

A MODEL FOR CONSUMER DEVOTION: AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT WITH PROACTIVE SUSTAINING BEHAVIORS

Ronald W. Pimentel

California State University, Bakersfield

Kristy E. Reynolds

Louisiana State University

Ronald Pimentel, Department of Management and Marketing, California State University, Bakersfield, 9001 Stockdale Highway, 20 BDC, Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099
Email: rpimentel3@csub.edu Phone: 661-665-6816, Fax: 661-664-2438. Kristy Reynolds, Department of Marketing, E. J. Ourso College of Business Administration, 3127 CEBA Building, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-6314
Email: reynolds@lsu.edu Phone: 225-578-7296, Fax: 225-578-8616

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumer goods can have significance beyond their utilitarian and commercial value (McCracken 1986),” and can become a vehicle of transcendent experience (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Intense experiences with brands can lead to consumer loyalty—sometimes extreme levels of loyalty.

Consumer Devotion—In some cases, consumer connections with brands reach a level of loyalty so intense that it survives poor product performance, scandal, bad publicity, high prices, and absence of promotional efforts. It is loyalty that motivates consumers to buy T-shirts, baseball caps, and bumper stickers in order to display the brand name and trademark. The term “consumer devotion” implies religious fervor and it includes elements of sacredness (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Fans of college football teams provide a convenient context for discussion of this fervor.

Fandom—Previous research has created a typology of sports fans (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999). Additional research has observed extreme fandom in non-sports contexts, such as exhibited by *Star Trek* fans (Kozinets 2001).

Commitment—In our study, we are concerned with three types of commitment: calculative, normative, and affective (Echambadi 2000).

Model

Our model of consumer devotion is presented in *Figure 1*. It includes antecedents that lead to calculative or normative commitment. Some consumers experience a sacralization process to make the transition from there to affective commitment which then leads to specific outcomes.

Antecedents—College football fans experience various antecedents to committing to teams such as responding to family norms to support a specific team, seeking to fill voids created by something lacking in their lives, enjoying association with other fans, and fulfilling a need to belong. Others become fans of teams that are less popular in order to express distinction from others.

Commitment—Calculative and Normative—Fans whose commitment is calculative are loyal to the team for extrinsic benefits, such as enjoying a winning season or watching an exciting star player. They are characterized by more devoted fans as being “fair-weather fans.” Normatively committed fans support the team through a sense of obligation.

Sacralization—Sacralization processes (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) serve as a transition to move fans to a stronger form of commitment. These processes include quintessence, inheritance, external sanction, collecting, gift giving, pilgrimage, and ritual.

Commitment—Affective—After fans move through the sacralization process, their commitment to the team has been internalized, and has become more affective in nature (Allen, Machleit, and Kleine 1991). The team becomes more emotionally significant and is used by the fans to maintain their self-concept (Ball and Tasaki 1992).

Outcomes—We identified several outcomes from affective commitment. Affectively committed fans ascribe positive attributes to their own team and negative attributes to rivals. They are loyal to their teams despite losing seasons, but they feel the losses intensely and personally. They reflect the sacralization process that brought them to affective commitment by expressing their commitment with religious references.

Desacralization—Affective commitment is more enduring than calculative or normative commitment, but it is not necessarily permanent. It is possible for a team to lose its sacred status with fans.

Proactive Sustaining Behaviors—Desacralization does not occur for fans who engage in various behaviors that help to keep the team sacred. If fans participate in these behaviors of their own volition, then they must remain loyal to the team to assure cognitive consistency. These behaviors include regular participation in rituals, displaying symbols of the team through clothing and memorabilia, and the building and maintaining of “shrines” in their homes. Some fans assume a missionary role, actively seeking to convert new fans. Many make significant personal sacrifices to support the teams and watch the games.

Model Extension

We investigated the generalization of the model, developed in a football context, to traditional “product” brands.

Antecedents—We found many of the same antecedents for devotion to product brands as we did for football teams. Some consumers mentioned wearing Nikes to fit in with the group; others avoided the brand in order to express distinction. Consumers expressed self-images through their preferred brands of soft drinks and jeans.

Commitment—Calculative and Normative—Calculatively committed consumers expressed preferences for brands due to product features and benefits. Normatively committed customers referred to family traditions with various brands.

Sacralization—Informants reported many of the same processes for other types of brands as with the sacralization processes for football team commitment. As an example, one informant described collecting Coca-Cola memorabilia.

Commitment—Affective—As with football fans, informants in the extension study reported sharing values with the brand and feeling an attachment to it.

Outcomes—Several outcomes were similar to those found for football fans, including commitment to the brand through bad times, and in-group/out-group behaviors.

Desacralization—Brands lose their sacred status through public relations failures and poor product performance.

Proactive Sustaining Behaviors—Rituals, recruiting, and sacrifices were observed for consumer brands just as they were for football teams. These similarities suggest generalizability of the model. It is significant, however that not all the outcomes and sustaining rituals were as consistent as they were with the football fans. Pilgrimages and religious references were far less common.

Conclusion

Brand managers should look to football teams and strong entertainment brands such as *Star Trek* (Kozinets 2001) rather than to other branded products to learn about consumer devotion.

For managers, the sacralization process and the proactive sustaining behaviors of the model are particularly important. If they can provide quintessence, or other sacralization processes, they may be able to encourage movement to affective commitment. If they can also encourage proactive sustaining behaviors, they can enjoy the benefits of highly loyal, devoted customers.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our model was developed conceptually. It would be helpful to test the model with qualitative and quantitative empirical data and in different contexts.

Keywords: Affect, Brand Loyalty, Group and Interpersonal Influence, Recreation, Consumption Experience, Emotional Influence, Meaning, Parental Influence, Self Concept, Social Influence, Symbolic, Consumer Behavior

A Model for Consumer Devotion: Affective Commitment with Proactive Sustaining Behaviors

McCracken (1986) has explained how “consumer goods have a significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value.” This significance is often applied, not only to the tangible goods, but to the brand. Consumer involvement with brands finds expression in a number of forms: self-extensions (Belk 1988), person-brand relationships (Fournier 1998), self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2003), and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). In this paper, we are particularly concerned with situations where consumer connections with brands have reached a level of loyalty so intense that the loyalty survives poor product performance, scandal, bad publicity, high prices, and absence of promotional efforts. It is loyalty that is expressed when consumers will go to their own expense to provide exposure for the brand name and trademark on T-shirts, baseball caps, and bumper stickers. Clearly, achieving such levels of consumer loyalty can be a tremendous asset for a brand, and consequently it is a matter worthy of investigation. We refer to this phenomenon as “consumer devotion.”

Consumer Devotion

We developed the concept of consumer devotion as a possible extension to brand equity, but based on the consumers rather than the brands. Brand equity is defined as the “set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers,” (Aaker 1991, p. 15). Brand loyalty is an important asset contributing to a brand’s equity. Aaker (1991) describes five levels of brand loyalty. The highest of these is the “committed buyer.” Within the category of “committed buyers,” the “ultimate committed customer” is described as “the Harley-Davidson rider who wears the Harley symbol as a tattoo (Aaker 1991, p. 41).” We assert that the “ultimate committed customer” is a “devoted” consumer as described in our model.

The devoted consumer derives benefits from the brand that are affective in nature, rather than merely utilitarian. In a postmodern consumer society characterized by secularization of religion and sacralization of the secular, consumer brands may take on aspects of the “sacred” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) for their devoted followers. A marker of this status is when the logo of the brand has become symbolic, not only of the brand, but also of consumers of the brand. The devoted consumer will display the brand logo on items from product categories different from that of the branded product, such as the logo of an automobile company on a T-shirt. They will seek opportunities to acquire and exhibit the logo—not necessarily in connection with consuming the product. In addition, commitment to the brand is essentially permanent for the devoted consumer.

Consumer devotion can be compared to a cult following (Carr 1996). Harley Davidson is often mentioned in discussions of brands that have gained intense consumer loyalty. The television shows *The X-Files* and *Star Trek* have gained similar loyalty from their fans. These brands are enjoying increasingly broad appeal, but their appeal is that of niche or cult brands. In our investigation we sought similar attitudes and behaviors toward more mainstream consumer brands. We found some of the same behaviors in regard to brands such as Saturn, Levi’s, Nike, and Coca-Cola. Each of these brands, however, has recently suffered declining loyalty (Welch

2000; Munk 1999a; Munk 1999b; Neuborne and Kerwin 1999; Sellers 1998; Tedeschi 1998a; Tedeschi 1998b; McKay and Deogun 1999).

In the course of our study, we discovered that the attitudes, affect, and behaviors that interested us were displayed readily by fans of sports teams, particularly college football teams. Consequently, we developed a model of consumer devotion based on such fans, and then applied it to other consumer products and services. In our model we propose that consumer devotion occurs when there is internalized affective commitment (Echambadi 2000) accompanied by proactive sustaining behaviors.

The term “devotion” implies religious fervor, and indeed, a college football team (or other object of devotion) holds elements of the “sacred” for the devoted fan. Informants often referred to their fandom as religion, and used religious terms such as “conversion” and “saint” when discussing it. Drawing from Durkheim, Eliade, and others, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) developed a list of 12 properties of sacredness: hierophany, kratophany, opposition to the profane, contamination, sacrifice, commitment, objectification, ritual, myth, mystery, *communitas*, and ecstasy and flow. Many of these apply for devoted fans and their adored teams. The property of *commitment* is central for devoted fans of college football teams. We saw this principle manifest by the fans who own recreational vehicles that they use to follow the teams to away games—all of them in some cases. Many informants are committed enough to attend all of the home games and watch all of the televised games. One of them advanced the date of his wedding so that it would not conflict with the Alabama football schedule.

Commitment to the team often also means active opposition to rival teams. An Alabama fan mentioned that “Alabama fans have *culture* and Auburn fans have *agriculture*.” Some Florida fans delight in referring to rival Florida State as a “girls’ school,” alluding to its origin as a college for women. While these rivalries are generally good-natured, they reflect the property of sacredness termed *opposition to the profane*. Although informants did not use these expressions, there is no doubt that many of them would enjoy the concept of their “sacred” team versus the “profane” rival team.

The property of *sacrifice* can be seen clearly when devoted fans willingly pay high prices for tickets or endure cold weather so that their body paint can be seen. Perhaps some of the discomfort is mitigated by another property of sacredness: *ecstasy and flow*. Devoted fans described experiences at games, particularly victories, as transcendent peak experiences, in which they experience liminality. This liminal state also facilitates expression of *communitas*, another, related property of the sacred. When this occurs, normal social structures are dismissed and individuals interact on equal levels of status. During a game there is a distinct camaraderie among fans of the same team. Normal social roles are forgotten when devoted Arkansas fans are “calling hogs” to support their team.

Hog calling itself is an example of *ritual*, a property of sacredness that is ubiquitous on game days. Informants had established rituals about the clothing they wear, the food they eat, friends with whom they gather, pre-game and post-game tailgating and other parties, and even where they parked their cars. As explained by Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989), rituals are often used to “ensure that the evil powers feared in *kratophany* will not be unleashed (p. 7).”

