

MY BLOOD RUNNETH MAROON:  
FACTORS AFFECTING SPORTS FAN LOYALTY

A Thesis

by

HAYES MAYFIELD BENNETT

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Chair of Committee, James F. Petrick  
Committee Members, David Scott  
Jane Sell

Head of Department, Scott Shafer

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## ABSTRACT

It is believed the overall success of institutions of higher learning and their athletic programs rests heavily on the non-guaranteed donations of sports fans. The present study sought to examine the relationships between involvement, satisfaction, psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty in the context of sports fans. After developing a conceptual model that utilized scales from the marketing, leisure and sports fan literature, this study used quantitative methods to collect data from current undergraduate students at Texas A&M University (n = 456).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to examine the dimensionality of the involvement construct. The EFA extracted 2 dimensions that explained 67 percent of the variance. Cronbach's alpha results indicated all constructs to be reasonably reliable, ranging from .887 to .928. Two regression analyses were completed as well as a correlation analysis to further examine the proposed hypotheses. Both regression analyses revealed involvement to be the best predictor of psychological commitment ( $\beta=.512, p=.0001$ ), and behavioral loyalty ( $\beta=.590, p=.0001$ ). All research findings intend to provide theoretical and managerial implications with regard to the involvement, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty of sports fans. The study's limitations and suggestions for future research are included.

## DEDICATION

For my family

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Justification of the Study

Due to rising expenditures for institutions of higher education and their athletic programs, these organizations have become largely dependent on external funding. The majority of these outside funds come from the private support of alumni and boosters. (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2002; Hibbert & Horne, 1996; Kircher, Markowski & Ford, 2007; Ko, Rhee, Walker & Lee, 2014; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Stephenson & Yerger, 2014; Stinson & Howard, 2007; Tsao & Coll, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2009; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). Ko et al. (2014) stated, “universities and their sport programs share the burden of ever-increasing athletics expenditures with ever-shrinking state and university budgets,” (p. 524), igniting the reliance on external donations to grow exponentially within the last two decades. Thus, this study sought to examine why individuals might seek to ease financial burdens on institutions of higher learning, as well as the athletic programs that represent them.

There has been a steady increase in research in the area of university athletic donor behavior over the past few decades due to the growing concern of retention (Mahoney, Gladden & Funk, 2003; Popp, Barrett & Weight, 2016; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). It is well known in the marketing literature that customer retention can be more cost efficient than obtaining new customers (Congram, 1987; Sargeant, 2001). Sargeant (2001) asserted that in order to succeed in donor retention, organizations should seek to

improve donor satisfaction and deepen the bonds that exist between them and their supporters. His assertion is consistent with the tenets of relationship marketing, for it has been argued that the aim of relationship marketing is to gain long-term trust with consumers in order to establish commitment from those consumers (Berry, 1983; Sargeant, 2001). In more recent sport fan literature, the relationship between organization and fan is thought to be of extreme importance, specifically retaining the interests of spectators in order for organizations to compete financially. It is believed the success of athletic organizations depends on not only performance, but also interaction with the fans (Birim, Anitsal & Anitsal, 2016).

It is believed to be of particular importance to understand the way sports fans think in order to better understand why they decide to give financially. University athletic departments must seek to understand *who* these individuals are and *what* motivates them in order to meet their needs. It is further believed that an examination of individuals' cognitive and affective processes can assist in better predicting their behaviors; for it is difficult to understand the behavior of an individual without first understanding the preceding cognitive and affective processes.

### *What is Loyalty?*

Loyalty has been defined many ways across a number of contexts in the literature. Loyalty when referred to in sport contexts, relates directly to consumer loyalty from the marketing, (Day, 1969; Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999) and leisure literatures (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Havitz & Dimanche, 1994; Iwasaki & Havitz,

1998; Pritchard, Howard & Havitz, 1992). Consumer loyalty was originally developed from brand loyalty and can be traced back to the work of Oliver (1999) and his examination of the relationship between consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The consumer loyalty literature is so vast that it exceeds the scope of this study, yet it is believed important to understand the birth of loyalty in sport contexts. For this study's purpose, however, it is believed to be important to explore how sport fan loyalty relates to loyalty within leisure contexts (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Dimanche & Havitz, 1994; Gibson, Willming & Holdnak, 2002; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998).

Research in the area of sport fan and donor loyalty is relatively new. Donor motivations related to athletics first studied the relationship between donor giving and the success of athletics (Sigelman & Carter, 1979), with success defined as the wins and losses of the institutions' athletic teams. A multitude of studies led by Sigelman and Carter's (1979) work discovered no connection between the success or failure of athletic teams to increases or decreases in the amount donated to the athletic programs (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahoney et al., 2003;). This pushed researcher's to further explore donors' motivations for giving.

#### Purpose Statement

Much of the previous literature in the area of sports fan loyalty has examined the direct influence of involvement on loyalty separately from the direct influence of satisfaction on loyalty (Boenigk & Helmig, 2013; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2004). Because of this, the current study will create a conceptual model to examine the influence of involvement and satisfaction on psychological commitment and behavioral

loyalty. It is believed this study will add to this realm of study by examining not only the relationship between sport fan involvement and satisfaction and how these two relate to psychological commitment, but also which of the two constructs will better predict psychological commitment.

Ultimately, this study seeks to explain factors that aid in the development of sports fan loyalty by using elements developed from the marketing, leisure and fundraising literatures. To do so, the study will explore the relationships that exist among and between behavioral loyalty and three antecedents: involvement, satisfaction and psychological commitment. These factors have been shown to be related to loyalty in the marketing, (Birim, Anitsal & Anitsal, 2016; Dick & Basu, 1994; Ngobo, 1999; Oliver, 1980, 1999; Rosenburg, Yun, Rahman, Kocher & de Olivera, 2015; Stephenson & Yerger, 2015) and leisure literatures (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997, 1999; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; Jun et al., 2012; Kyle et al., 2007; Mahoney, Madrigal & Howard, 2000), and have been suggested in the fundraising literature (Mahoney, Gladden & Funk, 2003; Sargeant, 2001; Stinson & Howard, 2010; Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2016).

### Significance

Obtaining loyal sport fans is believed to greatly impact the success of not only intercollegiate athletic programs, but the overall success of the institution. This inquiry is also believed to be important because understanding the elements that lead to sport fan

loyalty may provide the “world of sports” the opportunity to gain insight into the thoughts and actions of the individuals whom support them the most.

