, I believe that I have taken all appropriate precautions to acknowledge my biases and their potential effects on the present study. That being said, I am comfortable in acknowledging that based upon all of these procedures I have put in place, I have a bias towards the sport of NASCAR as being a very unique sporting environment. This bias I openly admit based upon my limited experiences with the sport and fan base.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich, thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan.

Within this chapter, the results and discussion are presented in the following sections: (a) Themes and (b) Discussion.

Results

The four themes representing the participants' experiences of being NASCAR fans included: (a) Entry into NASCAR, (b) Being A NASCAR Fan, (C) "Ya'll NASCAR fans": Fan Camaraderie, and (d) Win on Sunday...Sell on Monday.

Theme #1: Entry into NASCAR

All of the participants were asked to discuss how they became involved in the sport of NASCAR. The majority of the participants noted that their entrance into NASCAR was facilitated by a close friend or family member.

Specifically, 10 of the participants indicated that they were introduced to the sport by a family member. As Steve

stated, "my grandparents took me to a dirt track when I was five years old and I been following racing ever since."

Bob also noted that his wife was his chaperone into the sport, "she took me to the first race I ever went to." When commenting on his entrance into the sport Carl stated, "my dad got me into it."

Ralph elaborated on the aspect of growing up with the sport, "I have been involved since '62. My dad used to have a car, he was a mechanic, it was his car, but he had a driver. Then we got out of it, but I was still into NASCAR." This role of family was a salient point acknowledged by other participants. Looking at a group of nearby kids playing tag, Earl stated, "I brought my kids, they've all grow'd up coming to the tracks, so you know when I see kids playing I think that's awesome." Earl also noted,

We got Greg here [son], he's only 12 he loves Jeff Burton, oh yeah he had to come you know he got the pole [the number one starting position, earned by being the fastest during qualifying], he had to be here that's how I got into it.

The significance of family was apparent at each of the three racetracks. Numerous young boys and girls of various ages were observed walking around the merchandise trailers and interactive venues set up by the various companies and

race teams. The researcher also observed a family that appeared to be three generations - grandparents, children, and grandchild - all of the family members were wearing #38 M&M, Elliott Sadler, t-shirts.

The family component was stressed heavily by Wendy as she discussed her "birth into NASCAR." As she stated,

My dad was into NASCAR and always took my brothers to the track. I wasn't really into it when I was a kid, but as time went on I and I got older I started thinking I was missing something. We would get together as a family and NASCAR was all they would talk about. I finally decided to go to a race when I turned 40 and I am now a bigger fan than my brother.

In addition to the family influences, four of the participants indicated that they were not fans of the sport prior to attending a race in person. These four participants suggested that it was the 'experience' associated with attending a race in-person that solidified their interest and commitment to the sport. As Steve stated, "I wasn't even into the sport until I came to a race and experienced actually being at a race." When discussing her entrance into NASCAR, Wendy stated, "I was just like, I don't get it, it's kinda boring they go around in a circle. Once I came to one in person it's a lot different than on TV." Bob, who mentioned that all of his co-workers are NASCAR fans stated, "I've taken some people

that weren't [fans] and gotten them interested in it." For these participants the reality of being at the race and experiencing the environment both on and surrounding the track provided the catalyst to follow the sport of NASCAR.

Seven of the participants also noted that their initial interest in NASCAR was related to their love of cars. Specifically, James indicated his early influences in NASCAR were associated with his occupation as a mechanic. As he stated,

it started off as my boss offering me free tickets to the race each year, finally one year I decided to go and have been coming ever since.

A similar account was given by Barney who noted, "you know as a kid you like fast cars." He went on to say,

I had a friend that used to work on cars and he was the one that really got me interested in it and he and my brother and we all started going to the races, cause the racetrack was only like 5 miles from where we lived.

In line with the race 'experience' associated with attending a race, many of the participants noted the sense of community which is experienced while attending a NASCAR race. Debbie recounted a story which illustrates this sense of community:

I just got into NASCAR... came to the speedway and um I met a little kid in the shop and I said, what driver should I pick? And he's like oh, please, please be

Matt Kenseth, he needs so many fans, please, please, please, please, please. So I just started following Matt, cause one of my friends said - well, just pick a driver and follow him, I'm like how do I pick a driver, ya' know everybody likes Dale Jr., Jimmie Johnson, I wanted somebody who's like an underdog so then, when this kid pleaded with me I said, I am gonna do that and I just started following him, that's it!

Her story encompassed the friendly community-like nature which surrounds a NASCAR race weekend.

This aspect extends beyond the catch-fence, which separates the thundering cars from the thousands of fans, and permeates the entire surrounding area. The event often overtakes more than the race venue but rather an entire town or city such as in Daytona, FL during the Daytona 500. From the moment an individual enters the city of Daytona Beach, he or she is inundated with NASCAR signs, flags, banners all professing the same general theme, "Welcome Race Fans."

The circus-like nature of the traveling NASCAR circuit was evident at each of the three racing venues. The researcher was awed by the signs and symbols welcoming and embracing the onslaught of NASCAR fans to the Daytona 500. No negative advertising was observed. While Daytona 500 is often described as the 'Superbowl of NASCAR,' the similarities among the three race venues was evident to the

researcher. The signs and banners were present at Richmond in similar fashion as Daytona. While traveling the long stretch of Laburnum Avenue leading to Richmond International Raceway, local residents had set up stands selling water, food, and coffee. One sign on a front lawn advertised, "park here and we'll shuttle you to the track." The entire town was seemingly overtaken by NASCAR for three days straight. The same stretch of road the day following the race looked like any other main street.

The vastness of the Texas Motor Speedway, located about 30 minutes outside of Dallas, did not lend itself to such a dramatic spectacle of NASCAR infiltration. The researcher still found herself walking into convenience stores and nearby restaurants greeted by the familiar, "Welcome Race Fans" banner.

The aspects surrounding a weekend of NASCAR racing was something that Marty noted, "it's everywhere around town, the whole city is focused on this one event you gotta' be here." He elaborated on this aspect by recounting how he got into the sport,

I was never really into racing when I was younger, but my dad taught me how to work on cars. When I met my wife, her family was into NASCAR and it was just something I picked up from them and now living here in Richmond it's like everything NASCAR.

Theme #2: Being A NASCAR Fan

All of the participants were asked to discuss what it means to be NASCAR fan. When this question was posed to Ralph, his wife began to laugh and said, "a real NASCAR fan or just somebody." Consistent with this comment, several of the participants suggested that NASCAR fans were in some ways more dedicated and committed fans. As Bob stated, "I think they are truer fans than any sports fans." Earl elaborated on this, stating

The real truth comes out when your man [driver] isn't a winner anymore 'cause nobody wins every year.' When your man isn't a winner no more do you still love him, buy his stuff, and come there and support him?

