FROM WHINING TO WINNING: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF A CHAMPIONSHIP ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Cori Coleman: From Whining to Winning: An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of a Championship on Consumer Behavior
(Under the direction of Johnathan Jensen)

In 2016, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series, and for the first time in Cubs’ fans’ lives, they were champions. This study sought to understand the effects of a 1st time championship without the bias of expectations from previous success on various demographic groups.

The resulting exploratory research paper utilized the Cubs’ win as a natural experiment. A total of 202 fans responded to an online survey placed on Cubs fan sites on social media. Among other results, data analysis indicated that team identification was significant in affecting a fan’s propensity to BIRG and predicted nearly five percent of the variance in the propensity to BIRG. Overall, the included factors were successfully able to predict 8% of the variance in propensity to BIRG. This study shined a light on what factors may predict BIRGing behaviors on a group of fans that have finally celebrated a long-awaited championship.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like thank my thesis advisor Dr. Jensen of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at the University of North Carolina. Dr. Jensen’s door was always open whenever I ran into trouble or I had a question about statistics. He provided guidance throughout this project but still allowed for this paper to be my own.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIRFing  Basking in Reflected Failure
BIRGing  Basking in Reflected Glory
CORFing  Cutting Off Reflected Failure
CORSing  Cutting Off Reflected Success
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Vince Lombardi once said “Winning isn’t everything—but wanting to win is.” For many, the appeal of sport lies in the opportunity to be a part of a cohesive group and to feel the pride generated by being associated with a winning team. Unfortunately for many fans, however, they have aligned themselves with teams that have not had the success on the playing field that produces such pride. Consider, for example, the Cleveland Indians’ 68-year World Series drought, the Texas A&M failure for 75 years to win a national title in football, the Detroit Lions without a Superbowl win for 60 years, and Northwestern University lacking a national basketball tournament appearance for 78 years. There are relatively few fans who have experienced a championship and felt the happiness that comes from being associated with the winning team. Yet, even though championships and the glory that comes from those lofty victories are few and far between, many fans remain loyal to their teams and enjoy the process.

It is easy to be a fan when a team is successful. For decades, this phenomenon has been defined as Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing) and was determined through experiments that measure association with a favorite team after a win (Cialdini et al., 1976). After Cialdini’s initial study, subsequent researchers have developed the concept of BIRGing further and have coined correlating theories to describe other tendencies associated with fans’ team identification. Such studies have focused on the relationship between success or lack thereof and fans’ tendencies no longer to associate themselves with their favorite teams. These studies identified
the theories of Cutting off Reflected Failure (CORFing) (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986) and Cutting off Reflected Success (CORSing) (Campbell, Aiken, & Kent, 2004). Campbell et al. (2004) further developed a theory to explain fans who have stuck by losing teams, terming such behavior as Basking in Reflected Failure (BIRFing).

Not surprisingly, many people tend to associate themselves with winners and to disassociate themselves from losers. Yet, as evidenced by the fans of the Cleveland Indians, Texas A&M Aggies, Detroit Lions, and Northwestern Wildcats, some sports teams and those who identify as their fans have gone against the norm and continued to support their (losing) teams. While many studies have helped to define and explain the relationship between fan team identification and the level of the team’s success, to date no study has researched the effect of a long-awaited championship on the relationship between fan and (now winning) team. While it is expected that a team’s success affects propensity to BIRG in a positive manner, for teams whose fans have experienced BIRFing for a lifetime, the effect of a long-awaited success has not been explored or documented through research.

This research will utilize the natural experiment of the Chicago Cubs’ 2016 World Series victory. Prior to this World series win, the Cubs suffered a record drought of 108 years. As a consequence, virtually no current Cubs fan had experienced a championship during his or her lifetime. This situation provides a unique chance to explore the effect of a new championship on fan identification, without being skewed by the possible impact of prior championships. Despite the lengthy drought, Cubs fans remained loyal to the team and continued to proudly support or BIRF. This study will explore how the impact of a championship varies based on demographic data and the level of identification of fans.
Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to explore how a championship success of a long-suffering favorite team impacts the sport consumer’s propensity to BIRG. BIRGing behaviors have been found to directly impact consumer consumption tendencies. The results of this study could be used by sport managers to enhance their marketing efforts and promotions in order to maximize the revenue generation capabilities of the championship and to illuminate which fans are most susceptible to marketing campaigns following the win. Having the opportunity of a natural experiment, it is now possible to examine the effects of a championship win for the first time in a fan’s memory on a fan base that is known for their loyalty.