Today, institutions of higher learning likely could not operate effectively without the assistance of outside giving. If the sport fans that give financially are loyal, it is believed they will continue giving in the future (Leipnitz, 2014). That is why it is believed to be important to understand loyal givers: so the institutions they donate to can survive. Results from this study will aid institutions and athletic programs as they seek to grow loyalty among alumni and sport fans.

### Objectives and Hypotheses

Objective 1 of this thesis is to examine the relationship that exists between psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty as suggested by Bauer et al. (2008). It is thus hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1: An increase in respondents’ psychological commitment to Texas A&M athletics will result in an increase in behavioral loyalty to Texas A&M athletics.*

Objective 2 of this study is to uncover how well satisfaction and involvement explain psychological commitment as suggested by the previous works of Alexandris et al. (2004) and Bee and Havitz (2010). Thus, it is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 2: An increase in respondents’ involvement with Texas A&M athletics will result in an increase in psychological commitment to Texas A&M athletics.*

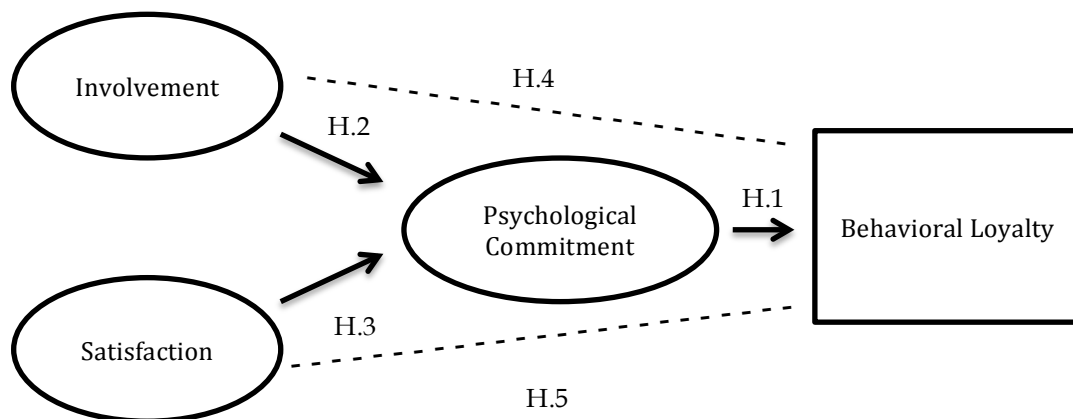
*Hypothesis 3: An increase in respondents’ satisfaction with Texas A&M athletics will result in an increase in psychological commitment to Texas A&M athletics.*

Objective 3 of this study will examine the influences of involvement and satisfaction on behavioral loyalty. While psychological commitment is a more agreed-upon indicator of loyalty, (Backman & Crompton, 1991), satisfaction and involvement have been used as predictors of loyalty in previous literature. Therefore it is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 4: Involvement with Texas A&M athletics will have a positive, significant influence on respondents' behavioral loyalty to Texas A&M athletics.*

*Hypothesis 5: Satisfaction with Texas A&M athletics will have a positive, significant influence on respondents' behavioral loyalty to Texas A&M athletics.*

Figure 1  
A Conceptual Model of the Structure and Antecedents of Behavioral Loyalty



### Delimitations

This study was subject to the following delimitations:

(1) The study only collected data from undergraduate students currently attending Texas A&M University between the ages of 18-25. This was to control for individuals who are unaware of athletics at the institution and to have an appropriate age range to match the demographics of the University.

### Limitations

The study was originally created to test current athletic donors but instead focused on current students who have the potential to later become donors. This is a limitation, as actual donors would likely provide more useful information for universities wishing to retain and increase donations. Another limitation of the study is the sample only contains individuals who are current members of a single Division 1-A public institution. Findings are likely not generalizable to smaller divisions or private institutions. A final limitation to this study is the exclusion of other antecedents of loyalty.

### Operational Definitions

INVOLVEMENT – “when a connection (conscious or unconscious) is made between stimuli (e.g., leisure activity) and the self-system” (Jun et al., 2012, p. 2).

SATISFACTION – “An overall affective response due to the use of a product or service” (Oliver, 1981; Petrick, 2004, p. 397).

PSYCHOLOGICAL COMMITMENT – A deep inner attachment that remains persistent over time and is resistant to criticism (Bauer et al., 2008).

BEHAVIORAL LOYALTY – Past behavior, as well as behavioral intentions for the future. Past behavior comprises past purchasing behavior and past positive word-of-mouth. The intentional component represents future positive word-of-mouth and cross-buying intentions (Bauer et al., 2008).



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explains each of the constructs employed in the conceptual framework and uncovers the interrelationships that may exist between the constructs. Review of past and present literature intends to connect loyalty, psychological commitment, satisfaction and involvement to the contexts of sports fans.

#### Loyalty

It remains outside the scope of this study to discuss all of the loyalty literature that exists. As an overview, this area of the literature review highlights loyalty as it has been studied in the contexts of consumer behavior, leisure, sport fans and athletic donors.

#### *Loyalty in Consumer Contexts*

Loyalty has historically been discussed in relation to consumer's behavioral responses to advertising (Day, 1969; Guest, 1944; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). The construct can be traced to Guest's (1944) work on brand loyalty where he examined the effect of brand loyalty on individuals from the time of exposure during childhood into adulthood. He used brand loyalty to "indicate constancy of preference over a period of years in the life of the individual" (p. 17). He thus operationalized loyalty as a behavioral tendency. Brand loyalty was later examined two-dimensionally, with the inclusion of attitudinal measures (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978).

Dick and Basu (1994) believed loyalty had three antecedents, (cognitive, affective and conative) which ultimately determine individuals' preferences. Their developed model and attention to theoretical background for consumer loyalty facilitated other researchers from the marketing (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Oliver, 1999) and leisure fields (Li & Petrick, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) to study loyalty more thoroughly.

Loyalty can be defined as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1997, 1999). What is particularly special about Oliver's (1997, 1999) definition is the identification of two distinct dimensions of loyalty: attitudinal and behavioral.

For the purpose of this research, the definition and measure of behavioral loyalty developed by Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer and Exler (2008) will be used in order to meet needs relevant to sports contexts. They defined behavioral loyalty as past behavior as well as behavioral intentions for the future. Past behavior comprises past purchasing behavior and past positive word-of-mouth. The intentional component represents future positive word-of-mouth and cross-buying intentions (Bauer et al., 2008).