For Earl, other sport fans may waiver on their commitment to their team or favorite athletes, but "true" NASCAR fans consistently remain loyal to their drivers and the sport.

Reflecting back to the 4 a.m. traffic jam that halted cars on Florida's Interstate-4 leading into Daytona early race morning, the researcher had a sense of the level of dedication being expressed by the participants. While the traffic leading into the Daytona International Speedway on race day was a sign of the commitment of NASCAR fans, the elaborate and expansive tailgating venues that were set up prior to daybreak provided another example. This spectacle

was not solely visible in Daytona. Mirror images emerged at all three race track venues. The most significant observation was of Richmond International Raceway (RIR), where the researcher found fans lining up at 5 a.m. to enter the RIR parking area for the race that evening, starting at 7:45 p.m. The race was an evening event and the parking lots, more specifically vast fields that surround the racetrack, were full by 9 a.m.

In addition to the comparison of NASCAR fans to other sport fans, several of the participants suggested that there were different levels of NASCAR fans. Barney pondered what being a NASCAR fan meant to him and stated, "Umm, dedication." He continued his thought by saying,

Because there are so many fans nowadays they pick a driver [and] if he don't win, they jump to a new driver. As a matter of fact I belong to an RV club and there's a fan in there that used to be Sterling Marlin fan and he hasn't won in several years and they jump to this new guy Carl Edwards cause he's a winner and I said you're not really a true fan if you're gonna jump around, if you get a driver you gotta stick with him no matter what his win loss is and I can verify this, you'll laugh when I tell you this but Kyle Petty hasn't won since he was, God knows when, about 10 years ago actually.

This statement was followed by a slight chuckle out of Barney's fellow tailgaters, who noted, "Kyle Petty's last win was in 1995 at Dover (laughs)."

The concept of dedication and "being a real NASCAR fan" was elaborated further by Earl, "[it's] my life...it's something special." He further stated,

You know what's the best part, when you go to the race everybody has their own moment. My first one's when you walk in the track and you look at it and you go wow, then my second one's when about 20 V-8's get together and come flying by you in a pack, that's nectar to the old ear, that's my favorite part, everybody has their own favorite part that's mine when they get run out on some green flags and you get about 15 or 20 of them, they get a nice hum going, you hear 'em coming there they go.

For Carl, being a NASCAR fan was summarized in one word - "loyalty." Scott equated his affinity for the sport in a similar but more definitive manner, "...t's an addiction, hey it's as bad as drinking beer it's an addiction, once you get into it you can't quit."

Alcoholic beverages had an overwhelming presence at each of the three races. As Scott noted, "some people look at ya funny when you walk out with a beer at 7 in the morning." While this statement was followed by a mild laugh, the reality of this statement was clearly evident at each of the three race venues. All of the participants were either consuming an alcoholic beverage or had a noticeable presence of alcohol at their tailgate, eight of the participants were drinking cans of beer and one seemed to

be enjoying a glass of wine out of a plastic cup. The relationship between alcoholic beverages and being a NASCAR fan is also evident on the racetrack, with Miller Lite, Budweiser, Jack Daniels, Smirnoff, and Jim Beam among the major sponsors of current Nextel Cup Cars.

Barney shared a story about when he met driver Sterling Marlin, which highlighted this relationship between being a NASCAR fan and the consumption of alcoholic beverages:

See, now my driver don't drink but Sterling drinks and we sat down and I have a beer or two occasionally, but I'm a wino really. So we sit down and have a drink with him and eat and he's a nice fellow, down to earth in the same way.

According to Marty, enjoying the atmosphere both at the track and around the track is a key part of being a NASCAR fan,

Being a fan is being here, this is what it's all about a warm sunny day, good friends, good food, drink [holds up his can of Bud Light]. Everybody's here for the same thing...to enjoy themselves and see some racing. It just doesn't get any better than this.

The action around the track on race weekend was what Wendy recounted as she pondered what being a NASCAR fan meant to her. She recounted her first race experience:

First race I ever came to was the 1995 Daytona 500 and it was Sterling Marlin's second Dayton win, he won back to back he won '94 & '95. And anyhow he drove the

Kodak car and we had met, were on the other coast of Florida Port Richie and we had met, I am gonna call him the PR person. You know before the races come to town they bring the show cars in and park em in store parking lots and they had the Kodak car down where I live in the Wal-Mart parking lot. So my husband and I went down there and we were there probably three hours talking to this guy named Pat and when we left I said to Pat, "oh, I'll see you in Daytona" - but I said it as a ya know, a joke. So never dreaming that we would see him, the night we pulled into Daytona and we were pulling out of a restaurant parking lot and what pulls up right in front of us, but the little Kodak truck. So, my husband says I wonder if that's the guy we just met in Palm Harbor, so we got lucky the light turned red so my husband pulled up alongside him and I'm looking out the window and it was the same guy that we met the week before where we live. So I'm waving at him trying to get his attention, and he looks and see's me and has a big smile on his face and says, follow me. So we followed him to where he parked the truck in a Winn Dixie parking lot and I got out and I talked to him and he told me what restaurant Sterling ate at what hotel he slept at, he told me everything we needed to know and that night I met Sterling Marlin at his restaurant and on Sunday he won the Daytona 500 and we went down pit road and I saw that guy Pat and he took me into the winners circle first race I was ever at.

Theme #3: "Ya'll NASCAR fans": Fan Camaraderie

When asked to discuss the culture of NASCAR, all of the participants mentioned an aspect of "camaraderie" among NASCAR fans. As Bob noted, "shoot, you just get along with everybody." Many of the participants resonated with this aspect of "getting along" with fellow race fans in their own way. Debbie explained her experience as follows,

Well, I would describe it as like, when you go to a football game you got all the Titans fans and they are playing Atlanta. So you got all the Titans fans and you got Atlanta fans, here you got fans of like 25-30 drivers. So everybody is just partying, doesn't matter, you don't have to be over with the (NFL team name) partying with them, you could have a car full and one could be for Dale Jr., one could be for Jimmie, it doesn't matter ya'll NASCAR fans.

Two of the participants suggested that NASCAR brings people from "diverse" backgrounds together. As Marty stated, "I've known people who're NASCAR fans from the poorest to the richest and no matter what they are they all talk the same about NASCAR, doesn't matter what background they come from." This was also acknowledged by Carl when he said, "You're seeing a lot more I guess you could say African-Americans that are coming into the sport and ah, just getting very, very diverse."