Research Questions:

Following an exhaustive review of literature on the subject at hand, these research questions were developed to help direct the research:

[RQ 1] Describe a consumer’s self-reported propensity to BIRG following a championship by his or her favorite team.

[RQ 2] While controlling for the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on a fan’s propensity to BIRG vary based on the consumer’s level of identification with the team?

[RQ 3] While controlling for the level of identification of the consumer with the team and the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on a consumer’s propensity to BIRG vary based on gender?

[RQ 4] While controlling for the level of identification of the consumer with the team and the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on the consumer’s propensity to BIRG vary based on age?
[RQ 5] While controlling for the level of identification of the consumer with the team and the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on the consumer’s propensity to BIRG vary based on marital status?

[RQ 6] While controlling for the level of identification of the consumer with the team and the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on the consumer’s propensity to BIRG vary based on how long he or she has been a fan?

[RQ 7] While controlling for the level of identification of the consumer with the team and the number of games attended, does the impact of a championship on the consumer’s propensity to BIRG vary based on income?

Definition of Terms:

- **BIRGing**: Basking in Reflected Glory. Developed by Cialdini et al. (1976). Further explained in literature review.
- **BIRFing**: Basking in Reflected Failure. Developed by Campbell, Aiken and Kent (2004). Further explained in literature review.
- **CORFing**: Cutting off Reflected Failure. Developed by Snyder, Lassegard and Ford (1986). Further explained in literature review.
- **CORSing**: Cutting off Reflected Success. Developed by Campbell, Aiken and Kent (2004). Further explained in literature review.
- **Drought**: instances in which a team has suffered a lengthy period of time without winning a championship.
- **Fan**: a person who has self-identified as a supporter of a specific team.
Assumptions:

- Subjects responded to each of the survey questions with honesty and objectivity.
- All of the information obtained from the survey will remain confidential and anonymous.
- The subjects voluntarily participated in this study and completed all questions on the survey.
- The selected sample of fans was representative of the overall fan population for the team.
- The information provided by the selected sample of fans was representative of the overall fan population for the team.
- The impact of the Cubs’ winning season on Cubs fans’ propensity to BIRG can reasonably be extended to fans of other teams who have experienced a drought in winning championships.

Limitations:

- For each question, participants were given a range of answers based on a numeric scale.
- This analysis involved a single, professional baseball team which may limit the number of other teams to which these results could be generalized.
- The results of this survey may not be directly applicable to collegiate sports or to other professional sports leagues.

Delimitations:

- Access was limited to fans with access to online fan message boards through Facebook and other fan sites.
- The surveyed group of fans was limited to those who self-identify as fans and joined a fan group for the team.
Significance of the study

Previous research, through staged experiments, has developed theories to explain the relationship between fan identification and previous team success. In contrast, this study will explore the effects of a first-time championship within the fan’s lifetime on the fan’s relationship to the team and his or her overall propensity to BIRG and the resulting consumer behavior tendencies. Moving beyond prior research, this study analyzes how sport success of a championship team changes the interaction between fan and team. An extensive literature search revealed no published study on the effects of a long-awaited championship on the team’s fans.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Sport Consumption Behavior

Throughout history, sports have been a venue for athletes to compete and for fans to seek entertainment, socialization, and relaxation. As this societal construct has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry, researchers have examined sport consumer behavior. Research based on sport consumer behavior allows for sport marketers to improve and target marketing activities and promotions, create or reinvent sports products, monitor price changes and sensitivities, redesign playing facilities, and improve the overall sport experience for this unique customer segment (Stewart, Smith & Nicholson, 2003). Sport consumption is multi-faceted and involves a great deal more than simply attending games.