#### *Psychological Commitment*

The behavioral aspect of loyalty was initially preferred to that of attitudinal because it was simpler to measure (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). However, in order to better comprehend the behavioral component, it has been recommended to also examine the attitudinal component of loyalty. In some of the loyalty literature, the term

*commitment* has been identified as the attitudinal aspect of loyalty (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahoney et al., 2000). It is worth mentioning that early loyalty literature has found definitional issues between loyalty and commitment due to their close association (Pritchard, Howard & Havitz, 1992).

Due to this, some researchers have suggested psychological commitment to be a separate construct from loyalty (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004), while others have argued the two are intertwined (Backman & Crompton, 1991). This issue was believed to be resolved by several researchers, (Beatty & Kahle, 1988; Crosby & Taylor, 1983), whom “delimited commitment to a cognitive dimension,” (Pritchard, Howard & Havitz, 1992, p. 160). Thus, psychological commitment can be defined as a stable preference that is bound by an attitude of resistance to change (Kiesler & Sakumura, 1966; Pritchard, Howard & Havitz, 1999).

This study sought to focus on psychological commitment instead of attitudinal loyalty in order to utilize the definition and measure provided by Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer and Exler (2008) from a sports context: a deep inner attachment that is persistent over time and resistant to criticism. Because of Bauer and others’ (2008) conceptualization of psychological commitment in a sport context, the present study examined it as a predictor of behavioral loyalty.

#### *Loyalty in Leisure Contexts*

Loyalty has largely been examined in consumer contexts previously discussed. Because of loyalty’s importance in the consumer context, some leisure literature has adopted the definition to further understand the loyalty process individuals endure in

relation to a leisure products/services (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Pritchard, Howard & Havitz, 1992). The work of Backman and Crompton (1991) was one of the first, and most influential, to establish the construct of loyalty to include both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions in a leisure setting.

Using a sample of tennis and golf players, they created a scale that examined what they believed to be predictors of loyalty: involvement, side bets, intrinsic motivation, mastery, number of different activities, price sensitivity, perceived competence, and frequency of participation. By using multiple regression analysis, they found three predictors (involvement, frequency of participation and perceived competence) to be significantly related to attitudinal loyalty and two predictors (number of different activities and frequency of participation) to be significantly related to behavioral loyalty (Backman & Crompton, 1991). From these conclusions, this study has chosen to include involvement in the pursuit of a better understanding of loyalty.

Recently, loyalty research has expanded within the leisure literature specifically, in the realms of recreation and tourism (Dawson, Havitz & Scott, 2011; Han & Woods, 2014; Kim, Vogt & Knutson, 2015; Lee & Shen, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Much of the current literature includes the constructs of involvement and satisfaction as factors that can have an effect on loyalty. For example, Kim et al., (2015) examined the influence an individuals' satisfaction with a hotel has on willingness to repurchase and recommend to others (p. 178), and found customer satisfaction to have significant influence on loyalty.

### *Sport Fan Loyalty*

Significant attention has recently been paid to loyalty related to sport fans (Bauer et al., 2008; Birim, Anitsal & Anitsal, 2016; Funk, Lock, Karg & Pritchard, 2016; Petrick, Bennett & Tsuji, 2013; Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2016) Originally, research regarding sport fans was collected with interest only towards an individuals' motivations (Sigelman & Carter, 1979). Research then began to focus on the cognitive processes of individuals by examining sport fan loyalty through identity (Laverie & Arnett, 2000), commitment (Mahony, Madrigal & Howard, 2000), satisfaction (Madrigal 1995), and involvement (Shank & Beasley, 1998).

A sport fan that gives financially to a particular sports entity can be described as a donor. Donor behavior, specifically donor loyalty, was originally examined through donor motivations (Billing, Holt & Smith, 1985; Staurowsky, Parkhouse & Sachs, 1996; Verner, Hecht & Fansler, 1998), similar to the research on sport fans. Much of the research involving donor loyalty in athletic program contexts has sought to compare the success of sports teams i.e. wins and losses, in comparison to the amount of money donated to athletic departments (Billing et al., 1985; Gladden, Mahoney & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Staurowsky et al., 1996;). Measurements such as the Athletics Contributions Questionnaire (ACQ) and Athletics Contributions Questionnaire Revised Edition II (ACQUIRE II) were among the first to attempt to analyze what motivated athletic program donors to give financially (Gladden et al., 2005).

Research surrounding donor loyalty, much like that of leisure contexts, has utilized concepts from the consumer literature in order to better explain loyalty's

importance, such as relationship marketing (Sargeant, 2001). Sargeant (2001) mainly focused on charity organizations in the United Kingdom and examined donor retention by suggesting organizations adopt “relationship fundraising” in order to facilitate donor loyalty. Similar to Sargeant (2001), others have argued the importance of understanding donor motivations in order to promote donor retention (Gladden, Mahoney & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2004, 2007).

Specifically, in the context of athletic program donors the majority of research has addressed the donors as “alumni.” Alumni are individuals who once attended the university for which they are donating. Much of the research on alumni donations has used predictors such as athletic team success, wins and losses (Gladden et al., 2005; Van Leeuwen, Quick & Daniel, 2002), satisfaction with time as a student and extracurricular activities (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014, 2015), and identification with the university (Tsiotsou, 2004, 2007). Since the population of alumni donors was not possible to get for this current study, future alumni members were chosen as the population.

Most research in the field of donor motivations and behavior has been studied according to tangible benefits, while intangible benefits (such as identification, attachment and loyalty) have not been heavily studied. It wasn't until the work of Gladden, Mahoney and Apostolopoulou (2005) that donor loyalty was examined qualitatively, however, it was measured by a single open-ended question. Therefore, this study collected data quantitatively, similar to the majority of studies in the context of donor loyalty, but suggests future research adopt a mixed methods approach.

## Satisfaction

Satisfaction has been discussed extensively in consumer, leisure and sport fan contexts. According to Oliver (1980), satisfaction is an overall affective response that results from an individual's interaction with a product/service. Oliver (1991, 1999) further defined satisfaction as a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment. With the help of Oliver's definition Petrick (2004) developed the following definition for satisfaction: "an overall affective response due to the use of a product or service" (p. 397).