Not all of the participants expressed this notion of diversity among the fan base at the racetrack. Earl described his experience at the track as a "meeting of the white boys club." Earl continued to elaborate on his point,

Hey sorry about that I know they preach diversity, but the bottom line is it's the white boys club and we all have fun and we all do our thing and everybody's happy and you know some people of other race, religions and ethnics might be jealous of what we have here and maybe that's why they pick on us and say well ya know...and it's like well nobody's stopping you guys

from having as Ted Nugent would say Kwanzaa, I don't care if you have it just don't shove it down my throat.

The sentiments of Earl may not have resonated with all participants, but the passion and conviction with which he spoke resonated loud and clear, as he finished up his monologue by saying, "hey it's all true from the heart, man." It is important to note that based on the researcher's observations at each of the three venues, the majority of the fans were Caucasian, although there were groups of non-white fans observed in passing at each race track venue. The researcher observed a small, but noticeable, presence of African Americans at each of the NASCAR races. As the researcher made her way through the open fields of the Texas Motor Speedway her attention was drawn to a truck that was carrying a group of five African-American males, all dressed in Budweiser Dale Earnhardt Jr. apparel. They waved as they passed by each of the tailgating sites along the way, and from where the researcher could see, always received a wave in return and at least one audible, "yeah...get-er-done."

It is also relevant to note that the researcher observed confederate flags flying within the tailgate (research) area outside each of the three racetracks. While

unable to provide a specific number, the researcher did observe numerous confederate flags at each of the three venues.

The participants discussed the friendships formed throughout their involvement in NASCAR. Earl recounted a kinship between himself and other fans:

I got people I only see when I go to Alabama, fellow race people. I look forward to seeing them and we all find each other and camp out together, friendships we made at the track.

Earl went on to say that by walking around and talking to people, "the next thing you know you got five new friendships." Marty compared NASCAR fans to other sport fans stating, "NASCAR fans are the friendliest and most laid-back fans."

James recounted a story of how "everyone just helps everyone else out, kinda' like one big family." He continued by saying:

Last year we came to this race and I ran out of propane for my grill (pointing to his large trailer-hitch grill attached to a large Chevy Truck) and these folks around us let us use their grill to cook our food after the race. We ended up hanging out talking 'til we were one of the last two cars left on the field.

Barney elaborated on this aspect of contrasting NASCAR fans to fans from other major sports by saying:

Well, I think I'm a big sports fan, except for basketball, and I go to a lot of sports events but I think that the fans in races are the most enjoyable to be with because it's not like in baseball, you go to a game and you get somebody that's a New York Yankee fan they got a little bit different personality than somebody else with a lesser team . . . I don't think people, NASCAR fans, hold any grudge against one another because they don't have the same drivers.

James also added that NASCAR fans are just, "good people who like to have a good time." This common bond among over 80 thousand 'friends' who gather together at NASCAR race venues such as Daytona International Speedway, Texas Motor Speedway, and Richmond International Raceway seem only to grow stronger as each of the respective race weekends progress toward the drop of the green flag on Saturday night or Sunday afternoon.

Theme #4: Win on Sunday...Sell on Monday

When asked to discuss the role that being a NASCAR fan plays in each of the participant's lives, all of the participants discussed the importance of NASCAR merchandise and souvenirs. While discussing what race tracks he had attended Scott noted, "course' you can't leave without a bag load of souvenirs." This became a salient point among the participants, all of whom were wearing some type of NASCAR or automotive-related merchandise during their

interview (e.g., hat, t-shirt, or jacket). Ten of the 12 participants had various NASCAR stickers, license plate covers, or tow-hitch covers visible on their cars, many of which proclaimed allegiance to their favorite driver.

When asked about the #17 *DeWalt* hat which he was wearing, Scott replied, "I've got dozens of these things at home. I got a different one for every day." It was this notion of excess and pride that seemed to encompass the response of many of the participants. The souvenirs represent more than a logo or a number; they are part of the NASCAR fan culture and a symbol of 'fandom.'

Wearing her Casey Khane hat and t-shirt, holding a DeWalt #17 Matt Kenseth koozie (can holder) keeping her Budweiser beer cold, Debbie talked about the role merchandise plays in her NASCAR fandom,

I purchase the drivers' cars (miniature - die-cast) and get them autographed. I would say I have over about 100 in the last 4 years...all of them signed.

Debbie noted that by having those items and souvenirs she feels that she is letting them know that she sponsors them and "by letting them know you're behind them, ya know." She elaborated on this point, "we're cheering for him whether he wins or loses, we'll be there the next time."

The affinity for replica race-cars was something that was shared by Earl, who regaled with stories of how he "built over 70 model cars, one twenty-fourth size, NASCAR schemes." Scott also noted that, "I got a shrine to Kenseth in my house."

Carl, wearing a Jeff Gordon rain slicker and hat, noted, "it's where I like to spend my money." This statement was backed-up as he continued, "you can buy a Jeff Gordon grill cover...oh yeah, I got one of those." When asked about whether he feels that the commercialization and sponsorship within the sport has an influence on the goods and services he purchases, he answered a resounding, "Yup, I think it does." Carl continued, "as far as buying Nextel Products because of NASCAR...I guess you could say it has an influence on them." The researcher followed up by asking if this influence has an effect on the type of car he drives, he replied:

oh yeah, Monte Carlo, most definitely...I got a couple Monte Carlos, I had one black one and one white, I had a '70, but it burn't to the ground and I had an '85. I am gonna get another of these days. It's gonna be blue with flames on it and a 24, I'm serous too I am gonna' get me a Jeff Gordon replica race car and drive it around town

When asked about what wearing his Jeff Gordon shirt and hat means to him, Carl emphatically replied, "it means I am wearing the best shit you can possibly wear at the racetrack." When probed about this statement he continued by saying, "it makes me feel special because I know that my driver is the best one out there in my opinion." He continued by explaining all of the NASCAR merchandise he has at home,

Oh, I got a Jeff Gordon toothbrush and I haven't found the underwear yet, when I do find the underwear I am going to get em', I got Jeff Gordon pajamas, I got it all man I pretty much just about buy everything Jeff Gordon you can get, books to rugs, bathmat.

The influence of sponsorships on the racetrack was also evident off the racetrack, where participants noted their affinity for certain adult beverages, brands or services based on driver sponsorships. Specifically, Earl noted,

Go to our houses, Tide, DeWalt, whatever kind of coffee, Budweiser Beer...ya' know if they ain't a sponsor, well then I am lookin' around the shop for something that's out here [gesturing to the track behind him] and really is a true fact and you gonna' find that with anybody you meet today, it's gonna' be the same thing.