Many sport behavior researchers have found a connection between the social nature of sport and the relationships and sense of belonging that comes from fandom. Sloan (1979) found six psychological benefits that sports offer to fans. These benefits range from a sense of belonging that comes from identification with a team, to deviation from everyday monotony, stimulation, a release of tension and aggression, entertainment and vicarious achievement, as well as a sense of success through the accomplishments of the fan’s team (Sloan, 1979). These benefits can also be described as a way to create social identity. Social identity is the way in which a person expresses his or her personal values and beliefs derived from his membership in a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Through membership in a group, in this case the
community consisting of fans of a sports team, individuals engage in group social identity, and take on characteristics of the group. A fundamental desire for ingroup behavior is a want for positive self-esteem, which can be gained through positive evaluations from those in the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals are motivated to behave in a manner that distinguishes positive reputations for the in-group and differentiates them from the outgroup, and in order to achieve social identity, an individual must internalize membership in the group (Hogg, 2003). Because fans are able to derive significant pleasure from watching sporting events and becoming part of the ingroup, it is important to understand these effects and the potential business goals that may be achieved from capitalizing on cravings which are appeased through sports.

Consumption involves not only direct interaction with the object but also using the consumption objects as a resource through which to interact with fellow consumers. Holt (1995) recognized that spectators commune when they voice to other fans how they are experiencing the consumption object (the game/match), so that their interactions with the game become a mutual experience. Frequently, spectators further this experience by engaging in imaginary interactions with managers, players, and umpires, essentially creating and playing out a fantasy in which they are in charge of the play on the field, even going so far as to claim that their actions influence the game (Holt, 1995).

Allegiances and Team Identification

Research on fans of sport teams has played a role in facilitating understanding of sport consumer behaviors and attitudes in order to educate sports managers regarding how to package and deliver the sport product effectively. Wann, Tucker, & Schrader (1996) noted that sport consumers start and maintain their support of a team for three primary reasons: 1) geographical location, 2) success of the team, and 3) peer and community support for the team. Other
potential reasons that could factor into an initial decision to identify as a fan of a team are the importance of family and friends who also are fans and the experiences of game attendance and tailgating (Kolbe & James, 2000). This analysis showcases the basis for fans to attach to a team. Attachment is the progression that occurs when an individual creates emotional, functional and symbolic connections to and adoption of the concepts, opinions, and images related to a team or sport (Funk & James, 2006). This process describes how a sport team elicits more robust attitudinal assessments (Funk et al., 2000), consistent with the basic core values developed from everyday life and other consumption experiences (Kahle et al., 2001). Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000) suggest motives for being a spectator influence both team identification level and expectancies. As the spectators’ expectations are positively confirmed and exceeded on the basis of performance, the spectators’ overall enjoyment and satisfaction with the game increases.

Mahony (1995) defined team identification as “the degree to which a fan defines him/herself by the same attribute that defines the sport team” (p. 12). When a sport consumer identifies closely with an organization, he or she feels a sense of connectedness, resulting in the fan defining himself or herself in terms of the organization (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). In one of the first studies to examine the extent of team identification, Wann and Branscombe (1993) conducted a study in which they created a scale to measure the level (high, moderate or low) of identification by fans with a team. The authors created a scale to measure the level of identification and coded each respondent into one of the three groups. The respondents who were classified as high identifiers were more involved and invested with the team, were more optimistic about the team’s chances for success, and had a more positive attitude concerning the team’s performance and the team’s future potential than the subjects who
were classified as low or moderate identifiers with the team. Additionally, the authors found that high identifiers were more likely to value whether their friends were fans of the team and to feel a meaningful connection with other fans of that team, even if they lacked a pre-existing relationship with those other fans (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The Wann and Branscombe scale has been used in many subsequent studies in order to determine the level of team identification.

Team identification can cause changes in sport consumer behavior based on team success. Kimble and Cooper (1992) found significant effects on fans’ moods based on whether their team was winning or losing. Results indicated fans of a winning team were elated, while fans of the losing team were disappointed. Based on the idea that winning fans experience such positive moods and losing fans experience such negative moods, sensations-seeking could be a potential motivation for fans to identify with a team (Kimble & Cooper, 1992). Fans are willing to risk the potential devastation of being associated with a losing team, because each game offers a new possibility for the team to win and for the fan to experience the elation that comes from success and winning. Fans were even more pleased after an unexpected win or good performance and, similarly, were even more displeased after an unexpected loss or poor performance (Trail, Anderson, and Fink, 2000).