### *Satisfaction in Consumer Contexts*

Satisfaction is one of the most commonly used and well-known constructs in consumer research. One of the earliest theoretical conceptualizations of satisfaction is the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm (EDP), which suggests satisfaction results from a comparison between expectations and performance (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1990; Jang & Feng, 2007). (For further background see Kim, Magnusen & Kim, 2014). According to Oliver (1980), EDP contains three distinct areas: confirmation, positive disconfirmation, or negative disconfirmation. This relates to individuals' expectations either being confirmed by performance, performance exceeding expectations or expectations exceeding performance respectively (Jang & Feng, 2007). Thus, it is believed that confirmation and positive disconfirmation lead to satisfaction, while negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction.

Originally, customer satisfaction was measured by longitudinal surveys related to a specific product or brand (Bolton, 1998). It was believed this type of study could better predict the repurchase intentions of customers (Petrick, 2004). However, some contemporary marketers would argue the best way to measure satisfaction holistically is during pre-, actual and post- consumption (Kim, Magnusen & Kim, 2014).

Much of the literature on satisfaction in consumer contexts has been discussed in conjunction with customer loyalty (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Oliver, 1980, 1997, 1999). Oliver's (1999) work mentioned multiple theories on the interactions that explain linkages between satisfaction and loyalty, most of which include satisfaction as a part of, or an antecedent to, loyalty. The relationships between satisfaction and loyalty are believed to be important to aid in better understanding consumers' repurchase intentions if satisfied with products or services (Petrick, 2004).

#### *Satisfaction in Leisure Contexts*

Cronin and Taylor (1992) believed customer satisfaction, based on the subjective judgment of a service, is the best way to evaluate a service because of its heterogeneous nature. Most leisure research involves a similar nature of heterogeneity and as such has measured satisfaction accordingly. In leisure contexts, satisfaction has been used in the realm of tourism to examine the impacts of travel experiences (Kim, Vogt & Knutson, 2015; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Specifically, the cruise industry has relied upon this research to better understand the needs of passengers in order to create improved experiences. This speaks to the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, where if an individual's expectations are met or exceeded, it is believed that



individual will be more likely to return or recommend their experience to others (Kim, Yogy & Knutson, 2015).

### *Sport Fan Satisfaction*

There also exists a growing amount of literature on satisfaction in sports-based research (Caro & Garcia, 2007; Du, Jordan & Funk, 2015; Gong et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014; Sarstedt et al., 2014; Tsuji, Bennett & Zhang, 2007). It is believed this growing area of research can be attributed to the implications of satisfaction on behavioral intentions (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Maroco & Ross, 2012; Kim, Yogy & Knutson, 2015; Kumar, Pozza & Ganesh, 2013; Leipnitz, 2014). According to Kim et al., (2014) satisfaction within sports fan contexts can be divided into three categories: game satisfaction, (Madrigal, 1995) service satisfaction, (Tsuji, Bennett & Zhang, 2007) or a combination of both (Yoshida & James, 2010). There continues to be disagreement in sport fan research regarding satisfaction and the category for which to measure the construct.

Most of the sports fan literature asserts that satisfaction relies on the success (wins/losses) of a sports team (Gladden, Mahoney & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Koo & Dittmore, 2014; Van Leeuwen, Quick & Daniel, 2002), while others suggest team success does not have a significant effect on satisfaction (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Verner, Hecht & Fansler, 1998). However, these findings could differ due to the method of data collection. For example, Naskrent and Siebelt (2011) conducted telephone surveys while Koo and Dittmore (2014) utilized balanced panel datasets from multiple universities.

Recently, Stephenson and Yerger (2015) found that sports fans with higher satisfaction are more likely to give back to the institution financially. Most of the research on satisfaction would agree with their assertion and agree with their conclusion: satisfaction should increase if the sport fans expectations are met, and satisfaction should not increase if expectations are not met (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Stephenson & Yerger, 2015).

The current study adopted the Oliver (1981) measure of satisfaction that has subsequently been used in multiple studies (Oliver, 1989; Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky, 1996; Petrick, 2004). The measure included five bipolar items (bad/good; not interesting/interesting; negative/positive; unpleasurable/ pleasurable; unsuccessful/successful) placed on a 5-point scale.

### Involvement

Rothschild (1984) explored empirical gaps for the involvement construct and in turn developed the first generic definition: “involvement is a state of motivation, arousal or interest and exists in a process driven by current external and past internal variables” (p. 217). He did so in order to generate further research on the construct and to assist in ending debates about what the construct of involvement encompassed (Rothschild, 1984).

Havitz and Dimanche (1999) adapted his work within leisure contexts and generated the following definition: “involvement is an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associate product. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties” (p. 123). Building from both

previous works, and believed to be relevant to this study, Jun et al. (2012) described involvement to be “when a connection, either conscious or unconscious, is made between stimuli and the self-system” (p. 2).

#### *Involvement in Consumer Contexts*

From the work of Rothschild (1984), two major works were developed in consumer research surrounding the involvement construct. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) and Zaichkowsky (1985) have been credited with being the first to quantify involvement (McQuarrie & Munson, 1987, p.36). The Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) sought to measure involvement multi-dimensionally (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985), and the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) sought to measure involvement uni-dimensionally (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Both of these scales have been used heavily in consumer (Mittal, 1995; Tsotsou, 2004) and leisure (Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2004; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998) contexts and continue to be adapted and reconstructed (Kyle, Graefe, Manning & Bacon, 2004; Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammitt & Jodice, 2007).

#### *Involvement in Leisure Contexts*

Mark Havitz along with Fredric Dimanche and Yoshi Iwasaki are among the notable figures in leisure research that have examined involvement (Dimanche & Havitz, 1994; Havitz & Dimanche, 1990, 1997, 1999; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998, 2004). Havitz & Dimanche (1990) agreed with Laurent & Kapferer (1985) and further stated that a multi-faceted scale was best. They developed 15 propositions for leisure involvement and

examined topics of future application of involvement, measurement issues with the construct and relationship of involvement with behavior (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990).

Building from this work, Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) examined the relationships between involvement, psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty in a recreational setting. They originally separated involvement into two distinct categories: enduring involvement and risk involvement, but dropped risk involvement due to challenges with conceptualization and measurement (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004, p. 62). Iwasaki & Havitz (2004) also tested three separate models for measuring the relationships between leisure involvement and behavioral loyalty and found a Fully Mediated Model (F-M-M) to be the best fit for the data (p. 62).