Kratophany is a property of sacredness that is characterized by simultaneous devotion and fear. For the devoted fan, losing a game is often a dire consequence—something to be feared. Informants reported becoming generally dysfunctional after significant losses. The “evil power” of kratophany for these fans is bad luck. Although it is often ostensibly performed in a tongue-in-cheek manner, rituals are enacted to invite good luck.

Rituals are often performed with the use of meaningful artifacts—good luck charms of various



sorts. The objects become sacred through *contamination* by being involved in the ritual or associated with the team. Related to this is the property of *objectification*, where otherwise mundane objects represent the sacredness of the team. Fans' vehicles become much more than transportation when they are painted in the school colors and bear various stickers, flags, and signs bearing the team name that express the fans' devotion (pictured at left).

Fandom

Kozinets (2001) identified a sacred aspect of being a fan, but in a different setting. In his insightful ethnography of the culture of consumption surrounding *Star Trek*, he identified five ethnographic themes for *Star Trek* fandom. One of these is entitled “‘A Kind of Higher Existence’: *Star Trek* Consumption as Religious and Mythic (p. 33).” *Star Trek* clubs profess a goal of helping to bring about the idealized future portrayed in the television series and movies. Fans cite the show as a source of moral and spiritual guidance. “Perhaps most importantly of all, the fact that parallels to religion and the sacred are found so prevalently in *Star Trek* discourse and debate demonstrates the remarkable level of affective investment that some (perhaps many) contemporary consumers can collectively make in a commercial product such as *Star Trek* (p. 38).”

Hunt, Bristol, and Babshaw (1999) also recognized fans with high levels of affective investment. They developed a conceptually-based typology of sports fans. *Temporary fans* are those who are only fans for a certain amount of time. For example, an individual may be a fan of a specific team only during winning seasons, or only as long as a favorite player is part of the team. *Local fans* are limited geographically. They tend to be fans of local teams. If they move away from the area, they cease to be fans of that team. *Devoted fans* have neither temporal nor geographic limitations. They have a stronger attachment to the team than do the previous two types of fans.



They support the team during good seasons and bad and also if they move away. Attachment to the team is part of the devoted fan's self-identity. *Fanatical fans* are similar to devoted fans, but somewhat more extreme in their attitudes and behaviors. For them, attachment to the team is very close to the center of self. These are the fans that construct shrines to their teams and come to games in costumes and/or body paint. The fanatical fans pictured above decorate their home on each University of Florida home game day and maintain a shrine inside their home. Pictured below are some of the more than 600 children that have been named after famed Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant (Whitley 1999). Our study regards devoted fans and fanatical fans, but does



not make distinctions between them. Consequently, we will group both under the title of "devoted" fans or consumers. Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw (1999) also identified a group as

dysfunctional fans. They are the disruptive and violent fans, such as the English soccer hooligans. This group is outside the scope of our study and we limit our treatment of it to a brief discussion of a possible extension of our model.

Commitment

Much research regarding commitment has been conducted in the field of organizational behavior. Allen and Meyer (1990) developed and tested a three-component model of commitment. It was originally applied to the commitment of an employee to an organization. Echambadi (2000) applied the framework of the model to the customer retention context. The three components of the model, as formulated by Allen and Meyer (1990), are *continuance*, *normative*, and *affective*. The continuance component of commitment refers to the employee's perception of the costs of leaving the organization as opposed to the benefits of remaining. Based on the items developed to measure this component of the model, the emphasis is on the costs. This aspect of commitment is characterized by a *need* to be so. In our application of the model, the individual's livelihood is not generally affected by ending the association. Consequently, the individual's cognitive comparison is more between the benefits received from supporting the team and the cost of giving that support. To reflect the difference, we have adopted the term "calculative" which is more commonly used in consumer behavior research for this component of commitment (Echambadi 2000, Hansen, Sandvik, and Selnes 2002).

The normative component occurs when employees are loyal to the organization because they feel that it is the moral and correct thing to do—that they have a responsibility to the organization. We have adopted this component of commitment as originally formulated.

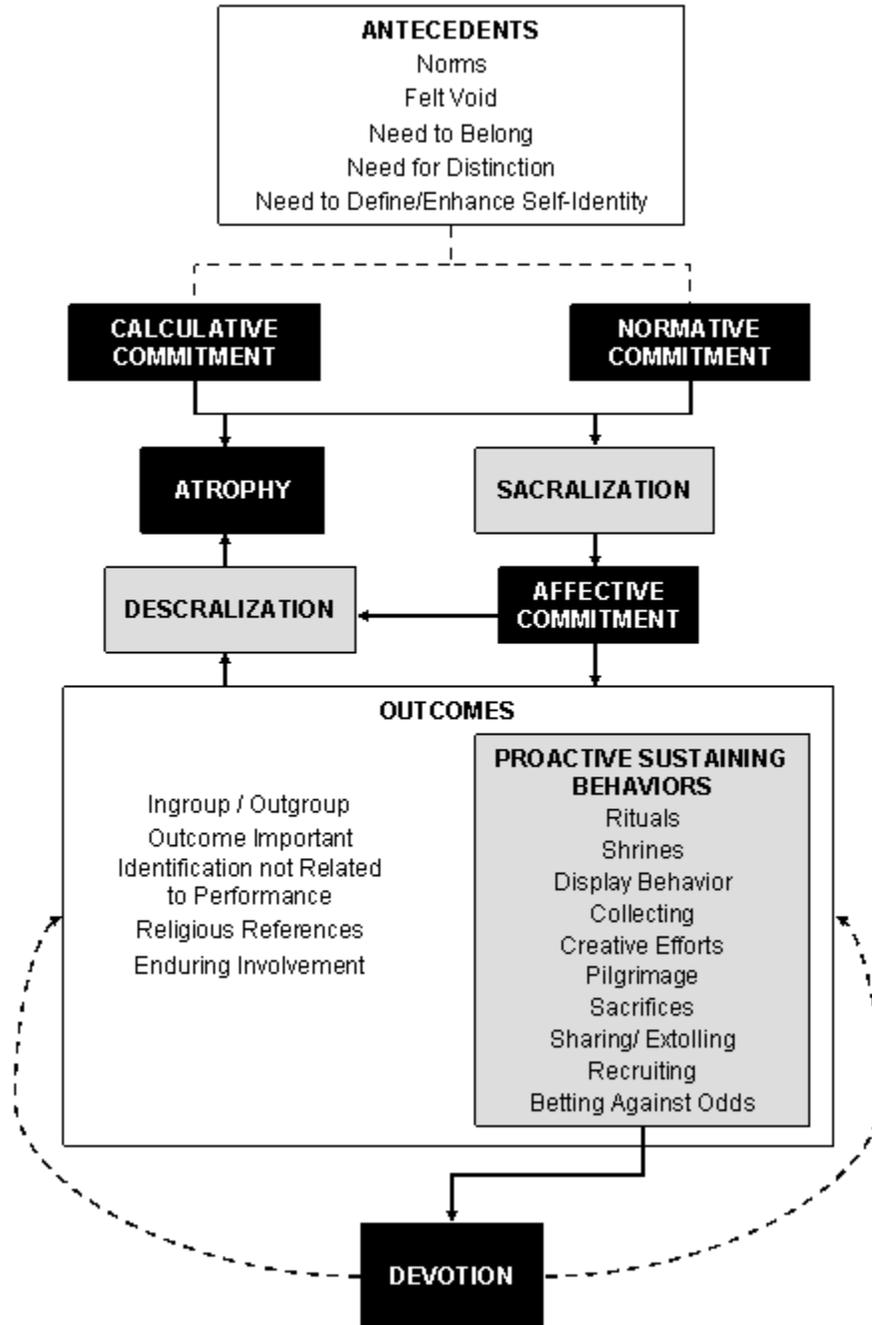
The affective component operates when employees are loyal because they want to be. These are employees who feel very connected and have strong affective feelings toward the organization.

The commitment framework that we apply to our model of consumer devotion includes the three components of *calculative*, *normative*, and *affective* commitment. Calculative commitment means that an individual will remain a fan of a team as long as the benefits of being a fan outweigh the costs (Etzioni 1961; Hrebiniak and Alutto 1972). These are individuals who are more likely to be fans during winning seasons, or when there is a player that is especially exciting to watch. Normative commitment stems from internalized, normative pressures to remain loyal. In our case, these are individuals who feel some sort of obligation to be a fan of the team regardless of the balance of costs and benefits. Finally, affective commitment means that there is an internalized emotional attachment between the fan and the team and that the fan feels that he or she identifies with the team and shares values with it. A more complete discussion of this framework of commitment follows in the Model section.

MODEL

Our model of consumer commitment is presented in *Figure 1*. The process begins with several antecedents that can lead to some level of commitment that is cognitive in nature, by a fan to a football team. Some fans go through a sacralization process by which they progress to internalized affective commitment, some of these then become proactively involved in behaviors that maintain and intensify the commitment such that it becomes more integral to the self of the

FIGURE 1
Model for Consumer Commitment



individual and more permanent—i.e. the individual has become a “devoted” fan. Outcomes of this transcendent level of commitment are extreme fan behaviors, including more of the behaviors that will help to maintain the devoted state. The model was developed conceptually, but we draw examples of the concepts included in the model from our qualitative research. We do not intend for the examples to be construed as empirical evidence for the model.

Antecedents

Individuals who develop commitment to a team may do so to fulfill expectations that others have of them, or to satisfy their own needs. In other words, the antecedents can be based interpersonally or intrapersonally. In either case, developing commitment helps them to achieve cognitive consistency (Heider 1958). If a family has a tradition of supporting a college football team, this tradition may have become established as a family norm (Fields 1984). Individuals who value their membership in the family will experience cognitive inconsistency if they do not also become fans. For example, one informant stated that she had “married into” being a Florida State fan. When asked if she was now a committed fan, her husband responded, “She better be.”

Students, alumni of the college, or members of the local community may also feel pressure to be committed fans—responding to a norm to support “our” team. Developing this commitment may also relate to the concept of the extended self (Belk 1988). Belk (1988) says that the self-extension process may include the maintenance of multiple levels of the self. This maintenance of multiple levels of the self may include viewing our family, community, and/or country as part of who we are.

Further, consumers use reference groups as a source of brand associations, which can be linked to one's mental representation of self to meet self-verification or self-enhancement goals (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Escalas and Bettman (2003) show that brands used by member groups and aspiration groups can become connected to consumers' mental representation of self as they use these brands to define and create their self-concepts.

Others may develop commitment to a team to fill a void that causes cognitive inconsistency about their self identities and their life situations. They become committed to the team in an effort to compensate for something that they feel is missing in their lives. A resident of Gainesville, Florida explained that she and her husband had never had children. To compensate, they had adopted the athletic teams of the University of Florida. The theme of adoption is evident in parental behaviors, including meeting the team at the airport, with homemade treats, as the team returned from a loss. This couple filled a void of being childless through their commitment to the team.

This is also consistent with Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self. In this regard, consumers may refer to the extended self as “what is mine.” The various categories of the extended self include the body, internal processes, ideas, experiences, and those persons, places and things to which one feels attached.