Kwon, Trail and James (2007) explored the potential effects of perceived value of the relationship between team identification and the willingness to purchase team licensed apparel. While it may be tempting to believe that fans who have a high level of team identification would be willing to pay any price for team merchandise, the authors found that even those with a high level of team identification might be concerned about price. The perceived value of the product had a much stronger impact on their purchasing decisions (Kwon, Trail & James, 2007).
Kahle, Kambara, and Rose (1996) studied the motivation for fans to attend college football games. The authors found that internalization, compliance, camaraderie, obligation, identification, self-definition, and self-expression were at play, but only compliance, identification and internalization affected attendance in a positive way.

There has been a great deal of research on whether identification as a fan of a specific team has helped to form a sense of community and a feeling of belonging. Branscombe and Wann (1991) found a positive relationship between team identification and positive self-esteem and experiences and, conversely, a negative correlation between team identification and feelings of loneliness and alienation. It is important to note that these results were apparent regardless whether the team was winning or losing (Branscombe & Wann, 1991).

*Exploring the BIRGing Phenomenon*

It is quite common to see fans support their team by wearing branded clothing with a team logo or saying, especially leading up to a big game and following a big victory. In sports, this has been termed basking in reflected glory (BIRGing). Cialdini et al. (1976) was the first to conduct research to explore the depths of this sport consumer theory. This study concluded that, as a result of BIRGing, even when fans had zero direct involvement with the outcome of the game, they still enjoyed the satisfaction that comes with supporting the team. Although the basic terms of this theory had been noted by previous research, Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) were the first to delve deeply into the reasons and the sport consumer behavioral results from fans experiencing BIRGing. These researchers conducted three groundbreaking studies which provided a foundation for future research on the BIRGing phenomenon.
In the first study, Cialdini et al. (1976) researched the effects of success on a devoted fan group, theorizing that the fans would demonstrate BIRGing by publicly broadcasting their affiliation with the winning team, even though their fandom had no effect on the outcome of the game. By following the student fans of seven powerful football universities, the researchers confirmed their theory. The subjects of the study were observed to wear more clothing with the university athletic logos on Mondays following a win than after a loss (Cialdini et. al., 1976). This seminal study generated interest in the field of sport consumer theory and has allowed for researchers and sport marketers to understand better how athletic success can affect sport consumption. The next two studies utilized telephone calls to students who attended two different state universities known to have powerful football teams. The researchers focused on the language used by student fans when describing the successes and failures of their football teams. Student fans were more likely to use the pronoun “we” in order to associate themselves with a positive source (a winning football team) than with a negative source (a losing football team) and were twice as likely to use the term “we” after a win than a loss (Cialdini et. al., 1976). This research created the baseline for theories on sport consumer behavior and are often used as a starting point in new research. Forty years after these studies were completed, researchers still are following and replicating the trends discovered in the initial studies. Jensen et al. (2016) confirmed that sport consumer behavior (in the form of apparel wearing) continues to be influenced by the success of the team the previous weekend. In their study, Jensen et al. (2016) confirmed that the use of the pronoun “we” is used after success as fans will attempt to credit themselves with the success (Jensen et. al., 2016).

After his three classic studies, Cialdini furthered his previous work by introducing the theory of Blasting (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Blasting refers to the idea of creating distance
from rival groups by projecting negative claims onto fans or members of the outgroups. Cialdini and Richardson (1980) researched this theory by observing the reactions of students from two rival in-state institutions to reports of their performance on a test. The students from the university who were told that they performed more poorly on the test were more likely to criticize and ridicule, thus Blast, their peers from the outgroup (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). This supports the theory of Blasting because the low performers were not looking to enhance their own reputation, but instead attempted to lower the assessment of the rival school, thus evening the playing field.