Kyle et al. (2007) are among many others to use the work of Havitz & Dimanche (1990), Laurent & Kapferer (1985), McIntyre (1989) and Zaichkowsky (1985) to create their own measurement for involvement in leisure research. Their Modified Involvement Scale (MIS) contained 15 items that measure five facets of involvement: Attraction, Centrality, Social Bonding, Identity Affirmation and Identity Expression (Kyle et al., 2007, p. 400). Kyle et al., (2007) sought to use the MIS to better operationalize the construct of involvement for professional practice and to allow academics a comprehensive understanding of leisure behavior. Kyle et al. (2007) found that a correlated factors model best fit the data.

Kyle et al.'s (2007) work with the MIS inspired Jun et al. (2012) to further examine this measure of involvement with specific attention to the previously mentioned factors of identity. They predicted Identity Affirmation and Identity Expression would

have a positive and significant effect on the remaining involvement facets, Attraction, Centrality and Social Bonding (Jun et al., 2012). They used two samples including recreation participants (United States) and exercise participants (Greece) and found Identify Affirmation to have a positive influence on each remaining facet of involvement, while Identity Expression had no significant influence on any of the facets.

### *Sport Fan Involvement*

Tsiotsou (1998) developed a scale that sought to explain why individuals make financial contributions to athletic programs. After testing the Giving to Athletics Model (GAM), Tsiotsou (1998) determined involvement was a significant indicator of financial giving and suggested further research be conducted on the construct.

Stevens & Rosenberger (2012) also examined involvement in sport contexts and its effect on sport following and fan loyalty. They collected data through self-administered surveys with fans of the Rugby League of Australia during an athletic event and found involvement to have a positive, significant influence on fan loyalty ( $\beta = .08, p \leq .01$ ), (Stevens & Rosenberg, 2012, p. 16).

However, for the purpose of this study the MIS was used to measure involvement in sport contexts. This particular scale was chosen because of its reliability ( $\alpha > .07$ ) and validity (t-values  $\geq \pm 1.96$ ), as well as its unique inclusion of the identification construct, which has often been discussed as a motivator for sports fans (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Sargeant, 2001; Tsiotsou, 2007).

### Gaps in the Literature

Much of the previous research done in the area of loyalty has examined either the relationship of satisfaction and loyalty (Madrigal, 1995; Petrick, 2004; Van Leeuwen et al., 2002) or involvement and loyalty (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998, 2004; Kim, Scott & Crompton, 1997; Jun et al., 2012), with minimal research utilizing both involvement and satisfaction with loyalty (Gong et al., 2015). This study examined both involvement and satisfaction within the same conceptual framework, and further explored the interrelationships between these constructs.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

To test the proposed model, a large-scale quantitative study was conducted with the assistance of Texas A&M University. This study included the examination of unobservable variables that were assumed to be measurable through a self-reported survey. Previous literature guided the development of the suggestion conceptual framework and the measures utilized. The questionnaire was sent by mass email to a list of all current students at Texas A&M University through the TAMU bulk mail process.

#### Study Area

The conceptual framework for this study was based largely on the research in consumer and leisure contexts. Existing scales for all constructs were adapted to fit current sport fan loyalty contexts (Bauer et al., 2008; Jun et al., 2012; Kyle et al., 2007; Oliver, 2000; Petrick, 2004). The instrument was also developed through personal communication with experts in the fields of loyalty and leisure studies and faculty members at Texas A&M University.

The data was collected from September 30<sup>th</sup> to October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in College Station, Texas and managed online with the use of Qualtrics software. The self-reported questionnaire was sent to all current students at Texas A&M University through TAMU bulk mail, and was available online. The email was sent in two waves: the first on

September 30, 2016 followed by a reminder email on October 6, 2016. The questionnaire was completely voluntary and participants could choose to start and stop participation at any time.

Participants were delimited to undergraduate students by asking what class participants belonged to (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior or other), and by asking for the age of the respondent. If a participant responded “Other” or was not within the controlled age limits, they were excluded from full participation. This was done in order to control for participants who may be less familiar with Texas A&M athletics and the aid in being able to generalize results to the undergraduate population. Questionnaires that were not at least 78 percent completed were also dropped from further examination.

### Presentation of Hypotheses

This study included five hypotheses that sought to illuminate the construct of behavioral loyalty in sports fan contexts. Each hypothesis hoped to explain relationships between the constructs of involvement, satisfaction, psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty.

The first hypothesis followed the proposition of Bauer et al. (2008) and posits: as psychological commitment increases, behavioral loyalty will increase. The second hypothesis asserts that as involvement increases, psychological commitment will also increase. This hypothesis derived largely from the work of Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) who found a strong, positive relationship between involvement and psychological commitment. Hypothesis three proposes that as satisfaction increases, psychological



commitment will also increase. This hypothesis follows the work of Schertzer and Schertzer (2004) who found a strong relationship between student satisfaction and commitment to institutions.

The final two hypotheses discuss the relationships between involvement and satisfaction and behavioral loyalty. Hypothesis five asserts involvement will have a positive, significant relationship with behavioral loyalty, drawing from the results of Stephenson and Rosenberg (2012) who found involvement to have a positive, significant influence on fan loyalty. Hypothesis six asserts satisfaction will also have a positive, significant relationship with behavioral loyalty based on the work of Stephenson and Yerger (2015) who found satisfied fans are more likely to donate to their institution financially.

### Questionnaire Development

The majority of research involving sport fan loyalty has been collected through self-reported questionnaires, (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Funk & James, 2001; Reding, 2008; Thibiti, 2003). The current study utilized semantic differential and Likert-type scales adapted from previous studies, and also included a few open-ended questions.

The involvement measurement for this study drew extensively from Laurent & Kapferer's (1985) Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP). Their work was later transformed by Kyle et al., (2007) and then Jun et al., (2012) into the Modified Involvement Scale (MIS), to better-fit leisure contexts. The MIS consists of 13 items focused on five dimensions of involvement: Attraction, Centrality, Social Bonding,

Identity Affirmation, and Identity Expression. All 13 items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (See Table 1). The MIS was adapted to fit the needs of this study in a sports fan context because of its reliability, ( $\alpha > .7$ ) and validity (t-values  $\geq \pm 1.96$ ) (Kyle et al., 2007).