Another informant described the filling of a felt deficiency in his heritage as a native of Alabama:

...if you look at Alabama and the history and the past, all the problems. We were a poor state and always last in education and always last in all these other categories. And we had problems with segregation and all that in the 50s. And, that's an image we battle with every day. But, there's one thing we can do as well as anybody in the country and that's play football. That's one thing we can do. It gives our state a sense of pride. We can go out there and play football with anybody...That's right and it's important. I think it's something deeply rooted in everybody because it's something you're proud of...

A sense of unfilled needs creates a state of cognitive inconsistency that may direct individuals toward commitment to a team. The need for affiliation (or “belongingness”) is recognized as a basic psychological need (Murry 1938, Maslow 1970, McClelland 1987) and it applies to motivation to develop commitment for football teams (Birrell 1981). One respondent told us, “You’ve got something in common with anybody from Arkansas...it’s a good feeling.” The fans use Arkansas football to interact with each other. This is consistent with Holt’s (1995) metaphor of consumption: “consuming as play” which he described in the context of sports (Chicago Cubs) fans. According to this metaphor, by communing with other fans, consumption (e.g. watching the game) becomes a mutual experience.

The following two quotes are examples of how fans affiliate with each other:

At the Razorback clubs, the booster clubs, all over the Southeast also...wherever we go we can sit down and start a conversation with somebody and in five minutes it's like you have known them forever and you are best friends.

We do a lot of visiting and we get to know other Alabama fans. Yeah, it's like a family really. Especially if you park in the same location.

This is consistent with Fournier’s (1998) “self-connection” facet of brand relationship quality. Self-connection is the “degree to which the brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes,” (Fournier 1998).

In addition, sharing food (as is done during pre- and post-game tailgating, a popular way that fans interact) is a symbolic way of sharing group identity in that food is also incorporated into the self (Belk 1988). Events involving the sharing of food (i.e., holiday meals, dinner parties) are situations that involve bonding through food (Belk 1988). Further, symbolic interactionist theory supports the notion that social interactions influence self-definitions via appraisals (Laverie, Kleine and Kleine 2002).

Other individuals may be motivated toward commitment to a team by their need for distinction (Birrell 1981). For example, when asked why Florida State was his favorite team, one man replied, “Because when I was there the team was considered underdogs.” Another fan grew tired of “everyone cheering for the Florida Gators,” so he decided to root for their archrival, the Florida State Seminoles, which has been his team “from here on out.” This fan exemplifies Holt’s (1995) metaphor of “consuming as classification.” Applying this metaphor, fans use the teams to build affiliation with fans of the same team and enhance distinction from fans of other teams.

Sankar (2003) proposed that individuals can develop strong relationships with organizations to fulfill self-definitional needs. Accordingly, some fans may become committed out of a desire to define or enhance their self-identity. Informants told us about being fans all their lives and describing teams as their own. This is consistent with Holt's (1995) consumption metaphor entitled "consuming as integration." According to this metaphor, fans engage in various practices to establish and define their connection to the team. Once again, this also applies to the Belk's (1988) notion of the extended self being defined by a person as "what is mine".

Commitment—Calculative and Normative

The antecedents may lead to commitment that is calculative or normative. The concept of calculative commitment represents the rational base to retention (Gilliland and Bello 2002) and "is defined as the extent to which exchange partners perceive the need to maintain a relationship given the anticipated termination or switching costs" (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, and Kumar. 1996, page 304).

"Calculatively" committed fans are those who see a net benefit when comparing the costs (financial, effort, emotional input) and the benefits. Informants described being loyal to the team for enjoyable benefits ("The more you contribute the better the tickets you can get") or for social experiences (a Florida State fan reports that she attends games to be with her husband). Calculatively committed fans are oftentimes described by other, more devoted, fans as "fair-weather fans" (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999), whose support for the team tends to be stronger in winning years or who develop commitment because the team is a winning team. The following is a description of "fair-weather fans" by one informant:

Fair weather fans who are uneducated fans that don't know the tradition of the school's program and don't know the fight song...they make me sick. If you are going to root for your school, you should do it 100%. You've got to take the good with the bad...Everyone should support the team.

Some fans may see their loyalty as a habit, supporting the team just because "that's what I've always done," which may be characterized as calculative commitment—remaining loyal to avoid switching costs.

"Normative commitment can be viewed as the sum total of internalized pressures and reflects the socio-normative base to retention (Echambadi 2000)." Fans with normative commitment feel that supporting the team is what they should do, that it is the right thing to do. This may be due to the fact that the team is their local team ("I'm loyal to them because they are the hometown team") or the state team ("It doesn't make a difference if you went to school there—as long as you are from Arkansas, you are a hog fan—it's like a state team") (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999). Others feel it is important to be loyal to fulfill the family tradition ("It's a family tradition thing" or "Ever since I was born...my whole family is Alabama fans. My dad went to Alabama, his brother went to Alabama, just my whole family is fans").

Clearly, calculative and normative commitment are not mutually exclusive. There may be fans who calculate the costs versus benefits of adhering to norms. Similarly, a fan's values regarding

the experience of supporting a team are affected by norms of our culture, e.g. that it is more enjoyable to support a winning team. The potential overlap of these types of commitment is explained when we realize that calculated benefit and normative pressures are separate dimensions rather than opposite poles of the same dimension.

These forms of commitment are temporary or transitory. Calculative commitment remains only as long as the perceived benefits outweigh costs. The balance of costs and benefits could change due to a losing season, change of coach, departure of favorite players, or just a general loss of interest. Normative commitment may be somewhat more enduring, but will only remain as long as the norms are enforced for the individual. For example, family norms may become less influential in a person's life as that person becomes more independent of the family, or develops a self identity that is more individualistic. Similarly, the effect of norms on alumni may wane as more years and miles separate them from the school. Consequently, commitment to a team may atrophy.

Sacralization

While the commitment of some fans may atrophy, other fans undergo a sacralization process, and progress from calculative commitment or normative commitment to affective commitment—a more personal and intense form of commitment (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). Several events may occur during this sacralization process to move fans to this stronger form of commitment, at which point the team becomes sacred to the fan. Some fans experience a “transcendent event” (Serwer 1998) or experience “quintessence” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) that inspires them to develop a stronger commitment. One such fan told us about his “transcendent” event when he experienced the quintessence of Florida State football:

The first time you walk into the stadium and you start hearing the FSU fans and the marching band, it just gets your blood boiling. You're pumped and ready for the game. Then, all of a sudden you see all the players come running out from the end zone onto the field, with Chief Osceola leading the way. Then you see Bobby Bowden, Saint Bowden. It's just breathtaking the first time. I believe everyone, even if they are not an FSU fan, should experience a feeling like this.

Other fans experience “sacralization through inheritance” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). They inherit the team just as they would inherit a valued family heirloom.

I guess it started when I was four or five years old. We did not have a TV back then. My dad always listened to the Notre Dame game on the radio, so I listened to the games with him. That's how I started to like Notre Dame.”

This sacralization process is similar to family traditions creating normative commitment, but at a level of greater intensity. For sacralization by inheritance to occur, one or more of the following conditions are necessary: the team had already achieved sacred status for the family (so that the individual is inheriting something sacred), or the process of inheritance itself had some sacred or transcendent meaning to the recipient—perhaps the fan in the preceding example experienced important bonding with her father while listening to the games.

Fournier (1998) found that some of the relationships that consumers formed with brands had nostalgic aspects. Children often form attachments to brands that their parents or grandparents used, because it makes them remember times with their loved ones. These relationships that children form with brands tend to be more imbedded than relationships developed later in life (Ji, 2002).



Some fans indicated that their commitment to their team was due, in part, to a recognized tradition of the program. This was common among Alabama fans. This is an example of “sacralization through external sanction” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). The opinions of experts become important to the development of commitment among others.

Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) explain how objects become sacred through “gift-giving” and “collecting.” These activities are common among fans. Many described collections of team-related merchandise or related how many of the gifts they receive are licensed items. A fan in Gainesville, Florida proudly gave a tour of her “Gator room” (pictured above) which was filled with Gator items that she had collected or received as gifts. An Alabama fan showed off the team quilts (pictured below, left) she had made for the RV that they drove to the games. These items help to objectify the team and build commitment for the team as well as the collected items.

Some fans make long trips to watch games. A group of teenage boys (below, right)



exhausted their combined financial resources to drive to Orlando, Florida to watch their beloved Arkansas Razorbacks play in the Citrus Bowl. (“Nutts” refers to coach, Houston Nutt). This is an example of “sacralization through pilgrimage” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).

Zillman and Paulus (1993) describe the “...formation of alliances whereby fans perceive themselves as members of a tacitly existing group to which the objects of their fanship belong,” (p. 604). At this point the fan begins to feel as if s/he is part of the team. For example, when we asked a Florida State fan about how he feels when his team loses. He described a feeling of personal responsibility:

Oh, I’m devastated and I refuse to take any phone calls or talk to anyone about it. I feel that maybe I didn’t cheer loud enough for them, or maybe I wasn’t there spiritually enough to help them. I get totally upset and depressed when Florida State loses a football game.

Part of the sacralization, or transition to affective commitment, is an increasing identification with the team in which viewing the team as part of one’s self begins (Fisher and Wakefield 1998), as expressed in the following quote from an Alabama fan:

It just gets in your blood. You look at Alabama’s tradition and you hear all of the stories and everything just builds in yourself.

One important point that must be noted here is that several of the sacralization processes (i.e., collecting, pilgrimages, affiliation, and viewing the team as part of one’s self-identity) also appear as outcomes of affective commitment or proactive sustaining behaviors that serve to preserve the sacredness of the team, as is discussed below.

Commitment--Affective

As a result of proceeding through a sacralization process, the fan’s commitment to the team has become more affective in nature. The fan has developed an attachment to the team such that the team is used by the fan to maintain his or her self-concept. He or she tends to feel that the values of the team are analogous to his or her own values (“I like the

history and tradition the school has...everything the school represents—integrity and loyalty”). The team is emotionally significant to the fan and is important to the fan’s self-worth (Ball and Tasaki 1992) and self-identity (“I’d say I’m a big Alabama fan all my life...”) (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999). According to Ball and Tasaki (1992), the attachment characterized by affective commitment is such that loss of the object of attachment (losing the team in this case) is perceived as a loss of self.

This identification of the team with self is consistent with Holt’s metaphor of consuming as integration (1995). It is also similar to Bhattacharya and Sen’s concept of consumer-company identification (2003). The affectively committed fan identifies with the team to satisfy key self-definitional needs. This is also consistent with Fournier’s (1998) “self-connection” facet of brand relationship quality. Self-connection is the “degree to which the brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes,” (Fournier 1998).

While the fan’s commitment has become more affective in nature, it has also become internalized. As a result, the commitment is intrinsically motivated. This is in contrast to calculative and normative commitment types, which are motivated extrinsically—through anticipated reinforcers from the external environment. An example of a fan that is motivated by internalized affective commitment is the informant who gave the following reply when asked how she would characterize the team if it were a person:

Oh, I would love that person; we would be very close friends. I love Alabama. I love everything about them. I love the campus, I love the stadium, I love the colors, I love the elephant. I love that all my children graduated there. I do. Something about it—this place—just draws me...