After the seminal research on BIRGing, researchers expanded their reach to explore other phenomena related to sport consumer behavior. Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986) were the first researchers to explore what happens when fans experience defeat, hypothesizing that fans would engage in behavior which is the opposite of BIRGing. The researchers found that, while BIRGing may be a common trend for sport consumers, many fans also will attempt to disassociate themselves from a team when that team is less successful. This phenomenon has been termed Cutting Off Reflected Failure (CORFing). Subjects who were placed into a group given negative feedback were more likely to distance themselves from the group than their counterparts who were placed in a positive results group (Snyder, Lassegard & Ford, 1986). The CORFing phenomenon can be explained as an image protection tactic. By cutting off the association with those who have failed, a person is able to maintain that such failure does not include him or her and he or she thereby can avoid a negative evaluation by others (Snyder, Lassegard & Ford, 1986).

Furthering these primary studies on BIRGing and CORFing, Wann and Branscombe (1990) sought to understand the relationship between team identification and propensity to act
consistently with the theories of BIRGing, Blasting, and CORFing. The researchers hypothesized that fans who were high in team identification would be less likely to engage in CORFing behaviors than fans who were moderate or low identifiers with the team. They also expected to find that those same high identifiers would have a higher likelihood to engage in BIRGing behaviors after a success than the low and moderate identifiers. The researchers’ findings supported these hypothesizes, indicating that fans who are high identifiers are more likely to BIRG and less likely to CORF (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). In a more recent study, Trail et al. (2012) re-tested this theory, examining the relationship between team identification level, the corresponding likelihood to experience vicarious achievement, and the propensity to BIRG or CORF. After observing fans of two teams involved in a national college football championship game, the researchers found that, regardless of the amount of identification those fans exhibited pregame, fans of the winning team had similar levels of BIRGing behaviors and experienced vicarious achievement (Trail, Kim, Kwon, Harrolle, Braunstein-Minkove, & Dick, 2012).

In addition to these three fan behavior theories, researchers have developed two additional ideas to explain behaviors which do not fit into the situations described above. In the first case, a team may have a negative performance, but its fans remain loyal and positive. This phenomenon is call Basking in Reflected Failure (BIRFing). BIRFing is associated with a team that has experienced a long drought from winning, the fans of which continue to remain loyal and publicly in support of the team. Even while the team is losing, its fans revel in the sense of community, the shared loyalty and the camaraderie that comes from belonging to this group (Campbell, Aiken & Kent, 2004). BIRFing allows fans to display their loyalty, even in times of extreme failure, labeling such fans as “die-hard.” The second case refers to the situation in
which the team is experiencing a successful run, but its fans no longer choose to associate themselves with the team. This phenomenon has been termed Cutting of Reflected Success (CORSing). Although this situation is not common, researchers have found that fans may dissociate themselves from a team because of rebelliousness, a need for individuality, and fear of success (Campbell, Aiken & Kent, 2004).

Based on an extensive literature review, the survey utilized in this research sought to understand the effect of a first-time championship. Previous work had focused on teams with a history of success. Wann, Tucker, & Schrader (1996) noted that previous success was one of the main motivators for team allegiances and Cialdini et al. (1976) conducted the seminal studies on historically successful teams. This research will examine the moment that a team’s success level switches and the resulting consumer behavior tendencies.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized quantitative research in order to study fans of the Chicago Cubs and their propensity to BIRG in the months following the Cubs’ first World Series Championship during the lifetimes of the fans. A survey was designed to gather data and investigate the difference in BIRGing behaviors of Cubs fans after the momentous championship win. The researchers studied fans’ levels of identification with their team and used this score and other key demographics as a predictor of fans’ overall propensity to BIRG.

Sample and Procedure

An online survey was used to collect this data. The researchers posted a survey on Cubs fan social media sites and Cubs fan message boards. The survey was posted on:

- Facebook Fan Sites:
  - Chicago Cubs Fan Central
  - Chicago Cubs Fans
  - Chicago Cubs Fan Page
  - Chicago Cubs Super Fans
  - Chicago Cubs Chat
  - Chicago Cubs Fans for Life
  - Cubs Fans in Nebraska
  - Cubs Win!
  - Chicago Cubs-Greatest Fans in the World!
  - Fantastic Cubs Fans
  - Friends who love the Chicago Cubs
  - Chicago Cub Fan Group 1
  - Everything Chicago Cubs
  - Blue and White
At the time of the data collection in the Spring of 2017, the Cubs has just won their first World Series Championship in 108 years. The first question of the survey allowed the researchers to weed out any non-Cubs fans in order to limit the study to subjects who self-identify as Cubs fans. Participation in this survey was completely voluntary and could be stopped at any time. Participants were offered a chance to win one of seven gift cards for $50.00 each in exchange for participation in the study.