Scott noted a similar affinity for supporting NASCAR sponsors,

Oh yeah, I got a bottle of Smirnoff in the car over there. I'm drinking a Budweiser...but I do have the one [cell] phone company that is not a sponsor of NASCAR.

Barney elaborated on this point by stating:

I think it is with a race fan more so than the other sports, if they see something advertised, especially if their particular driver is being sponsored by it they'll buy it even if it costs twice as much. Most of the time they'll go with the sponsors, even if you're not ya know that's not your driver you'll usually buy stuff that they sponsor the cars keep the thing in business.

When Barney was asked specifically about his spending habits, he thought for a minute and said:

Ah, my wife does all the shopping and she ah, I say now buys the NASCAR stuff. And she watches races on TV all the time so she pretty much comes home with NASCAR stuff and merchandise.

Barney also noted that his loyalty does apply to cars and sponsors, "as long as you don't drive a Ford." When asked about what it meant to him to be wearing his Kyle Petty hat, without hesitation he responded, "I feel proud to wear the Petty Family."

In contrast, Ralph, a self-identified Jimmie Johnson fan whose primary sponsor is Lowe's Home Improvement Store stated, "I shop at Home Depot." He continued by saying,

I go to both, I don't discriminate against, ah, Tony Stewart. Home Depot is closer, you know where we live

it's a little easier. Some people, yeah there's a lot of people who are diehards ya' know.

Ralph also noted that, wearing his Jimmie Johnson t-shirt means, "representing my driver...and sponsorship."

Interestingly, he also noted attending the final race at Homestead Miami Speedway every year where all of the merchandise is at a 90% discount, "we go down there and buy everything for like 3 bucks, a buck, 5 bucks."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an indepth understanding of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined the following: (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan. The following section will discuss each of the major themes in relation to existing research.

Theme #1: Entry into NASCAR

Many of the participants discussed the importance of family in developing their interest in the sport of NASCAR. Ten of the participants indicated that they were introduced to the sport by a family member. Consistent with the participants, Center (1998) found that NASCAR is a 'family

sport,' providing all members of a family, regardless of age, time together both at home and at the track, passing on the love of the sport from one generation to the next. In 2002, McDonald, Milne, and Hong (2002) examined sport differences in fan motivation and found high levels of group affiliation motivation among auto racing fans. The importance of family or group affiliation is consistent with the findings of the present study, indicating a strong bond of group and family among NASCAR fans. Even the current Chairman of NASCAR, Brian France, recognized the importance of family. As he stated, "it's important for us to be a family sport" (Blake, 1998, p. 5).

It was also suggested by the participants that attending a race in person was a major influence in following the sport of NASCAR. Specifically, the participants felt that the overall experience of attending a NASCAR race was about more than just the race. Kahle et al. (1996) identified sport as having a special role in society that reaches beyond the entertainment value of the game or event itself. The sporting experience for a fan often transcends the competition to incorporate the other entertainment features attached to a specific event. Researchers have suggested that the sport experience is

becoming increasingly commercial and entertainment driven (Bernthal & Regan, 2001). It was noted that NASCAR fans "are increasingly expecting a better overall 'event experience' beyond the race itself" (Bernthal & Regan, 2001, p. 201).

The events at each race venue provided a sense of community around the track, an aspect that was also evident to the researcher at each race venue. Many of the participants noted that they had not even followed the sport prior to attending a race. Consistent with the participants and observations, research examining sport fan identity addresses the importance of inter-group relations and socialization as a key component in how individuals develop and maintain their identity as sports fans (Jacobson, 2003). This aspect of socialization was evident in the present study in the groups of fans gathered together at each racetrack tailgating. Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, and Peas (2008) recently examined the motivational profiles of sport fans of different sports which included auto racing. The researchers surveyed 886 college students who were self-identified sports fans. The researchers asked the participants to rate their level of interest in 13 different sports, (professional baseball, college and

professional football, college and professional basketball, figure skating, gymnastics, professional hockey, boxing, tennis, professional wrestling, golf, and auto racing). The researchers then ranked the responses in relation to the participant's level on interest among the eight motivational subscales (escape, economic, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetic). The findings related to fans of auto racing indicated that entertainment was a significant motivational factor of the participant's interest in the sport. Although the results for the family subscale score were not significant, the post hoc tests revealed higher family subscale scores than both gymnastics and tennis. However, the raw scores reveal that the family subscale score ranked in the top three among subscale scores for auto racing fans, indicating that family was a highly motivating factor among auto racing fans.

Theme #2: Being a NASCAR Fan

It was suggested by all of the participants that being a NASCAR fan was about more than going to races and watching them on television. The terms "dedication" and "loyalty" were echoed by the participants. Consistent with the participants, Kahle et al. (1996) found that many

sports fans have been known to have a high emotional attachment to their favorite team/athlete. The researchers also noted that sport fans seek camaraderie or a desire for fitting in with a group when attending an event (Kahle et al., 1996). This notion of 'fitting in' was evident in the similar tailgating behaviors (alcohol consumption, early arrival) and clothing (e.g., drivers' gear) worn at events. Consistent with previous research (Newman, 2007), there is a defining component among fans which signifies their NASCAR fan identity. As Newman (2007) noted real fans of drivers such as Matt Kenseth, Kasey Khane, or Denny Hamlin, "adorn merchandise that identifies their allegiance through a singular, transcendental corporate signifier: that of DeWalt; or that of Dodge; or FedEx" (p. 297). The participants noted their level of dedication to both the sport of NASCAR and their favorite driver by recalling stories of their experiences at past races and what drivers or team members they had a chance to interact with at a race. The opportunity to interact with their favorite drivers was also a key component that the participants mentioned when discussing what it means to be a NASCAR fan. Unlike other professional sports, NASCAR allows fans the opportunity to interact with drivers and crew members on a

regular basis. These interactions typically occur at the track, either through merchandise trailer autograph sessions or pit-pass access where fans are able to get up close to where NASCAR teams and drivers work throughout a race weekend.