The affectively committed fan is committed regardless of the balance of costs and benefits for their commitment and regardless of the expectations of others.

Outcomes of Affective Commitment

Several outcomes result from affective commitment. We alluded to some of these outcomes previously, in the discussion of the theoretical basis of this study. In this section we will take a more comprehensive look at outcomes from affective commitment.

Fans with this higher identification with the team are then more likely to ascribe positive attributes to their team (the in-group) and negative attributes to other teams (the out-group) (Branscombe 1992). For example,

Michigan fans are the intellectuals...Arkansas fans are more folksy.

I think there is obviously more tradition in Alabama than in Auburn. I think it’s a different quality of people. They say “culture versus agriculture.” I think the people from Alabama have more class.

According to Fournier (1998), in strong consumer-brand relationships, bonding between the two partners grows over time, and can lead to biased perceptions of the brand.

To the affectively committed fan, the outcome of the game is of central importance (Real and Mechikoff 1992), often affecting his/her mood and outlook for a period of time following the game. One informant explained his feelings following a lackluster season:

I don't even want to talk about it. It killed me—it was depressing. I was physically depressed. I would like to get hypnosis and get the whole season wiped from my memory. That would be the ideal situation.

We make a distinction between having the team lose a game and loss of the team itself. As discussed previously, it is part of the definition of affective commitment that loss of the team would be perceived as loss of self (Ball and Tasaki 1992). An outcome of this connection between the team and self is that failures by the team are felt personally.

Although affectively committed fans live and die by the success and failure of their teams, their loyalty does not wane if the team's performance is poor. These fans describe themselves as "good fans" that always support the team, even in the lean years, ("We go 0 and 11 this year and I'll still be in the stadium") (Branscombe and Wann 1991). When we asked one fan if he is loyal because the team performs well, he told us:

It is definitely not based on performance, because they do not always perform well. I really do not know where my loyalty comes from. You know, you just build up an attraction or a loyalty to something.

This is consistent with Fournier's (1998) "love and passion" facet of brand relationship quality, which reflects more than a strong preference for the brand. Rather, it is a feeling that the brand is irreplaceable and unique. This facet of the brand relationship quality encourages "biased, positive perception of the partner," transgressions are forgiven and accommodation is encouraged (Fournier 1998). Thus, with strong commitment, the consumer is more likely to forgive transgressions by the brand (Fournier 1998).

In addition to not being limited to winning years, these fans' loyalty is not limited to just football season, but is enduring throughout the year. Many informants described how they follow player recruiting throughout the year, attend team-related events during the off-season, and how they live for football season to arrive. This can be explained in the context of product and brand involvement.

According to Bloch (1982), product involvement refers to an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal, or emotional attachment evoked by a product in a particular individual. Product involvement may be temporary—stimulated by a purchase decision. This is known as situational involvement. Football fans that only concern themselves with the team during football season may be identified as having situational involvement. Enduring involvement, however, exists on a long-term basis. The consumer continues to be involved when a purchase goal is not operative, or in our football example, during the off-season. The magnitude of enduring involvement is positively related to the extent to which an individual perceives such involvement as a vehicle for self (or self-concept) expression or enhancement (Bloch 1982). Enduring involvement is long-term product interest or attachment.

Consumers who have enduring involvement with a particular product category receive a great deal of pleasure from these products (Bloch and Bruce 1984; Laurent and Kapferer 1985). In addition, highly involved consumers are more likely to browse retail stores that carry products with which they are involved and engage in higher levels of ongoing search in order to increase, for example, levels of fun and pleasure (Bloch, Ridgway, and Sherrell 1989; Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway 1986; Schmidt and Spreng 1996). In the case of devoted consumers, enduring involvement is in regard to a specific brand within the product category. The devoted college football fan watches videotapes of games during the off-season and carefully follows the scouting, recruiting, and training activities of the team.

As it is sacralization processes that bring fans to a state of affective commitment, it follows that affectively committed fans would implicitly, and perhaps explicitly, recognize the aspects of sacredness in their commitment to the team (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Religious references are common among these loyal fans (Birrell 1981). Informants frequently described their loyalty as “like religion”. One man told us, “My oldest son has the spirit,” whereas another fan is quoted as saying, “My two children have been brought up in the Gator faith (Clarke 1999, p. E1).” Others who became fans later in life often characterized themselves as “converts.” One Notre Dame fan explained his commitment this way:

It's my number one priority, all I think about. The order goes—God, Country, Notre Dame. You could say I'm very loyal.

Desacralization

While the outcomes mentioned up to this point exhibit the affective nature of the fan's loyalty for the sacred team, additional behaviors are needed to avert possible desacralization. “Ecstatic as one might feel upon having contact with the sacred..., sacred status may be lost through habituation, forgetting, or encroachment of the profane (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).” If desacralization occurs, the affective nature of the commitment is lost and commitment in general may atrophy.

Recruiting violations, or misconduct by players or coaches, can profane a previously sacred team in the minds of some fans. Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry commented on how money can desacralize sports (1989). Fans of college football would like to believe that there is a difference between highly-paid professional players in the NFL and the college players who are playing for the honor and glory of the school, its students, and alumni.

Scandals, however, are not the only likely cause of desacralization. That which is sacred “may begin to seem ordinary and profane over time, ritual maintenance is sometimes needed to preserve and revivify...sacred status (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989).” We have taken Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry's (1989) concept of “sustaining rituals” and applied it to college football fandom as “proactive sustaining behaviors.” To be effective, these behaviors must consist of significant activities done by the individual by his/her own volition. The same behaviors, done to please others, or due to norms or other external pressures, do not have the same sustaining effect. When fans are proactively and voluntarily engaging in such activities on

a continuing basis, however, they must remain strongly committed to the team in order to maintain cognitive consistency.

Allen, Machleit, and Kleine (1992) determined that affective motivation has a role in perpetuating behavior. We are suggesting that the behaviors can, in turn, perpetuate affective commitment.

Proactive Sustaining Behaviors

We have already presented several outcomes of affective commitment. Those discussed previously, however, were not necessarily the sort of proactive behaviors needed sustain the sacredness of the team for the individual fan. Fans who engage in proactive sustaining behaviors become virtually permanent in their commitment to the team.

Ongoing rituals are one form of proactive sustaining behavior. Once the fan reaches the level of affective commitment, rituals involving the team and games become important (Birrell 1981; Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Many fans convene with friends and family to watch the game at home or make pilgrimages to the stadium, where “tailgating” and potluck dinners are an absolute requirement. One fan explained his personal rituals for game day:

Q: Do you have any FSU game day rituals?

A: Yes, I do. I prefer to sit at home and watch the game alone. I don't like telephone calls and people at the door because I don't want to see or talk to anyone. I won't even turn the TV during commercials to check on the outcomes of other games. I prefer to eat chicken wings and chips during the game. I also dress from head to toe, even in my hat, all in FSU attire.

Significant rituals can be observed in the encampments of RVs that form during the days before a game (pictured below). These fans wear special clothing on the day before the game and different special clothing for the game itself, share pre-game cookouts, watch videotapes of previous games, and set up camp adjacent to the same friends each time. These fans have their commitment strengthened both by “sacralization through pilgrimage” and by “sacralization through ritual” (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). So for them, the sacralization processes also serve as sustaining behaviors.

According to Boorstin (1973), one of the key ways of expressing group membership is through shared consumption symbols. Such symbols help identify group membership and define the group self. Consumers then define themselves through group identity at various levels.



Many fans sustain the sacredness of the team by erecting and maintaining shrines in their homes to pay homage to them, such as the “Gator Room” at a fan’s home in Gainesville, Florida. Others go to great lengths to display the “brand” and to collect team-related clothing and other memorabilia (Madrigal 1995; Fisher and Wakefield 1999; Belk 1988). A Notre Dame fan told us he has a Fighting Irish pendant that he wears every day, along with shirts or sweatshirts, depending on the weather. Holman (1980) investigated apparel as communication. She enumerated several communicative functions of apparel. Included among these is an emblematic function. According to Holman (1980), clothing can identify group membership, occupation, individual characteristics (including age group), social class, degree of wealth, politics, and other attitudes. This notion concurs with the ideas of Fiske and Taylor (1991) about social categories and schemas. They state, “Social categories, such as economic class and occupation can be based on uniforms, styles of clothing, and personal artifacts.” By wearing apparel that displays team logos, consumers identify themselves as members of the social group of fans—a group that through a strong commonality transcends economic or social class distinctions.

One Florida State fan who exhibited display behavior described his collection for us:

I have the hats, shorts, and shirts. I even have the FSU dress socks and tie, so when I go out I can still show my support. I have my golf bag, which is an FSU product, and my golf club covers are even Florida State products. If it has FSU on it, I have to have it. Sometimes it doesn't even matter about cost. I even have car magnets so when you go out to the game you can put them on the car. When FSU won the national championship, I had to go out and find the Coca-Cola bottles that displayed this. I even collect NASCAR and found a FSU die cast piece that doesn't really fit into my collection, but I had to have it. If it is there to be bought, I will buy it...If someone doesn't know what to get me for a gift, I tell them if it has FSU on it, that will do just fine...I would probably prefer an FSU gift over something else. Because you just can't go wrong with an FSU gift.

This is consistent with the notion that informal uniforms that are worn by social groups can indicate group identity (Belk 1988).

Some fans further involve themselves in display behavior by personally creating the team-related items that they display. We observed various “creative” efforts by team fans such as crafts (quilts, needlepoint designs) and special web pages devoted to the teams.

Many affectively committed fans further sustain the sacred nature of their commitment by making significant sacrifices (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) to support their teams and watch their games. Many of the fans in the RV encampments are generous financial contributors to the athletic program of their school. Many fans told us they would do “anything possible” to watch their team. Planning activities around games and missing parties, weddings, and other events due to games were frequently mentioned. When asked if he had any game-related rituals, one informant told us, “No, I only plan my weekends around the games.” Other fans reported:

We had to have a three-month engagement because we had to get the wedding in before football season.

Supportive, giving. I give a lot of my time and energy to the team.

I give a lot of everything. Yeah, money, time, and energy.

According to Fournier (1998), if a consumer has developed a committed relationship with a brand, the consumer is even more invested, monetarily and emotionally.

Fans also engage in outwardly focused behaviors, such as sharing their knowledge about the team and extolling the virtues of the team (Madrigal 1995). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) refer to such individuals as “consumer champions” or “advocates.” Some fans even go so far as to actively attempt to recruit others (“...I have a friend that used to rag me about my team. Eventually he became a loyal fan”). These are certainly sustaining behaviors. It is not likely that a fan’s commitment to a team will wane while that fan is preaching its merits to others. Knowledge of, and preference for, sports teams can serve as a means of group identification (Belk 1988).