Instrumentation:

This survey utilized the Sport Spectator Identification Survey (SSIS) (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This three-item instrument measures levels of team identification among respondents. The SSIS is recognized as a valid and reliable method to measure team identification and allows for behavioral, emotional and intellectual reactions to be noted and compared between fans. The following are a sample group of questions that utilize a seven-point Likert format. “I consider myself to be a “real” fan of my favorite team”; “I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of my favorite team”; and “Being a fan of my favorite team is
important to me.” The questions were combined to create a score for team identification. The maximum score was 21, indicating strong team identifiers, and the minimum score for the combined questions was 3, indicating weaker team identification.

The SSIS portion of the survey allowed the researchers to assess the level at which a fan identifies with the team. After determining the level of fan identification, the researchers sought to understand the propensity to BIRG which occurs after a championship win. The next portion of the survey utilized the scale that was developed and used in research done ten years ago about Cubs fans to explore their propensity to BIRF. The scale was developed through thorough literature review, subject experts and a pilot study to ensure validity and reliability. BIRFing behaviors are inherently similar to BIRGing behaviors, with the main divergence being whether a fan broadcasts his or her loyalty after a loss or a win. With the innate similarity between the two phenomena, the previous scale is applicable to the new data that the researchers sought to gather. To measure this behavior, respondents were asked to respond to each of the following items following the prompt: “When my favorite team wins, I am likely to display my team’s name or insignia at home or at work”, “When my favorite team wins, I wear my team’s clothing to show support for my team”, and “When my favorite team wins, I’m not afraid to let anyone know I’m a fan.”

The survey asked respondents the number of games they attended each year, income, marital status, and how long they have been Cubs fans. The questions used a sliding scale to register the answers. For age, 10 groupings were available and each grouping was approximately 5 years, starting at age 18. Income was categorized in a similar manner with 12 ranges of approximately $10,000 each. To operationalize marital status, the respondents were given the options of married, widowed, divorced, separated and never married.
Data Analysis

Given that the demographic groups were of different sizes (meaning an analysis of variance was unavailable), the data was analyzed using a multiple regression to predict the outcome for propensity to BIRG. Specifically, the respondents’ propensity to BIRG was used as the dependent variable, with the respondents’ level of identification with the team, age, marital status, etc. as independent variables.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS:

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 277 fans responded to the online survey. The first question of the survey was used to weed out any non-Cubs fans, leaving the usable pool of survey at 273. At completion of data gathering, a total of 202 complete and usable surveys were collected. The sample included 112 males (55.4%) and 90 females (44.6%). An analysis of descriptive statistics indicated that, of the 202 respondents, fans attended an average of 5.89 games per season (SD=10.53) and had been fans of the Cubs for at least four years (M=38.70, SD=15.33). The average age of the respondents fell in the range of 40 to 44 (M=5.68, SD=2.68 ranges). An analysis of descriptive statistics further indicated that of the 202 respondents, 116 were married and 86 were unmarried or separated at the time of the survey. The average income of the

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respondents fell in the range of $70,000 to $79,000 (M=8.12, SD=3.46 ranges). Using the questions detailed in the above methods section, each respondent was given a score for level of team identification (M=19.27, SD=3.69). The median for the entire group was 21, which shows that the group consisted mostly of high identifiers. This result was expected because the initial question asked if the respondent was a fan of the team and the survey was posted to Cubs fan sites.