Theme #3: "Ya'll NASCAR fans:" Fan Camaraderie

The sport of NASCAR has been dubbed one of the fastest growing sports in North America (Bernthal & Regan, 2001). Consistent with the research, many of the participants mentioned that the sport has grown over the past several years. Two of the participants also noted that the fan base has become more "diverse." This aspect of bringing individuals from diverse backgrounds together may be a byproduct of the recent rise in popularity of the sport in the United States. McGregor (2005) examined the world of NASCAR through a journalistic lens and noted a lack of diversity among NASCAR team crew members. As McGregor noted, from an "eyeball diversity check...the unscientific eyeball ratio of white to Black/Latino/Asian/all others [is] 100 to 1" (McGregor, 2005, p. 69). This observation was supported by other researchers (Newman, 2007; Newman & Giardina, 2008), who also noted overwhelming whiteness of the NASCAR fan population.

While some participants openly embraced the perceived growth in diversity among the fan base at the racetrack, one participant strongly voiced his longing for the more homogenous Caucasian fan base that was once the staple of NASCAR culture. This sentiment was touched on by many of the participants through the use of the term 'redneck.' Previous researchers and writers have also noted this aspect of the NASCAR fan culture as having a 'redneck-identity' (Hawaleshka, 2005; Poole, 2005). Several of the participants in the present study seemed to embrace this term as one of endearment and a sign of commitment to the sport of NASCAR. As Poole (2005) noted, "stock car racing resonates with very traditional views of manhood in the American South" (p. 4). The term 'redneck' appeared to reach deep into the social and cultural aspects of many NASCAR fans. Hawaleshka (2005) argued that the term is often associated with NASCAR due to a variety of factors, including its roots in Southern culture, stories of alcohol over-indulgence, or the presence of the Confederate flag often found flying at NASCAR events.

Many of the participants associated alcohol consumption with being a 'redneck.' All of the participants were visibly consuming alcohol while being

interviewed. Researchers have examined the link between alcohol consumption and being a college sports fan (Nelson & Wechsler, 2003; Wann, 1998). This research suggests that sports fans more often engage in binge drinking than non sports fans (Nelson & Wechsler, 2003). Also, more recently in 2006, Wakefield and Wann examined sport fans in an attempt to both classify them in relation to level of team identification and relationship with problem behaviors (i.e., event drinking, yelling at officials, and extent to which they are confrontational). The subjects of the study were attendees at a college football game who were not seated in the student section. The findings suggested that, "of those fans who agreed that alcohol consumption was an important part of the fan experience (19.9%), 34% were classified as being highly dysfunctional" (Wakefield & Wann, 2006, p. 180). This indicates a possible link among NASCAR fans and dysfunctional fan behaviors, given the NASCAR fan culture which openly embraces the consumption of alcohol

As previously noted, the confederate flag was observed at each of the race venues. The confederate flag is often referred to as an overt symbol of racism due to the history of racial slavery in the United States (Wikipedia, 2009).

While present at all race venues, the sport of NASCAR has attempted to separate itself from promoting the flag.

While not openly banning the confederate flag from any fan areas or racetrack parking venues, NASCAR has taken steps to disassociate itself from this controversial symbol.

Specifically, McGregor (2005) attached an Unrated Directors Cut section to the end of his book *Sunday Money* in which he noted that he had consulted on a film project with NASCAR and in the editing process was "asked to remove a shot [image] that included a Confederate flag" (McGregor, 2005, p. 14). Russell (2007), in his book examining NASCAR as one of the fastest growing spectator sports as both a businesses and a religion, noted observing a white male wearing a t-shirt with the crossed stars of the Confederate flag emblazoned across its front, captioned with "You wear your X, I'll wear mine" (p. 55). This overt sign of 'southern culture' was also evident in the works of previous researchers (Newman, 2007; Newman & Giardina 2008).

Newman (2007) examined the socio-political and religious culture of the NASCAR fan culture. More specifically, the focus of his study was an ethnographically designed critical interrogation of the

NASCAR fan culture within and around the racetrack venue. Newman and Giardina (2008) observed various signs and symbols which highlighted the lack of diversity among the NASCAR fan base. Specifically, symbols of racial inequality and intolerance in the form of signs, bumper stickers, and t-shirts proclaiming, "top ten reasons there's no black race car drivers" (Newman & Giardina, p. 490). These signs of overt, "racist paraphernalia" (Newman & Giardina, p. 484) as described by the researchers were not as openly apparent in the findings of the present study. Yet, the present study serves as an unfortunate reminder that the sport of NASCAR remains a primarily white-male dominated society. As the sport expands into more diverse markets, such as New York City and Southern California, there is a strong need to increase and promote racial diversity among the NASCAR fan community. A climate of intolerance and segregation will only serve to impair the sport's growth and expansion. The NASCAR fan culture must evolve into one which embraces diversity both within the grandstands and on the track.

Theme #4: Win on Sunday...Sell on Monday

According to Van Leewen et al. (2002), sport fans often reinforce their social identity as fans by

assimilating and associating in ways such as drinking the same cola or using the same razor as their favorite athlete or sport team. Consistent with Ven Leewen et al. (2002), the participants acknowledged the importance of wearing the gear of their favorite driver and supporting NASCAR sponsors. In addition to wearing their favorite driver's gear, all of the participants had various NASCAR stickers, license plate, and tow hitch covers on their cars, signifying their favorite NASCAR driver. Consistent with the participants, research on sport fans addresses the notion that fans will often immerse themselves in the event or game by wearing a team jersey/shirt or colors (Wann et al., 2001). Researchers have suggested that, in wearing their favorite team's/athlete's gear, the participants are enhancing their team identification and therefore their overall fandom.

The participants also discussed the importance that the various NASCAR souvenirs play in the NASCAR fan culture. From one participant talking about how she owned over 100 autographed NASCAR die cast cars, to another saying he had a NASCAR hat for every day of the week, the high amount of pride that each participant took in their souvenirs was evident. This aspect of fan behavior within

the NASCAR culture is consistent with previous research by Jacobson (2003) which found that sport fans are constantly playing roles and exhibiting role behaviors which are important in the creation of their fan identity. As each participant provided the researcher with a description of the various types of NASCAR merchandise and memorabilia they owned, they were simultaneously affirming their status as a 'true NASCAR fan.' The importance of merchandise and souvenirs within the NASCAR fan culture ultimately served to legitimize and authenticate an individual's standing as a NASCAR fan. For example, in 2002, Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak examined University of Florida football fans and found that Florida fans would wear orange and blue shirts, shoes, hats, or earrings throughout the football season as a way to increase their identification with the team.