In addition, these highly committed fans are sometimes willing to wager bets in favor of their team, even if they feel the odds are against their team’s success. This helps to maintain cognitive consistency. Fans who only bet when there is a good chance of victory are merely displaying calculative commitment. Betting against the odds is an expression of loyalty beyond objective forecasting of returns—loyalty of affectively committed fans.

Q: Would your loyalty ever make you bet on a game even if you weren’t confident in the outcome?

A: Well, like the friend I was just talking about—this bet was a hard one for me to make. We had no chance to win this game. But, deep down inside I just knew we would. Later that year we made the same bet and I was worried. We lost and I had to wear a Gator hat to and from work for a month. Having to put that hat on was the hardest thing I had to do, because I just can’t stand that team.

Devotion

The ultimate fans are those who are affectively committed to the team and are proactively engaging in sustaining behavior that sustains their affective commitment. To acknowledge the transcendent nature of their commitment, we have termed these as “devoted fans.” They are the fans that can be expected to continue to support the team in virtually any circumstance. We present as our definition of “devotion”: affective commitment accompanied by proactive sustaining rituals.

Three themes are pervasive in the model: the concept of self, social processes, and maintaining cognitive consistency. Each of these themes is essential to the model and each interacts with the other two. As an example, antecedents of the model include needs of consumers to achieve an *ideal self* that they may become the types of fans that they would like to perceive themselves as. In terms of social influences, there may be established norms of fandom, or there may be a group of fans to which individuals aspire to belong. There would be an interaction between the self concept and social influences

if individuals are pursuing an *ideal social self* such that they seek to become the fans that they want others to perceive them as (Morgan 1993). Due to a need for cognitive consistency between the current states and aspired selves and group memberships, the individuals are motivated to develop behaviors and commitment.

A number of different social processes are important to our model. The group of fans of the team can become an important reference group for individual fans. The group of devoted fans has distinct norms of unwavering support for the team through good times and bad. Interacting with each other at games, game-day parties, RV encampments, and on message boards, the group exerts *informational influence* on members and aspiring members of the group. The group becomes a highly credible source of information about the team. The *value-expressive influence* (Bearden and Etzel 1982) of the group encourages appropriate fan behaviors—behaviors that are consistent with the values and attitudes of the group. Through a process of *social comparison* (Festinger 1954), members of the group compare their own behaviors and attitudes with the group. They are also likely to compare the role-related product clusters they have accumulated (team clothing, banners, etc.) with those of other members of the group.

The group influences result in various levels of compliance from different fans. Those who are calculatively or normatively committed are probably merely *compliant*, while those who are affectively committed or devoted have reached a level of *private acceptance* (Kiesler and Kiesler 1969). In other words, when commitment is at only a cognitive level, individuals are likely to be conforming to the wishes of the group without really feeling strong commitment to the team. When the person personally develops the commitment to the team, however, he or she progresses to an affective level of commitment.

MODEL EXTENSION

After demonstrating our model in a football context, we felt it would be useful to also attempt to examine it in another setting—traditional “product” brands. As shown in our model in Figure 1, the process begins with several antecedents to devotion.

Antecedents

Similar to the football setting, the antecedents can be based interpersonally or intrapersonally. As with football fans, individuals can become devoted based (interpersonally) on adherence to family norms: “I’m loyal to (Kellogg’s, Ragu, Pledge) because my parents used it.” This example helps to point out a distinction between the football fan context and the product brand context. The norms in the latter seem to be based more on following an example than responding to expectations and pressure from others. The motivation comes more from the individual wanting to be similar to the group, than the group demanding loyalty—one could be disloyal to the brand without it being interpreted as disloyalty to the family.

Additional interpersonally-based antecedents were reported by informants who told us that they were loyal to particular brands because these brands were recommended by their doctors (i.e.,

Gerber, Alive, Neutrogena) or coaches (i.e., Adidas). This is another distinction from the football fan context, where we do not anticipate individuals becoming fans of specific football teams because they received expert advice.

Many consumers are also inspired by a need to belong. While social groups form more readily around college football teams than around most consumer products, peer groups will often favor particular brands and create conformity pressure in order to belong. When asked if someone in particular influenced his loyalty to Nike, one informant explained, “Michael Jordan. I love basketball and he’s always sponsored this brand...My friends feel the same way...You feel more with the crowd because everyone wears Nike.” One female college student described the impetus that started her shopping at the Gap:

I used to hang out with a lot of rich kids back in middle school and they all wore Gap clothes. So, to fit in, I started wearing them.

As in the football context, some consumers were motivated by a need for distinction. A Reebok fan proclaimed that “Everybody seems to be wearing Nike. I like Reebok better—it’s more unique.” Other informants are moved towards devotion by a need to define or enhance their self-identity. They describe their connection to their brands as very strong: “I feel like I have a pretty strong connection to Dove soap...it feels like a part of me.” One informant talked about his devotion to Levi’s jeans:

Levi’s identifies me as a casual and unique person that loves comfort. Wearing Levi’s makes me feel secure about myself and categorizes me in a select group of people that like to dress simple, yet sophisticated.

Another informant described her loyalty to Coke:

...it makes me feel special. I think a drinker of Coca-Cola is a “good taste” person who loves “good brand” products. Anyway, I feel cool when I drink Coca-Cola.

Consuming with others to fulfill the need to belong was also prevalent in the traditional brand setting. Below are some quotes describing the fulfillment of this need:

We would go and hang out with other teenagers. Pizza Hut was a place to hang out other than the mall. When the mall was closed, we went to Pizza Hut. We hung out there with friends and the people we saw from high school there. Then, in college, you get with a bunch of friends and go out to Pizza Hut for lunch. That was fun. It gives me a good feeling thinking about that. It was fun.

It has definitely given me the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends—through my Coca-Cola connections, like being in the collectors’ club.

If I see another Widespread Panic fan around in everyday life, I always go up and meet that person. Last week I was getting food from Denny’s to go, my truck was running and I had

Panic playing. As I got in my truck, some Panic fan walked by and we talked for like 15-20 minutes. It's always real cool to run into a Panic fan.

We also saw evidence of consumers fulfilling the need to belong by finding something in common with others. One informant replied:

I feel good when I am driving my Toyota. When I see other people driving Toyotas, I feel a bond if it is the same model. I feel like we are friends in a round about way...

If you see anyone wearing the Roots brand outside of Canada, you have an association with these people and can almost just assume they are from Canada or at least have been there.

I can tell you that owning a Harley is like being in a brotherhood. Everyone that has one feels a sense of kinship with other Harley owners.

Intrapersonally-based antecedents for loyalty relate to anticipated personal benefits to be received by being loyal to a brand, such as consistently pleasing performance of the product and a perception of good value for the money. Informants reported being motivated to stick with products that are “dependable” or that are a “good value.”

Antecedents that are based intrapersonally also include desires for hedonic benefits. Regarding clothing specifically, a desire for “comfort” seems to direct consumers toward specific brands. They also seek styles that they like, and clothing that helps them feel positively about themselves. Aesthetics are a hedonic motivator for many product classes with informants reporting preferences for colors, appearance, textures, and flavors. Satisfaction of these needs can motivate commitment to a brand.

Commitment—Calculative and Normative

As in the football context, consumers are motivated by one or more antecedents. Subsequently, they may develop calculative or normative commitment to the brand. Consumers maintain calculative commitment for various reasons, such as receiving particular benefits from the brand. For example, one respondent told us “When I wear Victoria’s Secret, I do feel better. It has a way of making you feel sexier and more confident,” whereas another said, “I like Structure—it makes me look professional.” One informant revealed to us how he feels about Doc Marten shoes:

I always feel that I am in style and looking a little taller with them when I’m out. Of course my feet are comfortable, but more importantly I like being a little taller when I’m at a club or any social environment. Comfort is overridden by my insecurities of being too short in this situation. Dr. Marten’s makes me feel complete when I get dressed to go anywhere. I would feel naked and a little shorter if I were only wearing any other product line of shoe. Yes, I feel more confident when I’m a little taller.

Another informant told us the following about wearing Tommy Hilfiger clothing:

I feel cool when I'm wearing his clothes. I feel like to have money even though I don't.

Still other informants gave revealing testimonies relating to their loyalty:

I think the truck is cool, but don't tell anyone

I won't lie and say I bought my Lexus without thinking of social status.

When I drive a BMW I feel rich and I feel important and in the upper level of society.

Others reported that they use particular brands because of the brand's fit, comfort, taste, convenience, or price. Finally, some consumers described their loyalty as a habit ("I've just always used it because it works for me"). In particular, informants who revealed their favorite brand to be a cigarette brand spoke of their habits and addiction to this type of product.

On the other hand, other consumers seem to become more "normatively" committed. Several informants described using the brand as a way to carry on a family tradition. One woman in particular said, "I've been loyal to Coke since I was knee high to a grasshopper. My mother would give me Coke as a child and I've been drinking it ever since." Another consumer told us about his loyalty to Coca-Cola:

I started drinking it, I don't know, probably when I was a year old. I cannot remember exactly. I only remember drinking it. Since I was a kid, all of my family drank it. When you are born and the product is there every moment to drink, I think you are influenced to use that product. I had been influenced to drink Coca-Cola by everybody. When I breathed, Coca-Cola was there.

Another informant stated the following:

My father had a Harley Davidson motor cycle my entire life. I like this product because I grew up knowing and accepting now other motorcycle brand. In my house you were not allowed to ride, much less own, anything but the All-American Harley Davidson.

A mother explained the situation with Pepsi in her household:

Pepsi is the only option that my family members have if they want to drink soda.

Sacralization

Again, in the traditional brand setting, consumers go through a sacralization process from calculative or normative commitment to affective commitment. Some consumers, just like football fans, experience "sacralization through inheritance" (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). For example, one informant said that she was loyal to Liz Claiborne clothing, developing the loyalty from "following my mother's tastes." Another reported the following:

Hellmann's was the brand I grew up with and remember always using. I started when I was a child and I've been buying Hellmann's for over 40 years. My mother used it, so it is the only brand of mayonnaise I've ever purchased and I use it in recipes, as well as a condiment. It is continuity within my family. Everyone in my family uses it. I've raised my children with it and now they use it.

In the preceding example, the use of Hellmann's mayonnaise was a family norm that escalated for this particular consumer to affective commitment. The sacralization of the brand for this consumer is evidenced by her inferences that has enhanced her family life by providing continuity and being part of the raising of her children. This is also evident in the statement below from another informant:

I was raised on Colgate and it worked for me throughout my childhood and adult life and continues to work. I have believed this all my life and I impart this on my children.

Product brands can also become sacred through collecting: "I am loyal to the company in that I collect memorabilia. I buy souvenirs when we are on vacation." Informants also make trips to consume the brand or brand-related products or experiences: "I try to stay involved. We've toured the headquarters and visited the museum in Atlanta." Several informants in our study reported their favorite brand to be a musical band/act. These consumers talked about traveling hundreds of miles to attend concerts. Pilgrimages to Widespread Panic (a rock band) concerts also include encampments several days before the actual concerts and rituals associated with the concerts, similar to football tailgating festivities. One particular Widespread Panic fan (commonly called "Spreadheads") described it this way:

How do I prepare for a show? Well, that's easy—by enjoying a big parking lot scene, drinking beers, hanging out, talking to new and old friends. Most people camp when following the band. You see a lot of people with their mountain bikes and canoes. Spreadheads seem to be outgoing, always searching for fun and adventure. That's part of the whole experience—going to different cities, seeing what the city has and the type of people that live there.