Table 1  
Modified Involvement Scale (MIS) Items (*Adapted from Kyle et al., 2007*)

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Items</b>
<i>Attraction</i>	Attending TAMU athletic events is one of the most enjoyable things I do
	Attending TAMU athletic events is very important to me
	Attending TAMU athletic events is one of the most satisfying things I do
<i>Centrality</i>	I find a lot of my life is organized around attending TAMU athletic events
	Attending TAMU athletic events occupies a central role in my life
<i>Social Bonding</i>	I enjoy discussing attending TAMU athletic events with my friends
	Most of my friends are in some way connected with attending TAMU athletic events
	Attending TAMU athletic events provides me with the opportunity to be with friends
<i>Identity Affirmation</i>	When I'm attending TAMU athletic events, I can really be myself
	I identify with the image associated with attending TAMU athletic events
<i>Identity Expression</i>	You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them attending TAMU athletic events
	Attending TAMU athletic events says a lot about whom I am
	When I'm attending TAMU athletic events, others see me the way I want them to see me

The measurement used for satisfaction comes from leisure literature, related specifically to tourism. Due to the work of Bailey and Pearson (1983), along with Engel et al. (1990) and Oliver (1980, 1989), a semantic differential scale was developed to

measure overall satisfaction. The Oliver (1980) scale, which has largely been used in tourism research (Petrick, 2004), includes 5 bipolar items (bad/good; not interesting/interesting; negative/positive; unpleasurable/pleasurable; unsuccessful/successful) placed on a 5-point scale.

Psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty measurements were adopted from Bauer et al.'s (2008) work involving brand image and brand loyalty for sports fans. Psychological commitment consisted of 8 items and was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (See Table 2). Participants responded to questions such as "I am a real fan of TAMU athletics," "The long-term success of TAMU athletics is important to me," and "I am very committed to TAMU athletics." Behavioral loyalty consisted of 6 items and was also measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree) (See Table 3). Responses were provided to questions such as "I will often participate in discussions about TAMU athletics," "I will purchase a lot of TAMU athletic merchandise" and "I will watch TAMU athletic events on TV."

Table 2

Psychological Commitment Items (Adapted from Bauer et al., 2008)

I am a real fan of TAMU athletics
I am very committed to TAMU athletics
There is nothing that could change my commitment to TAMU athletics
I will not change my affiliation with TAMU athletics in the future just because it is no longer successful
I would defend TAMU athletics in public even if this cause problems
I will not change my affiliation with TAMU athletics because my friends try to convince me to
It is really important to me that TAMU athletics continue playing at the collegiate level
The long-term success of TAMU athletics is important to me

Table 3

Behavioral Loyalty Items (Adapted from Bauer et al., 2008)

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I will often attend TAMU athletic events live in the facilities
I will watch TAMU athletic events on TV
I will often follow reports about TAMU athletics players, coaches, managers etc. in the media
I will purchase a lot of TAMU athletic related merchandise
I will often wear the colors and/or logo of TAMU athletics
I will often participate in discussions about TAMU athletics

---

A series of questions were also developed for this study to understand respondents' willingness to contribute financially to TAMU athletics in the future. Overall willingness was measured on a sliding scale ranging from 0 percent (Not at all Willing) to 100 percent (Definitely Willing). Respondents were also asked to provide a dollar amount for, "How much money per year do estimate you will contribute to TAMU athletics: The year after you graduate? In 10 years? In 25+ years?" It is believed this set of questions allowed for a more holistic picture of current students who may have intentions to donate in the future.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the current study to examine the hypothesized relationships by employing a number of statistical analyses. While Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) would have provided a more holistic view of the relationships proposed with less error, SEM remains outside the expertise of the researcher. Instead, data analyses included descriptive and frequency statistics, factor analysis, regression and correlation analyses.

CHAPTER IV  
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 497 questionnaires were received and 456 of those were considered completed and useable. Table 4 below shows the descriptive statistics of the respondents. A majority (66.1 %) of respondents were female, 71.5 percent were white, and 93.9 percent were between the ages of 18-21. The largest group of participants (30.9%) responded as being freshmen at Texas A&M University, and the majority (78.9%) stated they owed a 12<sup>th</sup> Man sports pass. Finally, respondents were asked to describe their favorite sport at Texas A&M: 73.5 percent responded football, 6.8 percent baseball, 5.9 percent basketball, 2.2 percent soccer.

Table 4  
Demographics of Participants

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>	
<i>Gender</i>	Male	145 (32.8)
	Female	292 (66.1)
	Don't wish to answer	5 (1.1)
<i>Age</i>	18	129 (28.3)
	19	98 (21.5)
	20	120 (26.3)
	21	81 (17.8)
	22	21 (4.6)
	23	5 (1.1)

Table 4 Continued

<b>Variables</b>		<b>Frequency (%)</b>
<i>Age</i>	24	0 (0)
	25	2 (.4)
<i>Ethnicity</i>	American Indian/Alaska Native	2 (.5)
	Asian	12 (2.7)
	Black/African American	12 (2.7)
	Hispanic/Latino	83 (18.8)
	White	316 (71.5)
	Other	17 (3.8)
<i>Class</i>	Freshman	141 (30.9)
	Sophomore	116 (25.4)
	Junior	113 (24.8)
	Senior	86 (18.9)
<i>Sports Pass Ownership</i>	“12 <sup>th</sup> Man”	360 (78.9)
	“White”	11 (2.4)
	“Maroon”	13 (2.9)
	None	72 (15.8)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the dimensionality of the thirteen involvement items. The original five dimensions were named: Attraction, Centrality, Social Bonding, Identity Affirmation and Identity Expression. Results of the EFA with a varimax rotation revealed a two-factor structure, which explained 67.13 percent of the variance. Factor 1 included items from the original

Attraction, Social Bonding and Identity Affirmation and was termed “What I do.” Factor 2 included items from the Centrality and Identity Expression factors and was renamed “Who I am” (See Table 5).

Table 5  
Factor Analysis Results

	<b>Involvement Dimensions</b>	
	“What I do”	“Who I am”
Attending TAMU athletic events is one of the most enjoyable things I do	.724	.426
Attending TAMU athletic events is very important to me	.712	.500
Attending TAMU athletic events is one of the most satisfying things I do	.665	.560
I find a lot of my life is organized around attending TAMU athletic events	.505	.637
Attending TAMU athletic events occupies a central role in my life	.466	.681
I enjoy discussing attending TAMU athletic events with my friends	.760	.322
Most of my friends are in some way connected with attending TAMU athletic events	.615	.169
Attending TAMU athletic events provides me with the opportunity to be with friends	.800	.104
When I'm attending TAMU athletic events, I can really be myself	.649	.438
I identify with the image associated with attending TAMU athletic events	.657	.475
You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them attending TAMU athletic events	.132	.844
Attending TAMU athletic events says a lot about whom I am	.255	.862
When I'm attending TAMU athletic events, others see me the way I want them to see me	.405	.675
Cronbach's alpha	.917	.887
Average variance (%)	35.70	31.43

Total Variance Explained: 67.13%

Overall reliability of the measurement constructs was tested using Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability test indicated that the reliability coefficients for each of the five factors ranged from .887 to .928, which meet the recommendations of Peterson (1994) and Nunnally (1967, 1978). This speaks to the ability of each item within a factor to explain that said factor.