According to Madrigal (2000), highly identified college football fans are more likely to purchase products associated with team sponsors. Consistent with the research, the participants all indicated that at some point they made purchases specifically because the brand or company was a NASCAR sponsor. Consistent with previous researchers (Amato et al., 2005; Mackeller, 2006; Newman, 2007; Newman & Giardina, 2008), NASCAR fans were found to

have strong loyalties to products and goods related to NASCAR sponsors. This was also reinforced by the fact that some participants initially indicated they did not purchase goods specifically due to their association with the sport, but after thinking about all the goods and services they consume, realized they almost always purchased NASCAR sponsored products. The sport of NASCAR has always had an umbilical link to branding and sponsorship (Golenbock & Fielden, 2003). In the early years the sponsors were local service stations; today it is hard to find an aspect of NASCAR racing that is not branded by a sponsor. The uniforms of each driver are camouflaged with names of sponsors and companies and in any interview the first words out of their mouths are those thanking their sponsors. A 2005 survey conducted by the James Madison Center for Sports Sponsorship, reported that of the 1,000 NASCAR fans polled, 36% could name the sponsor of each car ranked top 30 in the standings (Ryan, 2006).

General Discussion

This qualitative investigation was undertaken to examine NASCAR fans. The previous section utilized the themes to address the research questions. The purpose of

this section is to provide a general overall interpretation of the findings of the present study.

A major element within this general discussion is the interpretation of the results within the theoretical framework for identity formation of sport fans. As previously noted, social identity theory refers to the process by which individuals use social groups and group membership to uphold and maintain their personal identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The participants in the present study revealed a strong social component which exists among the NASCAR fan community. This aspect resonated with each of the participants by gathering with friends at the track or being in the presence of other race fans to enjoy the sport they love in a community environment. As Newman (2007) noted, "being 'part of the crowd' is an essential element in the construction of both meaning and identity in this imagined community" (p. 296). While Newman presents a critical assessment of the NASCAR fan community in a socio-political context, it does serve as a point of reference for the importance that being part of a community holds for NASCAR fans.

The present study provided insight into how NASCAR fans create and maintain their sport fan identity.

Specifically, NASCAR fans create their identity by actively seeking out opportunities to socialize with other NASCAR fans. As noted by Madrigal (1995), this process continues as individuals assimilate themselves with the norms of NASCAR fan culture and allows the individual to gain emotional significance and value within the fan culture. In the present study, individuals create their NASCAR fan identity by: (a) following and professing their love for a specific driver, (b) supporting their favorite driver's sponsors both through purchases and wearing of official merchandise with logos, and (c) remaining loyal to his/her driver through both success and failure on the racetrack.

Another key aspect which relates to the findings of the present study is the overall lack of diversity among the NASCAR fan culture. As discussed in previous sections, there is an inherent lack of racial diversity among the NASCAR fan base. Consistent with previous researchers (Newman, 2007; Newman & Giardina, 2008) and numerous sports writers (Haweleshka, 2005; MacGregor, 2005; Russell, 2007), the present study indicated a lack of African-American/black representation among the NASCAR fan base and on the racetrack. This link between a lack of African-American race car drivers and African-American fan

population must not be overlooked in examining the sport of NASCAR and the surrounding fan base of the sport. Often lost within this struggle for racial diversity is the lack of gender representation within the sport itself.

The sport of NASCAR asserts that over 40% of their audience is female, which accounts for approximately 40% of overall race attendees (Amato et al., 2005). This large representation of the fan base dwarfs the number of females working within the catch fence of NASCAR. There are currently no female crew-chiefs or drivers working within NASCAR'S top division. In the past, there have been female drivers competing in various levels of the NASCAR three-tier series structure: (a) Camping World Truck Series, (b) Nationwide Series, and (c) Sprint Cup Series (NASCAR home page, 2009). The present study included only 16% women, which is far below the 40% statistic presented by the sports governing body. While the participants in the study cannot be considered a true representation of the entire NASCAR fan population, it does raise the question of whether the sports fan base is as gender neutral as advertised by the sports governing body.

The final point of exploration within this section examines the findings of the present study in relation to

the existing literature on NASCAR fans in general. The sport of NASCAR has been challenged by recent growth to satisfy its hardcore fan base (Amato et al., 2005). As previously noted, the sport has put together advertising campaigns designed to lure back the core fan (NASCAR begins campaign that targets core fan base, 2008). According to Howell (1997), identification with the sport of NASCAR is what separates core fans from casual viewers of the sport. A high level of identification with the sport of NASCAR was expressed by all of the participants in the present study. This indicates that the present study potentially sampled solely hardcore NASCAR fans, thus indicating the present study may have uncovered key aspects of the identity development of NASCAR fans which could aid in the retention of these 'hardcore' fans throughout the expansion of the sport to new markets outside of the heartland of the sport. More specifically, the sport could adapt and implement concepts of increased fan socialization away from the track, either by promoting viewing parties for races in various cities or other types of social gathering for fans. These actions could be funded and supported by existing sponsors of the sport, thus enhancing the brand association and loyalty among the core fan base. The present study

provides insight into how the sport of NASCAR can address the challenges in retaining the hardcore fan base both today and throughout the development of the sport into the next millennium.

Implications for researchers

The focus of the present study is to examine what it means to be a NASCAR fan. During the process of attending the three race venues, soliciting participants, compiling field notes, and analyzing the data the researcher was totally focused on the research endeavor. The process of participant selection was completed in a single day. At each venue the researcher would arrive at the track several hours prior to the start of the races and recruit participants for the present study. It may be beneficial for future researchers to expand the timeframe of participant recruitment to the entire race weekend. In allowing an extended period of time to recruit participants, the researcher would have the potential to include a greater number in future studies. This could be accomplished by attending various events which coincide with a NASCAR Sprint Cup race, such as practice and qualifying sessions. Also, throughout the Sprint Cup season there are numerous race venues which host both

Nationwide and/or Camping World Truck Series races during the same weekend as Sprint Cup Series race.

Researchers should also be aware that a NASCAR parking/tailgate area provides a unique environment in which to conduct interviews. Specifically, the researcher should be prepared to deal with various interruptions from friends and family of participants throughout each interview. These interruptions from friends and family should not be viewed as disruptive to the research process, but rather embraced as part of the NASCAR tailgate culture.

Recommendations for professionals

Several recommendations have arisen from this study which will be helpful for sports marketing professionals working within the realm of professional sports.

The participants in the study consisted of 10 male and 2 female NASCAR fans, all of whom were Caucasian. This noted, overly apparent lack of racial diversity among the population of NASCAR fans can serve as a way for professionals to learn from apparent failed marketing and promotional techniques implemented by NASCAR to improve the sport's diversity. This could be accomplished through outreach into diverse community organizations that otherwise may not have access to attend races.