Affective commitment in this context also includes increasing identification with the brand. For example, particular respondents related the following:

Swiss Army watches represent me as a person as much as I think a watch can.

When I drive my Mercedes, I feel that it is an extension of myself—a true part of me.

I am emotionally connected to Polo mainly because I feel that it has become a part of my life and my self-image.

Boyd's Bears reflect the type of person I am.

It has become a part of me and who I am.

Commitment--Affective

Once again, after consumers complete sacralization processes, commitment to the brand appears to be more affective, versus calculative or normative. Consistent with affective commitment, these consumers report that their own values are similar to the perceived values of the brand and/or company:

Why am I loyal to Coca-Cola? Because of its image and attributes as far as the happy family, all-American, all-around just a great brand that represents a lot of things I believe in. The more I dedicate myself to it, the more emotionally attached I become to it. That's one reason for the longevity. Because learning about the company, becoming more educated about them, and still liking what I see and what they stand for...even over time, they have endured my expectations of a company to be proud of.

What is it about Adidas? I like what it stands for.

It's a part of my heritage, next to black-eyed peas and fried chicken. It's a part of my memories, drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola on my mama's front porch with nothing to do.

I would have to say that my connection to Ford is intense and I would have to admit that my connection to the product is more than a connection to the product but also a connection to my youth and the men of the past in my family.

Consumers internalize their affect and commitment to the brand. Several informants characterized the brand as their “best friend” or “someone I would marry.” The brand becomes part of the person’s life and self-concept:

My connection with Coke is very strong. It's something that's been part of my life for years.

I would have to say I am emotionally connected to Folgers because it's been part of my life for a long time.

All of my friends know that I don't drink anything else but Diet Coke. Diet Coke probably reminds my friends of me. I've been drinking Diet Coke longer than I've known some of my friends.

Outcomes of Affective Commitment

Several outcomes also result from affective commitment in the traditional brand context. For many devoted consumers, as with football fans, performance is not necessarily important to the consumer’s identification with the brand (team). One devoted Coca-Cola informant told us she did not care about the company’s falling stock price and other troubles. She would remain steadfast in her loyalty until things turned around. Devoted consumers also tend to engage in in-group/out-group behaviors (Coke versus Pepsi, Ford versus Chevy, Reebok versus Nike, Wal-Mart versus Target, McDonald’s versus Burger King, the Backstreet Boys versus N-Sync): “I am a Coke person, not a Pepsi person.” Finally, devoted consumers maintain an enduring involvement (Bloch 1982) with their brands.

Many informants told us how they just cannot live without their brands and how they would do anything possible to obtain or keep their brands. They also seem to be consistently in-the-know regarding any new developments regarding the brand.

Desacralization

Desacralization may also occur with traditional brands. Encroachment of the profane can occur with scandals and rumors, such as those relating to unfair hiring/promotion practices and lawsuits (i.e., Coca-Cola) or “sweatshop” issues (i.e., Nike). In addition, poor or lower than expected product performance (Saturn), a company's failure to innovate or keep up with trends (Levi's), or health concerns (McDonald's--Mad Cow), could lead to a loss of sacred status.

One informant explained how a brand lost its sacred nature for her son when too many others adopted the same brand:

Well, if you talk to my sons, one's an aggressive in-line skater and he wears Fila because he thinks he's earned it and other boys at school wear it because they think he's cool.

Proactive Sustaining Behaviors

Rituals involving the brands are common: “I use it everyday. It's part of my daily routine.” The following informants described their rituals to us this way:

I come home from work—the first thing I do is slip into my favorite Polo shirt—the one I am wearing now. And, whenever possible, I wear a Polo shirt to work.

I drink Coca-Cola almost every day. I drink it during my meals. I drink it when I drive. It is part of my daily routine. I take a Coke everywhere. I have an intense connection with Coca-Cola. Probably this connection is an addiction. This is the truth—I can't live without it. When I drink a Coca-Cola I feel so good. When I am thirsty I like to drink it very cold. This makes my thirst go away. It is a pleasure for me, probably a ritual, when I drink it. The bubbles and the gas tickle my throat. It is an inexplicable sensation.

When I get home from work I always have an Icehouse. I usually average about 6-8 beers every day.

I usually wear at least one thing from Tommy Hilfiger every day.

In this context we also found devoted consumers who maintain shrines to honor their brands and who engage in display behavior: “We have a Coca-Cola room and a Coke machine at home.” A Budweiser devotee described his T-shirts, neon signs, pool sticks, glasses, mugs, magnets, coasters, and dartboard. One N-Sync fan told us the following:

I have T-shirts, wallpaper that I made from photos in magazines. I have posters everywhere. The first time I saw Justin he had a charm that said “N-SYNC” but they only sold in silver. But, I had to get one anyway.

A devoted Coca-cola consumer explained how she collects memorabilia:

I have an entire Christmas village of Coke. I set the village up with the lights every Christmas. My daughter-in-law gives me something new each year to add to the village I also have Coke beach towels, balls and bags, magnets, calendars, drinking glasses, coke mugs and many others.

Kozinets studied devoted fans of *The X-Files* (1997) and of *Star Trek* (2001). He found display behaviors to be an important aspect of “fandom.” He relates an interchange between members of the *Fan Trek* club about when it is appropriate to wear *Star Trek* uniforms—a recurring topic of discussion (Kozinets 2001). Those who are devoted to the point that they do not care about possible derision from outsiders seek to wear the uniform, or other emblems, in more situations and in situations that are more public.

Devoted consumers also share their knowledge about the brand with others, engage in recruiting behaviors, and spread positive word of mouth:

I tell everyone McDonald's has the best burger in the world and try to get everyone to go there.

I tell people that it's awesome, that it's really good. Every time I see a [Colgate] Total commercial, I tell people, "It's true! It does leave a tingly sensation."

I often recommend it to others. In fact, when shopping with others, if I notice that they are buying any other brand of mayonnaise I tell them that Hellmann's is the best and that they are gross if they buy Miracle Whip, for instance.

One devoted consumer told us this when asked, “Do your friends also drink Sprite?”

Yes, they do. In fact, I make them drink it.

Consumers will go to great lengths and sacrifices to obtain their brands:

I would walk through the desert to get it. I would drive miles out of my way.

As a matter of fact, I went up to Connecticut to buy my latest Mercedes because that dealer was able to deliver the newest model with the navigation system sooner than the Miami dealer. So, I don't mind traveling for my Mercedes.

I wanted to go to their concert this year so bad but I didn't know when the tickets went on sale. I called the radio station and they said they would go on sale tomorrow afternoon. I wasn't prepared for that. I called all of my friends, my mom, my sister, my cousin, and people I only half knew. They all came down at 6:00 in the morning at Ticket Master and spread out in the lines so no matter whose number was called, we would have some way of getting tickets. If I could do it over again, I would sleep on their doorstep so I could be the first one in there.

When examining more traditional brands, we found many of the same attitudes and behaviors and the model appears to be generalizable. It is significant; however, that not all the outcomes were as consistent as they were with the football fans. We saw little in the way of “betting against the odds” with traditional product brands. This is largely because product brands just don’t lend themselves to traditional wagering. The form that this outcome could take with product brands would be when a consumer continues to purchase the product after a series of negative experiences or reports about the product. We did not witness or receive reports of such behavior.

The widespread availability of consumer products made it so that pilgrimages were unusual. They were reported in just a few cases, such as the Coca-Cola devotee who visited the headquarters and museum in Atlanta.

The most significant difference was in the incidence of religious references. Aside from a few shrines, there were no religious references made about product brands, while they abounded for college football teams. This is particularly significant since we consider that a consumer becomes devoted to a brand when that brand takes on a transcendent nature with elements of the sacred for the consumer.

Extension to Dysfunctional Loyalty

Another option for an extension of the model is to apply it to consumer misbehavior by dysfunctional fans, within the context of sports and outside it. On November 13, 1971 there was a football game between Stanford University and San Jose State University. Stanford had a strong team that year and anticipated playing in the Rose Bowl. They were considered heavy favorites over San Jose State for this game in November. Late in the fourth quarter, San Jose State led 13-12. Stanford made a final drive, and then missed the field goal. San Jose fans flooded the field and damaged the goal post while there was still time on the clock. The announcer instructed the fans to leave the field, but to no avail. Using social comparison, the fans could see that it was acceptable behavior for them to be on the field. The announcer was not part of the reference group and had no influence. To stop the behavior, the fans needed social influence from within the reference group.

A contrasting scene was played out at a University of Arizona basketball game in 1999. A player from the opposing team was at the foul line to take a shot. Fans in the stands shined laser pointers into his eyes. Wisely, the stadium management got the highly-respected Coach, Lute Olsen on the microphone. The coach made it clear that the behavior was unwanted. He served as an opinion leader for the reference group and the behavior ceased immediately. The group of devoted fans feels an entitlement to distinction from others due to their commitment levels and team-support behaviors. They make a strong enough in-group/out-group distinction that influences need to come from within their own reference group to be effective.

The University of Michigan also enlisted the help of a respected coach in an attempt to stop vulgar chants at hockey games (Yost 2003). Twenty-year coach, Red Berenson sent a letter to season ticket-holders asking them to stop the vulgarity, he wrote that it “detracts from the excitement of the competition, offends the overwhelming majority of the fans in attendance and adds nothing to the experience of Michigan hockey (page W9).” He also made a plea to fans at

the home opener, to clean up their act. This tactic was also employed successfully at Louisiana State University by athletic director Skip Bertman, who had gained the respect of LSU fans as the school's former national-championship winning baseball coach. He sent out an email message congratulated the LSU fans for their restraint in their celebrations of the football team winning the 2003 national championship:

Congratulations Tiger fans. Our team is the national champion of college football, but you know how to be champions, too.

Efforts to reduce dysfunctional fan behaviors need to recognize the processes that have helped to create the devoted but dysfunctional fan. A devoted fan affords central importance to the success of the team. He or she also bases much of his or her self-concept on being a devoted fan and a member of the elite group of such fans. Consequently, to address dysfunctional fan behaviors, communications should be developed that communicate that inappropriate behaviors will hurt the team and be contrary to the norms of the reference group—enough so that such behavior would result in exclusion from the group. The source of the message is also important. As the group has informational influence on the group members, the information from the group is considered credible. To be effective, the message needs to appear to come from opinion leaders within the reference group.

IMPLICATIONS

John Popper is the front man harmonica player for the musical group Blues Traveler. Due to his distinctive style, he is often asked about his musical influences. Rather than mentioning harmonica players, as might be expected, he mentions saxophone and guitar players, explaining that they have the “vocabulary.” A similar approach may be needed for developing devotion for product brands. Instead of learning from other branded products, this study indicates that managers of these brands should look to college football teams and strong entertainment brands, such as *Star Trek* (Kozinets 2001) for inspiration and as examples of becoming sacred and maintaining that sacredness..