Hierarchical Regression Results

The demographic variables described in the methods section were utilized to investigate the influence of various demographic factors on the propensity to BIRG, which eventually predicts a higher likelihood to engage in consumer purchasing following a championship. The base model includes the Team Identification variable and the attendance variable. The results demonstrate that the number of games a respondent attended, while interesting, does not explain a significant amount of variance in propensity to BIRG ($F(1,200)=0.187, p=0.666$). Model two added the variable of team identification. The results confirmed that team identification was significant in affecting a fan’s propensity to BIRG ($F(2,199)=5.125, p=.007$). The level at which a respondent identified as a fan of the team predicted a significant amount of incremental variance and nearly five percent of the variance in propensity to BIRG is attributed to team identification level ($\Delta R^2=.048$). Team identification was the most significant variable tested.

Gender was added into the model in the third step. This variable predicted a significant amount of variance in the respondents’ propensity to participate in BIRGing behaviors ($F(3,198)=5.029, p=.002$). The gender of the fan predicted 2.2% of the variance in the overall model ($\Delta R^2=.022$). The fourth model included age as a determining factor. Surprisingly, adding
age to the model did not predict any incremental significant variance \((F(4,197)=3.796, p=.005)\) and age predicted only .1% variance of the entire model \((\Delta R^2=.001)\). Likewise, marital status did not have a large impact when added to the model \((F(5,196)=3.272, p=.007)\) and a total variance change in the propensity to BIRG of .05% \((\Delta R^2=.005)\). The next model included the variable of longevity. Surprisingly, this variable had very little effect on the overall predictive variance \((F(6,195)=2.751, p=.14)\) and predicted only .01% of the total variance of the model \((\Delta R^2=.001)\). The final model added income. The income level of the fan predicted very little of the variance in the respondents’ propensity to participate in BIRGing behavior \((F(7,195)=2.345, p=.026)\). The income level of the fan predicted only .02% of the variance in the overall model \((\Delta R^2=.002)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>.019 (.269)</td>
<td>.007 (.095)</td>
<td>.009 (.135)</td>
<td>.006 (.135)</td>
<td>.005 (.074)</td>
<td>.010 (.142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team ID</td>
<td>.220 (3.171)**</td>
<td>.245 (3.517)**</td>
<td>.244 (3.503)**</td>
<td>.243 (3.488)**</td>
<td>.238 (3.349)**</td>
<td>.231 (3.173)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.150 (2.156)*</td>
<td>.155 (2.188)*</td>
<td>.161 (2.272)*</td>
<td>.160 (2.248)*</td>
<td>.152 (2.087)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.028 (.401)</td>
<td>.066 (.843)</td>
<td>.118 (.857)</td>
<td>.120 (.848)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>.083 (1.078)</td>
<td>.088 (1.127)</td>
<td>.100 (1.288)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity</td>
<td>.060 (.461)</td>
<td>.059 (.442)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td>.054 (.683)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistics</td>
<td>5.125</td>
<td>5.029</td>
<td>3.796</td>
<td>3.272</td>
<td>2.751</td>
<td>2.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standardized coefficients reported (\(ß\)), t-values in parentheses, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Overall, the final model, which included all seven variables that were collected, predicted 8.0% of the variance for which was accounted. The most efficient model was the third model which included team identification and gender, predicting 7.1% of the accounted variance.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION:

This study’s analysis of propensity to exhibit BIRGing behaviors following a first-time championship features several notable findings that have important, practical and theoretical implications. For team managers and marketing directors, this study highlights specific opportunities to maximize profit potential by focusing on demographic groups which reacted to the team’s success most profoundly. This study extends the literature to confirm many ideas related to team success and BIRGing behaviors, after a long team drought so that prior success did not bias the results. The research was successful in predicting 8% of the overall variance in propensity to exhibit BIRGing behaviors.

Game attendance was added to the model in order to ensure the validity of the group of respondents surveyed by the means of the internet. By controlling for the number of games attended, the model was able to judge the effects of BIRGing without the bias of surveying only fans at a particular game. Typically, marketing is directed in venue at fans attending games, and this survey aimed to find the demographic groups most likely to exhibit BIRGing behaviors without game attendance as a variable.