Specifically, the creation of a partnership between NASCAR and community groups that reward children and families who strive to excel both at school and within the community with opportunities to attend races. The development of community outreach programs such as these will increase diversity among the fan base and provide exposure to the sport of NASCAR to a new population of sport fans.

Sports marketing professionals will benefit from the findings of the current study by creating more opportunities for fans of various sport types to gather and share their sport fan experiences. This could be accomplished by offering events, gatherings, and other opportunities for fans to socialize together and create bonds with each other which will enhance their specific sport fan identity, thus enhancing their affinity for the specific team or sport. More specifically, gatherings for fans of specific teams in a local or non-local area to view the team on TV could serve to enhance the sport fan identity through the interaction with other individuals who share their love for the specific sport team.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich, thick description of what it means to be a NASCAR fan. More specifically, the researcher examined the following; (a) how NASCAR fans create their sport fan identity, (b) how being a NASCAR fan influences their overall identity, and (c) the social and cultural aspects associated with being a NASCAR fan. The following section will discuss each of the major themes in relation to existing research.

To attempt to explore such aspects, the following research questions were examined:

1. How do NASCAR fans become interested in the sport?
2. What does it mean to be called a "NASCAR" fan?
3. How do NASCAR fans develop their sport fan

Summary

The participants consisted of 12 self-identified NASCAR fans. Ten of the participants were male and two of the participants were female.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in an attempt to discern the ways in which NASCAR fans develop, maintain and reinforce their sport fan identity. All

interviews were conducted at one of three race venues (Daytona International Speedway, Texas Motor Speedway, & Richmond International Raceway). The approximate length of time of each interview varied (25 - 40 min). The interview process was concluded when the researcher completed asking all questions on the interview guide and felt that each participant had discussed being a NASCAR fan to individual saturation. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Upon completion of the transcription process, the transcripts were repeatedly read by the researcher. As the researcher studied each individual interview transcript, notes were taken to enhance the ability of the researcher to compile all of the information within each interview.

The data were analyzed using both open and axial coding processes, which elicited common themes for the researcher to conduct further detailed analysis. These findings were then arranged in a coherent manner. The four themes representing the participants' interviews included; (a) Entry into NASCAR, (b) Being A NASCAR Fan, (C) "Ya'll NASCAR fans": Fan Camaraderie, and (d) Win on Sunday...Sell on Monday.

Conclusions

The conclusions presented below are based upon 12 interviews with self-identified NASCAR fans.

According to the fans in this study, their affinity for the sport of NASCAR has been fostered by close friends and family. Whether they grew up going to the racetrack with their dad or were persuaded by a close friend to attend a race, the experience of attending a NASCAR Sprint Cup event propelled them on a lifelong journey following the sport. The unique and special experience of being at a NASCAR race fostered an overwhelming sense of community among the participants.

The aspect of community emerged from an overwhelming expression of camaraderie, friendliness, and hospitality among the participants in this study. All of the participants articulated their affinity for fellow NASCAR fans and spending time with other fans at the track, serving as a way of enhancing their sport fan identity. One of the participants openly and passionately noted his distaste for the added racial diversity within the population of NASCAR fans. This notion on racial intolerance, while not echoed by any other participants in this study, had a visual presence at each of the three

racetracks in the form of the confederate flag. This image of the confederate flag has been overwhelmingly shunned by NASCAR's governing body, although it remained a constant symbol at Daytona International Speedway, Texas Motor Speedway, and Richmond International Raceway.

According to the 12 NASCAR fans in this study the role of NASCAR merchandise was an important component in expressing their fan identity. All of the participants were wearing some type of NASCAR driver or team apparel. The level of pride that they took in their collection served as a means to legitimize and enhance their NASCAR fandom. The display of these symbols of fandom are overwhelming, both in the fact that almost every person observed at each race venue was wearing some type of NASCAR driver or team apparel, and the display of merchandise in the form of stickers on cars, flags flying with driver numbers, or tailgate accessories embossed with NASCAR logos and symbols.

The 12 participants in this study all considered themselves 'true' NASCAR fans. Being a 'true' NASCAR fan meant being loyal to one's driver, regardless of his standing. A true NASCAR fan has commitment and dedication to the sport. There were numerous examples of dedication

observed at each race track, such as a 7:00 a.m. traffic jam outside of Richmond International Raceway when the green flag didn't drop on that night's race until after 7:40 p.m. For one of the participants, being a 'true' NASCAR fan was consuming alcoholic beverages for breakfast. While only one of the participants shared his feelings on breakfast beverages, it was clearly evident that alcoholic beverages were an accepted norm within the NASCAR fan culture.

The overwhelming amount of sponsorship within the sport of NASCAR was something that many of the participants viewed as having an impact on their behavior as a consumer. Some of the fans noted that they try to exclusively purchase NASCAR sponsor brands, such as DeWalt tools and Budweiser Beer. Three of the participants expressed an attitude that they felt that other fans purchase based on NASCAR sponsorship, but they did not. Interestingly, all of those who made a point to say that they did not purchase goods based on a NASCAR sponsorship, contradicted themselves by naming several NASCAR sponsored products they purchase on a regular basis.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of the present study suggest the following directions for future research on NASCAR fans.

1. A replication of the present study is needed with a more ethnically diverse representation of the NASCAR fan base.

2. A replication of the present study is needed with a more encompassing geographical presence which includes all racetracks which host NASCAR Sprint Cup events.

3. A replication of this study is needed with a longitudinal component which can serve to further explain the maintenance of NASCAR sport fan identity.

4. A replication of the present study is needed which includes analysis of NASCAR team member's and driver's perceptions of fan behaviors to better understand the unique and special dynamic which exists between fans and stars/players in the sport of NASCAR.

5. This study demonstrated the overwhelming sense of community that exists among NASCAR fans. Future research should examine sport fans of other sports to provide further insight and understanding regarding the existence of a sport fan community within specific sports.

6. A future is needed with a mixed methodology approach which utilizes both interviews and a survey instrument to assess level of fan identification to provide a more all encompassing analysis of NASCAR fan identity in relation to the level of fan identification.

7. This study demonstrated the presence of a gap in cultural and racial diversity among NASCAR fans. Future research should examine the culture of NASCAR fans from a critical race theory perspective to better understand and help bridge this gap.