Using college football as a context, we have developed a model of consumer brand devotion. The process begins with antecedent factors that act to influence a consumer to develop commitment to the “brand.” At first, the nature of the commitment tends to be calculative or normative. These sorts of commitment are apt to be transitory. Calculative commitment may atrophy as soon as benefits are no longer perceived to out-weigh costs. Normative commitment may atrophy if situations change such that the fan no longer feels obligated to follow the norms, or if the norms themselves are changed or abandoned. Some fans, however, go through a sacralization process by which they develop affective commitment. At this level, there is an exceptionally strong liking for the team and attachment to it. There are various manifestations of affective commitment, and outcomes from it. Fans tend to identify with the team and view their loyalty team as an important part of their self-concept. Fan/team values also seem to coincide. Fans engage in enduring involvement, throughout the year, including the off-season and losing seasons—although losing seasons become personal tragedies. They come to feel that their team is unique and irreplaceable. As evidence that they have experienced a sacralization process, affectively committed fans commonly use religious references in regard to the team. Despite the

intensity of affective commitment, there is still the possibility of desacralization. This may come if the fan feels betrayed, or the commitment may just fade over time. The desacralization process will not occur, however, if the commitment is maintained through sustaining behaviors that occur through the fans' own volition.

We also examined traditional "product" brands. One intriguing observation here was the difference between the informants' commitment to consumer products compared to their commitment to things like football teams. Commitment to football teams seemed to be much more intense than commitment to consumer brands. While we are not using our examples as empirical evidence, as we assembled examples, there was an emerging pattern. For "traditional brands," there seems to be an overwhelming number of calculative reasons to be loyal. On the other hand, college football seems to generate more affective commitment.

Perhaps one difference between football and traditional brands is that football is typically "consumed" in a group setting, whereas many consumer products are not. It is possible that managers could evoke more passionate devotion to consumer brands by facilitating more group events, such as the events that Saturn sponsored in previous years. Further, managers need to develop strategies for products that cannot be consumed in group settings or would not benefit from this. In addition, better understanding fans' devotion to football teams could help managers create stronger consumer devotion to brands.

From a managerial perspective, the sacralization process is particularly important. Our model may help managers move consumers from calculative or normative commitment to affective commitment. In other words, our findings may help managers introduce sacred aspects to the consumer's commitment. Perhaps marketers could provide or facilitate the transcendent event or the creation of alliances that would encourage consumers to develop affective commitment towards the "brand." For example, Saturn's Homecoming event can be interpreted as an effort to achieve these goals (1999 Saturn Homecoming Invitation). Acura recently staged special VIP hospitality tents at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Local Acura owners were invited to the exclusive tents and given free passes to the event (2004 Acura New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival Invitation).

Other companies are increasing their efforts in what experts call "experiential marketing" by enhancing plant tours and store visits and by opening exciting visitor centers. These companies have found that trying to reach consumers through traditional advertising and other tactics is too difficult. Therefore, they are adding "engrossing personal experiences to drive home the lessons behind their brand" (Kerwin 2004, page 94). Visitors to Ford Motor Company's new \$30 million visitor center will learn about the company's values and new products and experience the brand in a theme park environment. Each year 375,000 kids and their families visit the Crayola Crayon factory to see how crayons are made. They also have the opportunity play with their favorite Crayola colors and work on hands-on projects in the on-site discovery center. Chrysler Jeep owners can attend Camp Jeep, a company-sponsored gathering, where they are able drive on mountain trails and experience other off-road challenges. Finally, every year thousands of young girls visit Mattel's American Girl Places in Chicago and New York. These are giant stores built around the American Girl Doll. The girls get to see musical shows and historical recreations, and can take their dolls to a beauty parlor (Kerwin 2004).

Getting consumers to engage in proactive sustaining behaviors is more difficult. Just as Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) explain that consumer-company identification must be volitional by the consumer, consumers need to feel that “proactive” behaviors are done on their own initiative. Marketers may be able to model the sustaining behaviors in promotional efforts. Also, while brand events such as Saturn’s Homecoming may serve as an initial transcendent event in a sacralization process, successive pilgrimages to an annual event may become a sustaining ritual. Retailers have the opportunity to sponsor events on an ongoing basis. A clothing boutique might hold special fashion shows or trunk shows for its customers each season, for example.

There may be opportunities for marketers to realize some of the benefits of brand events through virtual gatherings. Consumers are becoming increasingly involved with on-line communities—message boards and chat rooms are becoming important social gathering points. *Cooking Light* magazine provides message boards for the community of subscribers. Many subscribers visit the message boards daily, or multiple times daily. The receipt of the new issue of the magazine is heralded with considerable excitement each month. Typically a subscriber will receive her/his copy in the mail and rush to the message board to declare that they have it. Other subscribers may not receive it the same day and they ask for previews about the new issue. The privileged earlier recipients will scan the index and post it on the message board so that others will know what is in the issue that is coming to them. In addition to the shared excitement of the arrival of the new issue, other rituals ensue. Various subscribers try out the recipes in the new issue and then post their reviews on them. The social aspects of the on-line community transcend the normal experience of a magazine subscriber viewing a magazine alone. It also allows for the formation of alliances as described by Zillman and Paulus (1993). Sacralization may occur through external sanction of the magazine by the other subscribers who are posting on the message board. Regular visits and postings to the message board may serve as the proactive sustaining rituals.

We also have attempted to make a contribution to theory in this area by introducing and demonstrating the consumer devotion process. In addition, we have established and clarified a distinction between consumer devotion and affective commitment—that affective commitment is a necessary but not sufficient condition of consumer devotion—it must be accompanied by proactive sustaining behaviors. Further, we have attempted to describe the formation of affective commitment by showing that, through sacralization, commitment becomes internalized and the consumer develops attachment to the brand. We have also sought to compare, contrast, and connect the concepts in our model

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We used a specific context for the formulation of our model. We give observations from qualitative data as examples, but have not done rigorous testing of the model. The model provides a starting point for testing and for examining possible extensions and generalizations. Future research should focus on examining this phenomenon in the context of other frameworks or models.

This research actually began as a study of “transcendent brands.” It evolved into a study of devoted consumers. At this point it may pay to return to a study of brands to examine what sorts of brands have the greatest potential for achieving affective commitment and devotion. For example, some brands may be better suited for addressing the consumer antecedent “need for distinction,” by being more visible in use or by serving an “emblematic function” (Holman 1980). Some brands may be better suited for ritualistic usage.

In addition, the model should be tested empirically with quantitative data as well as qualitative data. It would be useful to develop and test propositions relating to the relationships in our model. For example, the strength of the relationship between affective commitment and the various outcomes should be examined. Differences among consumers who remain at normative commitment, those who remain at calculative commitment, and those who move to affective commitment and devotion would also be useful to examine. Determining how to identify those consumers who would most readily move to affective commitment would be valuable to managers.

An important future direction is to determine effective means of applying the model. This would include research to determine the sorts of sacralization processes that can be initiated by marketers. Possibilities include extraordinary performance or service levels that provide quintessence, or events that help to provide transcendent experiences. Similarly, it would warrant investigation to determine what sorts of things marketers can do to encourage sustaining behaviors. An important aspect of this study would be to determine whether the deliberate attempts by the marketers to create sacralization processes and sustaining behaviors will fail simply because they are deliberate attempts by marketers. Perhaps a sacralization process would be profaned if it was initiated as a commercial activity. Perhaps sustaining behaviors introduced by marketers would not be perceived as volitional by consumers and consequently participation in them would not necessarily compel continued loyalty.

While we did not seek to study dysfunctional fans, some were observed. Examples include the devotee of Diet Coke who drinks 12 cans a day, and the informant who drinks 6-8 Icehouse beers a day. These provide opportunities for future de-marketing studies.

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APPENDIX
Illustrative Informant Comments

CONSTRUCT	COMMENT
ANTECEDENTS Norms: cultural, subcultural, family, group (Fields 1984)	<p><i>I guess it started when I was four or five years old. We did not have a TV back then. My dad always listened to the Notre Dame game on the radio, so I listened to the games with him. That's how I started to like Notre Dame.</i></p> <p><i>It goes back to my dad watching them...when he was younger we spent the first half of every phone call discussing Notre Dame. He followed them just as much as I do.</i></p>
Felt void—something missing in individual's life	<p><i>...if you look at Alabama and the history and the past, all the problems. We were a poor state and always last in education and always last in all these other categories. And we had problems with segregation and all that in the '50s. And, that's an image we battle with every day. But, there's one thing we can do as well as anybody in the country and that's play football. That's one thing we can do. It gives our state a sense of pride. We can go out there and play football with anybody...That's right and it's important. I think it's something deeply rooted in everybody because it's something you're proud of...</i></p>
Need to belong (Birrell 1981)	<p><i>You've got something in common with anybody from Arkansas...it's a good feeling.</i></p> <p><i>I'm in Winn Dixie the other day and I'm looking around and everybody in there is buying about the same stuff—chips and dip, beer and Cokes. And everybody is talking about the football game. And everybody is talking about how bad Auburn got beat. And everybody is having a good time and enjoying life.</i></p> <p><i>We just get a lot of friends that want any excuse to drink beer and we all have a common interest. And that's Alabama football.</i></p> <p><i>We feed at least a block of people...tailgating is totally neurotic.</i></p> <p><i>We do a lot of visiting and we get to know other Alabama fans. Yeah, it's like a family really. Especially if you park in the same location.</i></p>
Need for distinction (Birrell 1981)	<p><i>Why is FSU your favorite team? Because when I was there the team was considered underdogs...</i></p> <p><i>In high school I got tired of everyone cheering for the Florida Gators...I found out who the Gators' arch rivalry was and said Florida State—that's my team from here on out.</i></p>
Need to define/enhance self-identity	<p><i>...I'm a big Alabama fan all my life.</i></p> <p><i>It's my team and I have to watch it!</i></p>
CALCULATIVE COMMITMENT For enjoyable experience	<p><i>The more you contribute the better the tickets you can get.</i></p> <p><i>I really enjoy it. It is one of my favorite things to do on the weekends in the fall.</i></p> <p><i>The loyalty to FSU football is like a rush, you just get a high off of watching</i></p>