As expected, the variable of team identification resulted in the biggest effect predictive of a fan’s propensity to participate in BIRGing behaviors. Although this result was expected, the finding is novel because of the fan base surveyed. The fans in this survey were high identifiers with the team who self-selected to participate in the survey. Even with extremely skewed data
favoring high identifiers, this variable still was able to predict the most variance in the model. This research is consistent with the theories promulgated in Wann and Branscombe (1993) and Trail et al (2012) regarding high identifiers.

Gender was the other significant factor that was added to the model. The model predicted that males would be more likely to exhibit the BIRGing behaviors following a first-time national championship. While it is not surprising that males exceed females in likelihood to BIRG, what is noteworthy was that the significance was not large. Previous research on the gender of fans has shown that females are more likely to be fair-weather fans than males (Fink, Trail & Anderson, 2002). Consequently, female fans should be targeted in marketing efforts following the first significant success. This a prime time to grow the female fan base. The most surprising result indicated by the model was that age and longevity of fandom did not significantly predict BIRGing behaviors. The researcher initially hypothesized that because the 2016 championship was the first in each fan’s lifetime, the older the fan and the longer that the fan had identified as a fan of the team, the larger would be the effect of this long-awaited win. This was not the result that the model found, however. The result is important to note because it means that, the effect of a national championship on propensity to exhibit BIRGing behaviors is the same, regardless of age, and a team may profit by reaching out to fans across the age spectrum. Because of this result, managers need to vigilant in the effort to attract first time fans and develop a strong relationship that leads to a high team identification score. The first-time fans show the same level in propensity to BIRG as the life-time fans in this analysis, which allows an opportunity to target the young new fan.
**Limitations and Future Research**

One clear limitation of this research is the way that the sample was collected. Each respondent was found by the means of online fan websites, so that he or she had to self-identify as fan of the Cubs, then self-select to participate in the survey. The subsection of Cubs fans that were represented in this data are classified as high identifiers of the team and are likely to feel the success of a national championship more strongly than fans that are not already high identifiers. Because the respondents in the survey were fans that had joined fan clubs, their pre-existing connection to the team must be acknowledged.

Second, all of the results were collected online through a survey with a range of predetermined answers. Respondents did not have the ability to clarify questions or submit answers that were not a part of the given range. While the questions were designed to be clear and brief, it is possible that confusion arose or answers did not fully capture all of the possible variance from the 202 respondents.

Given the study’s limitations, the results here may not be determinative of the behaviors of other followers of the Cubs (such as fans without access to fan sites or those who chose to not align with the team through these sites). Additionally, this research may not be generalizable to other sports teams experiencing their first championship, given that the Cubs had such a unique history famous for the drought and the curse of the billy-goat. As a consequence, future research should extend the natural experimental design used in this research to fans of other teams. Also, future research should incorporate in-person interviews to avoid the self-selection bias from fan websites and should explore other fan gathering areas in an effort to widen the range of identification level in the results. Finally, future research should utilize a sports team which is
not involved with Major League Baseball in order to test whether the results are consistent, regardless of sport. Such recommended future studies will build on the momentum provided by the results featured in this study and further extend the knowledge of BIRGing behaviors.

**Conclusion:**

The results of this study represent an important and novel contribution to the existing literature on the theory of Basking in Reflected Glory and the study of sport consumer behavior as a whole. This study was the first of its kind to explore the effects of a first-time championship in fans’ lifetimes and the resulting impact on existing sport consumer behavior theories. This study confirms many ideas related to BIRGing, while adding new information not biased by fans’ expectations of success. In addition, the study improves the understanding of BIRGing, by investigating the impact on BIRGing of the variables of fan identification, gender, age and the amount time one identifies as a fan. Notably, the results indicate that, of the seven demographics studied, 8% of the overall propensity to exhibit BIRGing behaviors can be predicted. Further, of these seven demographic groups, team identification and gender by far, most prominently impact the model. Collectively, the study helps to showcase which demographic groups likely will feel the greatest impact of a first-time championship and allowing for team managers and sports marketers more clearly to create marketing plans which capitalize on the fervor experienced by the fans. It is the author’s hope that this study provides a motivation for future consumer behavior-focused research on BIRGing tendencies.
References


influencing the origination, continuation, and cessation of identification with sports teams. *Perceptual and motor skills,* 82(3), 995-1001.