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Appendix A

Pilot Interview Guide

1. When did you become interested in NASCAR? How? Why?
2. What does it mean to you to be called a "NASCAR fan"?
3. Which driver/drivers do you cheer for?
 - Does being a fan simply mean cheering for #48 or #24...what is it that makes you a "fan"?
4. How did you decide which driver to cheer for? & Why?
 - (This question stems from the fact that unlike most other sports there is no geographical association attached to an individual fan or driver; i.e. like the Philadelphia Eagles --- thus, no inherent loyalty or interest is present.)
5. How has the sport changed over the past 5-10 years or how do you see it changing in the next 5 years?
6. How many races do you attend a year? How do you decide which races to attend & WHY?
 - This questions centers around the recent 'boom' in NASCAR and more specifically the fact that certain races/tracks have become so expensive that many of the 'original' supporters of the sport have simply been priced out of contention to get tickets and/or attend the races (i.e. Bristol Motor Speedway)
7. Given the commercialization of the sport, do you feel that the goods/service you purchase are

influenced by sponsorships that (your favorite driver name) has or the association of a product to the sport (i.e. NEXTEL cellular phone service?

- How has or does the fact that Dale Jr. drives a Monte Carlo influence you only buying American made cars? Why?

8. Do you wear any NASCAR apparel or merchandise?
If yes, what does it mean to you to wear a
(your favorite driver) hat, t-shirt

Appendix B

Consent Form

TITLE: NASCAR Fan Identity

Principal Researcher's Name: Erin M. Halloran, M.S

Advisor's Name: Emily A. Roper, Ph.D., Department of
Kinesiology (215) 204-1947

Department of Kinesiology, Phone Number (215) 204-1940

I am currently engaged in a study examining the experiences of National Association for Stock Car Racing (NASCAR) fans and how being a fan affects one's overall identity. To help gain further insight into this area, I am asking you to complete a demographic form and participate in a face to face interview. The demographic form and interview will focus on your experiences as a NASCAR fan. Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of your time.

None of the procedures used will expose you to any physical and/or emotional risk, discomforts, and/or inconvenience.

The data you will provide will be assigned a number and your participation in this study will be held in confidence. Pseudonyms will be used in any and all written and verbal discussion of the findings or results of this project.

I welcome questions about the study at any time. Your participation is on a voluntary basis, and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

Questions about my rights as a research participant may be directed to Mr. Richard C. Throm, Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, Broad and Ontario Streets, Hudson, Third Floor, Philadelphia, Pa. 19140, phone (215) 707-8757.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Dates

Appendix C

Permission to Audiotape

Researcher's Name: Erin M. Halloran, M.S.
 Department: Kinesiology
 Project Title: NASCAR Fan Identity

Subject Name: _____

Date: _____

Pseudonym: _____

I give Erin M. Halloran, M.S. permission to audiotape me.
 This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose:

_____CLINICAL

This audiotape will be used as part of my treatment. It will not be shown to anyone but my treatment team, my family, and myself.

_____EDUCATION

This audiotape may be to education professionals for educational purposes. At no time will my name be used.

 X RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

_____MARKETING/PUBLIC INFORMATION

This audiotape will be used to promote to educational or health professionals, referral sources, and/or general public. At no time will my name be used.

_____OTHER

Description:

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: February 2006 to May 2006.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give my permission for these tapes to be used from February 2006 until February 2007.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Temple University in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

If I want further information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Researcher's Name: Erin M. Halloran, M.S.

Department: Kinesiology

Institution: Temple University

Street Address: 137 Pearson Hall

City: Philadelphia State: Pa.

Zip Code: 19122

Phone Office: (215) 204-1940

Email: emhtrail@temple.edu

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

Please Print

Participant's Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ email: _____

Participant's Signature:

(Or signature of parent or legally responsible person if participant is a minor or is incompetent to sign)

Relationship to

Participant: _____

Participant cannot sign because: _____

but consents orally to be audiotaped under the conditions described above.

Participant's Signature Date

Principal Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix D
Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____

Sex: ___ Male ___ Female

Ethnicity: ___ White/Caucasian ___ African American
 ___ Hispanic ___ Latino
 ___ Asian/Asian American ___ Other

Marital Status: ___ Single
 ___ Married/Committed Relationship

Hometown: _____

Occupation: _____

Favorite Driver/s: _____

What racetracks have you attended a NASCAR Winston/Nextel Cup Race:

___ Atlanta Motor Speedway ___ Bristol Motor Speedway
___ California Speedway ___ Chicagoland Speedway
___ Darlington Raceway ___ Daytona Int'l Speedway
___ Diver Int'l Speedway ___ Gateway Int'l Raceway
___ Homestead-Miami ___ Infineon Raceway
___ Kansas Speedway ___ Kentucky Speedway
___ Mansfield Motorsports Speedway
___ New Hampshire Int'l Speedway
___ Las Vegas Motor Speedway
___ Lowe's Motor Speedway
___ Indianapolis Motor Speedway
___ Indianapolis Raceway Park

___ Other (please identify):_____

How many years have you been a fan of NASCAR Winston/Nextel Cup Racing? _____

How many NASCAR Nextel Cup Races do you attend per year?

How many NASCAR Winston/Nextel Cup Races have you attended in the past 5 years? _____

Appendix E

Interview Guide

Entry Statement:

- My name is Erin Halloran and I am a graduate student at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA conducting a study examining the experiences of NASCAR fans. I was wondering if you would mind taking some time to talk with about what being a NASCAR fan means to you?
-

- When did you become interested in NASCAR? How? Why?
- What does it mean to you to be called a "NASCAR fan"?
- How would you describe the culture of NASCAR fans?
- Does being a fan simply mean cheering for #48 or #24...what is it that makes you a "fan"?
- How did you decide which driver to cheer for? & Why?
- Do you freely disclose that you are a NASCAR fan to friends outside of the racing culture?
 - How do people react when you tell them you're a NASCAR fan?
- Do you tend to interact with other fans at races? How does this make you feel?
- Do you consider being a NASCAR fan part of your identity as a person?
- How has the sport changed over the years you have been a fan or how do you see it changing in the next 5 years?

- What is your perception of these changes?
 - o How do you decide which races to attend & WHY?
 - o Given the commercialization of the sport, do you feel that the goods/services you purchase are influenced by sponsorships that (your favorite driver name) has or the association of a product to the sport (i.e. NEXTEL cellular phone service)?
 - How has or does the Chevy cars because Dale Jr. drives a Monte Carlo...only buying American made cars? Why?
 - o Do you wear any NASCAR apparel or merchandise?
 - If yes, what does it mean to you to wear a (your favorite driver) hat, t-shirt, etc...around?
 - What types of merchandise do you purchase, other than clothing?
 - o Is there anything that I failed to touch upon in relation to being a NASCAR fan, which you would like to share?
- Thank you very much for taking time to speak with me and enjoy your day!