Regression analysis was employed to examine the effects of both dimensions of involvement as well as overall satisfaction on respondent’s psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty to TAMU athletics. The first regression examined how well the two dimensions of involvement and satisfaction (independent variables) explained psychological commitment (dependent variable). The values of  $R^2$ , Adjusted  $R^2$ , and Standard Error were .721, .719, and 5.26. The  $R^2$  for the model indicated that 72 percent of the variance in psychological commitment was explained by the three independent variables. The F-score and F significance were 402.719 and .0001, while the  $t$  – values of all three independent variables were significant ( $p = .0001$ ) (See Table 6). According to the standardized coefficients ( $\beta$ ) of the three independent variables, “What I do,” was found to be the best predictor (.512) of psychological commitment followed by “Who I am” (.423), and overall satisfaction (.237). This suggests that what one does is a better predictor of psychological commitment to a sports program than either who they are or how satisfied they are with the program.

Table 6  
Regression Analysis – *Psychological Commitment*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t - value	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	$\beta$		
Overall SAT	.697	.102	.237	6.862	.0001



Table 6 Continued

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t - value	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	$\beta$		
“What I Do”	5.155	.316	.512	16.306	.0001
“Who I Am”	4.189	.280	.423	14.956	.0001
(Constant)	30.497	2.300		13.261	.0001

A second regression analysis was employed to examine how well “What I do,” “Who I am,” and overall satisfaction, explain behavioral loyalty. The  $R^2$ , Adjusted  $R^2$ , and Standard Error were .702, .700 and 4.46. The  $R^2$  indicated that 70 percent of the variance in behavioral loyalty was explained by the independent variables. The F-score and F significance were 4356.903 and .0001. The resultant  $t$  – values of all independent variables were significant ( $p = .0001$ ) and can be seen in Table 7. Mirroring the results of the first regression, the standardized coefficients ( $\beta$ ) showed “What I do” (.590) to be a better predictor of behavioral loyalty than both “Who I am” (.424) and overall satisfaction (.148).

Table 7  
Regression Analysis – Behavioral Loyalty

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t - value	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	$\beta$		
Overall SAT	.360	.088	.148	4.082	.0001
“What I Do”	4.867	.273	.590	17.846	.0001
“Who I Am”	3.429	.241	.424	14.223	.0001
(Constant)	25.119	1.994		12.597	.0001

A correlation analysis was also conducted to explore the relationship between participants' psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty using Pearson's *r*. Table 8 shows a strong, positive, significant correlation ( $p = .0001$ ) was found between the two variables,  $r = .844$ . This suggests that an increase in either psychological commitment or behavioral loyalty would elicit an increase in the other. While Pearson's correlations do not reveal the direction of the relationship, past research (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998, 2004) would suggest that psychological commitment occurs temporally first, and leads to behavioral loyalty.

Table 8  
Correlation Analysis – *Commitment and Loyalty*

		<b>Psychological Commitment</b>	<b>Behavioral Loyalty</b>
<b>Psychological Commitment</b>	Pearson's <i>r</i>		**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.844
	N		.000
		471	459
<b>Behavioral Loyalty</b>	Pearson's <i>r</i>	**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.844	1
	N	.000	
		459	459

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Data was also collected in reference to participants' overall willingness to contribute financially to Texas A&M athletics, which was on a sliding scale ranging from "Not at all willing" (0) to "Definitely Willing" (100). A series of questions related to the timing of potential donations in the future were also posed including, how much would you be willing to contribute in the year after you graduate, in ten years, and in

twenty-five years. It was believed these are appropriate time intervals in order to have a more comprehensive view of current students who may intend to give financially in the future. Tables 9 and 10 outline the descriptive statistics of each variable. These findings suggest that students' behavioral commitments to the university via financial contributions will increase, as they get older.

Table 9  
Descriptive Statistics – *Willingness to Contribute*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Overall Willingness	443	0	100	39.2528	32.69763
Year after graduation	418	0	4000	91.85	285.422
In 10 years	405	0	100000	1343.89	6463.565
In 25+ years	402	0	1000000	12049.43	79253.185

Table 10  
Frequencies – *Willingness to Contribute*

Willingness Percentage	Frequency (%)
0 – 10	141 (31.8)
11 – 20	41 (9.2)
21 – 30	33 (7.4)
31 – 40	20 (4.5)
41 – 50	65 (14.7)
51 – 60	28 (6.3)
61 – 70	25 (5.6)
71 – 80	35 (7.9)
81 – 90	30 (6.7)
91 - 100	32 (7.2)

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Overview

This final chapter is divided into three sections: the first reviews the findings from the previous chapters. The second explores theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the third includes recommendations for future research.

#### Review of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute to sports fans behavioral loyalty. More specifically, this study sought to examine the relationships among involvement, satisfaction and psychological commitment and how these variables relate to sports fans behavioral loyalty. Through the utilization of previous research from the marketing, leisure and sports fan literatures, a conceptual framework was developed that integrated valid and reliable scales from each of the areas of research. The Modified Involvement Scale (MIS) from the leisure literature (Jun et al., 2012; Kyle et al., 2007), the Semantic Differential scale from the marketing literature (Oliver, 1980; Petrick, 2004), and the Fan Loyalty scales by Bauer et al. (2008) from sports fan literature were utilized to measure the constructs of interest.

Hypothesis 1 stated as psychological commitment increases, behavioral loyalty would then also increase. This hypothesis was confirmed using a regression analysis and Pearson's correlation, ( $r = .844, p = .0001$ ). Hypothesis 2 stated that as sports fan

involvement increased, so too would psychological commitment. The same was stated in Hypothesis 3 with sports fan satisfaction: an increase would lead to an increase in psychological commitment. Both hypotheses were confirmed through a regression analysis. Hypothesis 4 and 5 proposed that the involvement constructs and satisfaction would predict behavioral loyalty. Hypothesis 4 asserted that involvement would have a positive, significant influence on behavioral loyalty and Hypothesis 5 asserted that satisfaction would have a positive, significant influence on behavioral loyalty. Both hypotheses were confirmed according to the second regression analysis.

More specifically, after running the previously mentioned statistical tests, we discovered that “What I do” was a better predictor of psychological commitment and behaviorally loyalty than either “Who I am” or overall satisfaction. The second regression analysis utilized the same three independent variables to predict behavioral loyalty and had similar results.

### Implications

According to Tachis and Tzetzis (2015), understanding the relationship between the constructs of involvement, commitment, and loyalty appears to be “advantageous, as it assists the development of better managerial decisions” (p. 14). The same can be said for the findings of this study. While all five hypotheses were confirmed, more important are the implications for both management and theory.

### *Managerial Implications*

From managerial and marketing perspectives this study has provided interesting findings. Results revealed that the stronger a sport fans commitment, the stronger their behavioral loyalty. This means if an athletic department wants to increase fans' behavioral loyalty, it should seek to increase their commitment. Thus, efforts focused at promoting commitment should seek to move students from an affective relationship to a behavioral relationship with their university would likely lead to more donations in the future. What this study was also able to provide is the important role that involvement and satisfaction play in the behavioral loyalty of sports fans. More specifically, the two dimensions of involvement now represent two unique aspects of the sports fan. The "What I do" dimension includes a fans actions, particularly attendance and being with others. The second dimension, "Who I am," is more specific to the way a sports fan sees him or herself, or how they identify.

This is where a marketing strategy could have major impacts with sports fans. If an athletic department understands that involved fans have a better chance at becoming loyal, they should seek ways to keep those fans involved, particularly in what they do and who they believe they are. Thus, management strategies focused on getting students involved and to be with others, especially for athletic event attendance, could lead to more psychologically committed and behaviorally loyal (i.e., better donors) former students.

While not as important as "What I do," both "Who I am" and overall satisfaction were found to be good predictors of psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty.

From a marketing perspective, athletic departments should then seek to connect with fans through their identity. The majority of respondents agreed with the following statements: “Attending TAMU athletic events says a lot about whom I am,” and “Attending TAMU athletic events occupies a central role in my life.” Athletic departments should aim to strengthen the identity of their fans so they will continue to keep athletics as a central role in their lives, and thus assist them in remaining committed and loyal.

It was further found that psychological commitment was positively and significantly related to behavioral loyalty. Since past research (Bee & Havitz, 2010; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998, 2004) has revealed that psychological commitment leads to behavioral loyalty, university officials should also consider relationship and brand management to be of particular importance. Sargeant (2001) discussed that in order to succeed in donor retention, organizations should deepen the bonds that exist with their supporters. Marketing strategies for athletics could thus include hosting events that are specific to the fan experience or creating promotional campaigns that allow fans’ relationship with athletics to grow. These would seek to satisfy fans as well as strengthen their identity, commitment and loyalty to the program.

Also managerially, when observing the responses to participants’ willingness to contribute there appears obvious room for growth. For overall willingness, respondents were on average only 39.25 percent willing to contribute, with 14.7 percent of respondents responding “Not at all willing.” Therefore, we can assume that the majority of current undergraduate students at Texas A&M University do not currently expect to

give financially to athletics in the future. Since the majority of university donations come from alumni (Tsiotsou, 2004) these numbers suggest university officials could do a better job creating a desire for students to donate in the future. More research is necessary in this area in order to determine what causes students to desire to donate, though the current study suggests that getting students involved and satisfied are key variables.

Questions were also posed to participants regarding giving in the future (25+ years), where 39.8 percent said they would be willing to donate 100 dollars or less. These findings could assist athletic departments in employing campaigns that seek to help students understand the importance of their contributions in an effort to retain financial giving in the future.

#### *Theoretical Implications*

The current study also has implications for theory. With the use of scales from a number of research areas, valid and reliable measures were employed to examine sports fan behavioral loyalty. In recent years, a number of studies have examined behaviorally loyal sports fans (Stephenson & Yerger, 2015; Yoshida, Heere & Gordon, 2015), but few have included satisfaction and involvement as antecedents in their frameworks (Brown, Smith & Assaker, 2016; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). It is the hope of this research that the established model will be able to be used to accurately and validly explain the relationships and inner workings that exist within sports fans' cognitive (involvement and satisfaction), affective (psychological commitment) and behavioral (loyalty) processes.



The present study also speaks to the relationship between the multiple areas of research used to create the model. While the scales utilized were developed in the marketing, leisure and sport fan literatures, they were found to work together well together. This suggests the scales can be used across fields and that they are conceptually sound across different populations. Gibson, Willming and Holdnak (2002) asserted, “sport is a major form of leisure in the US and around the world” (p.398). However, it appears that the two areas of research have continued to separate from one another. By combining scales this study implies that leisure and sport can be examined collectively, with sport as a unique form of leisure.

#### Future Research

In the future, it is recommended that extended statistical tests be run on the entire conceptual model. Specifically, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could provide important information regarding the consistency and reliability of the conceptual framework as a whole and better show the overall relationships between all variables. While regression and correlation analysis allowed for investigations of univariate relationships, SEM would allow for a more global view of the findings. Further Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) including all variables might also provide interesting information in the future for examining cross loading between scale items.

The population of the study could also be revised in future studies. It may be interesting to see how behavioral loyalty of undergraduate students compares to graduate students at an institution. Furthermore, it could provide interesting information if

students were segmented by transfer students and students who have remained enrolled at the same university. This study originally sought to examine the loyalty of university athletic donors, or former students. Therefore, it is recommended in the future this study be conducted with current donors.

The developed items in the questionnaire could also be edited in the future to assist marketing strategy for specific sports teams. For example, instead of asking questions related to TAMU athletics as a whole, questions could be directed towards football or baseball, which appeared to be the most popular. By doing so, marketers could have a better chance at identifying the target market of individuals who are loyal to a specific sport instead of the athletic department as a whole.

It was also found that if a sports fan was satisfied, they were more likely to be committed and thus behaviorally loyal. However, the present study did not investigate the determinants of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended for future studies to explore what causes students to be satisfied and/or dissatisfied with university athletics.

In conclusion, it is believed that the present study illuminated several factors that affect sports fan loyalty. This research indicated that involvement, satisfaction and psychological commitment are capable of influencing behavioral loyalty in sport contexts. While sports fans remain a complex population and thus, call for further investigation, it is hoped this research provided a stepping-stone for future research in this area.

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