	<i>the FSU Seminoles play.</i>
Participate for social benefits	<p><i>Well we'll go to the quadrangle and participate in all the activities, and we'll walk around and visit, we know a lot of the people around here. When you travel a lot, no matter where you go away games or home games, 75% of these people are the same so although you don't necessarily talk to them you know them. Like these folks here we know them and we don't see them anywhere else but football games.</i></p> <p><i>We have a big cookout in the morning, there's a grill in all these RVs, and just have breakfast in the morning, hang out tomorrow, go shopping.</i></p>
Fair-weather/temporary fans (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999)	<p><i>Q: Are there any kinds of fans that you're embarrassed of? A: The fans that don't get up and cheer. The fans...so-called 'redneck fans'. They bother me...The fans that are not in the stadiums really piss me off. We go 0 and 11 this year and I'll still be in the stadium.</i></p> <p><i>Q: What other sorts of fans are there? A: Fair weather fans who are uneducated fans that don't know the tradition of the school's program and don't know the fight song...they make me sick. If you are going to root for your school, you should do it 100%. You've got to take the good with the bad...Everyone should support the team.</i></p>
Habit	<p><i>I have been loyal to them so long it has become a habit.</i></p> <p><i>It's just something I have always done.</i></p>
NORMATIVE COMMITMENT Local fans (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999)	<p><i>Well, when you grow up in Birmingham, Alabama is the school to pull for...</i></p> <p><i>We were talking about liking a Florida team because we have been here for 8 years. So, we started going to UCF games about 3 years ago.</i></p> <p><i>I am loyal to them because they are the hometown team.</i></p> <p><i>It doesn't make a difference if you went to school there—as long as you are from Arkansas, you are a hog fan—it's like a state team</i></p>
Fan as part of a family tradition	<p><i>Q: How did you become a hog fan? A: "Born and raised"</i></p> <p><i>It's a family tradition thing</i></p> <p><i>Q: How long have you been a fan? A: Ever since I was born.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Why did you choose Alabama? A: Because my whole family is Alabama fans. My dad went to Alabama, his brother went to Alabama, just my whole family is fans.</i></p>
Supporting friends, family members	<p><i>Q: How did your loyalty develop? A: Because friends and family were fans</i></p>
Supporting school (Fisher and Wakefield 1998)	<p><i>My dad went to Alabama, his brother went to Alabama, just my whole family is fans.</i></p> <p><i>I think it's something deeply rooted in everybody because it's something you are proud of, you want your team to do good and you want your school to do good.</i></p>

	<p><i>It's to support your university. So we are out there yelling for them. I mean, we may be the only 2 yelling, but you yell for your university</i></p>
<p>Loyal for loyalty's sake—it's the right thing to do to support the team</p>	<p><i>Q: What about the last few years when you didn't have such a good season? A: The fans were still there...we are still very proud of them...never not a hog fan.</i></p> <p><i>I mean, we may be the only 2 yelling, but you yell for your university.</i></p>
<p>SACRALIZATION (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) Transcendent event (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002, McAlexander and Schouten 1998)</p>	<p><i>The first time I was ever on campus...My wife and I went up there early so I could have the opportunity to walk around the campus. It was the first time I had been on a college campus, so it was mind-boggling just to be there. It is the school you cheer for and you finally get to go up there and see everything. We went to the bookstore so we could see all of the clothes and other items they sell. If I were rich I probably would have bought one of each of the items. Then I got to go to the basketball gym...it was just exciting to see the big Seminole Indian head on the gym floor. It's something to see because it's the school you love and cheer for. Then you finally get to be there and see every aspect of it.</i></p> <p><i>The first time you walk into the stadium and you start hearing the FSU fans and the marching band, it just gets your blood boiling. You're pumped and ready for the game. Then, all of a sudden you see all the players come running out from the end zone onto the field, with Chief Osceola leading the way. Then you see Bobby Bowden, Saint Bowden. It's just breath taking the first time. I believe everyone, even if they are not an FSU fan, should experience a feeling like this.</i></p>
<p>Through inheritance</p>	<p><i>My parents are from Michigan, so I became a Michigan fan and now I'm going to turn my kids into Michigan fans</i></p> <p><i>We get brought up now. It's like some of the schools where you get a ticket, you have to inherit it and it passes down through lineage.</i></p>
<p>Recognized tradition</p>	<p><i>Q: Why are you a fan? A: Because I just love "N.D." I like the history and tradition the school has.</i></p>
<p>AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT</p>	<p><i>Person talking about the high school hog fans—it's been really an exciting time to watch these kids, but again they started it early. I can tell you at 50 years old they will be hog fans. They are just die-hard.</i></p> <p><i>I've never made a conscious decision, it's just like I always liked Alabama</i></p> <p><i>It just gets in your blood. You look at Alabama's tradition and you hear all of the stories and everything just builds in yourself.</i></p> <p><i>We had to have a 3-month engagement because we had to get the wedding in before football season.</i></p> <p><i>Supportive, giving. I give a lot of my time and energy to the team.</i></p> <p><i>Give a lot of everything. Yeah, money, time and energy.</i></p> <p><i>I always just loved Alabama, loved Bear Bryant, loved the tradition. The</i></p>

	<p><i>tradition is just unbelievable.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Now, think about your relationship with the team—what is your relationship with it? A: Like husband and wife.</i></p> <p><i>Q: So, it's almost like you're married. A: Yeah, you are not alone...</i></p> <p><i>Q: Would you say that Alabama is a big part of your life? A: Yeah, it's been in the fall of the year for the last 30 years, because we don't do anything when the fall of the year comes but go to ball games, every weekend. Friday 'til Sunday. It gets in your blood.</i></p> <p><i>At every Gator game, the fans have something powerful in common—love of the university (Clarke 1999).</i></p> <p><i>Identification with team—part of self (Fisher and Wakefield 1998).</i></p> <p><i>Q: How would you characterize your relationship with Alabama if it were a person? A: Oh, I would love that person, we would be very close friends. I love Alabama. I love everything about them. I love the campus, I love the stadium, I love the colors, I love the elephant. I love that all my children graduated there. I do. Something about it—this place—just draws me....</i></p> <p><i>I like the history and tradition the school has...everything the school represents—integrity and loyalty.</i></p>
<p>The team is part of the fan's self-identity (Hunt, Bristol, and Babshaw 1999).</p>	<p><i>I'd say I'm a big Alabama fan all my life. And my brother and my family feel the same way. When you come to my house the only thing on TV is Alabama football.</i></p> <p><i>I pay so much attention to them that I almost feel like I am a part of the team</i></p>
<p>OUTCOMES</p> <p>Fans with higher identification to the team are more likely to ascribe positive attributes to their in-group (the fans of their team) and negative attributes to out-groups (fans of opposing teams). (Branscombe 1992)</p>	<p><i>Michigan fans are the intellectuals.</i></p> <p><i>I think there is obviously more tradition in Alabama than in Auburn. I think it's a different quality of people. They say "culture versus agriculture." I think the people from Alabama have more class.</i></p> <p><i>If the Alabama team were a person, they would have integrity, charisma. They are competitive. If the Alabama team were a person, I'd see them with a wonderful personality. Honest, conscientious, integrity, and class and pride. They would go the extra mile for anyone. That's what Alabama is.</i></p> <p><i>I don't like Penn State for several reasons...I don't like Miami either. They play Syracuse every year and it has turned into a big rivalry.</i></p> <p><i>USC is another team I don't like.</i></p> <p><i>You could not catch me wearing the U of Miami, FSU, nor could you catch me with anything saying University of Florida on it. I hate those schools with a passion. I watch their games, but I always hope they get beat.</i></p> <p><i>Miami—they're a bunch of convicts. I don't like USC, either. They are Notre Dame's biggest rivals. I can't stand them. I want them to lose every game. USC are the stupid Trojans. They have a different attitude, kind of a West Coast attitude. I don't like them.</i></p> <p><i>I hated them (Miami Hurricanes) back in the 80's when they were so good. I</i></p>

	<p><i>was really happy to see them go on probation... Washington State and Oregon... I hate them...Oregon is most hated because they are usually a good team...</i></p>
<p>Outcome of the game is important (Real and Mechikoff 1992).</p>	<p><i>Q: How'd you feel about last year? A: It was awful.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Did you feel betrayed? A: No, not betrayed just very disappointed, sad, sick, embarrassed. It is embarrassing.</i></p> <p><i>Q: When football season gets here, how do you feel? A: Giddy. It's exciting.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Don't you get sick to your stomach? Are you sick to your stomach right now? A: I get sick. I get nervous...I start counting down 90 days before kick off—that's when I start counting down.</i></p> <p><i>Q: How did last season make you feel? A: It was devastating, it was sad. My children were sad, my mom was sad. We were all sad about the season being so bad. We couldn't figure out what was wrong...and the Auburn game—we played a wonderful game, played our hearts out and then in the last 38 seconds in the game we gave the game to Auburn. Now, I couldn't even talk about it the next day. I didn't get mad at anybody, but I drove home, went to my bedroom, and went to sleep in my clothes. I didn't want to listen to the radio on the way home, nothing. And the next day it was like the sun wasn't going to come up...</i></p> <p><i>You know Jeff has been living for football to come. You know he had his wedding ahead of time. Why? Because he couldn't have a wedding during football season.</i></p> <p><i>Q: How do the games affect you? A: If they lose I am depressed and physically I am sick. I am on pins and needles throughout the entire game regardless of how good they are doing or how far ahead they are because they could screw up and lose. I cannot relax until the game is over. If they win I am on cloud nine.</i></p> <p><i>Usually I have Notre Dame's schedule before they start playing the season. I know which games will be televised and I plan ahead. On occasion, I have had the television going and two different radios on trying to locate the game when it is not televised. My wife bought me a short wave radio so that I could pick up Notre Dame games...</i></p> <p><i>If we lose today all I will do is go home and go to sleep. If we win I'll go out and party and get drunk. But if we lose I'll come home, lock the door and go to bed. And I'll be depressed all week.</i></p> <p><i>Q: If Florida State loses, how do you feel? A: Oh, I'm devastated and I refuse to take any phone calls or talk to anyone about it. I feel that maybe I didn't cheer loud enough for them, or maybe I wasn't there spiritually enough to help them. I get totally upset and depressed when Florida State loses a football game.</i></p> <p><i>I guess I can admit I get a little edgy when they play bad. Now that I think of it, it seems everyone tiptoes around after some games.</i></p> <p><i>I feel like I am involved with the team since I went there. I kind of take it personally.</i></p> <p><i>Q: How did you feel about the season last year? A: I don't like to talk about</i></p>

	<p>it. <i>Q: Did you feel depressed? A: Oh yeah, definitely. I don't even want to talk about it. It killed me—it was depressing. I was physically depressed. I would like to get hypnosis and get the whole season wiped from my memory. That would be the ideal situation.</i></p>
<p>Fan's identification with a team not related to that team's performance record. (Branscombe and Wann 1991).</p>	<p><i>Q: Is your loyalty to Notre Dame simply because you have always watched them, or because they always perform well? A: It is definitely not based on performance, because they do not always perform well. I really do not know where my loyalty comes from. You know, you just build up an attraction or a loyalty to something.</i></p> <p><i>We go 0 and 11 this year and I'll still be in the stadium.</i></p> <p><i>The last couple of years have not been so good, but I still like the team.</i></p> <p><i>And you know even though they didn't win last year we're still back 'cause we're dedicated—win or lose we're here for them.</i></p> <p><i>I'm a good fan. I always support them. Never boo—win, lose, or draw. Even when people think they are going to suck, I still think they are going to be good</i></p>
<p>Religious references (Birrell 1981)</p>	<p><i>My two children have been brought up in the Gator faith.</i></p> <p><i>I was delighted when they embraced the rituals and made my beliefs their own.</i></p> <p><i>They would make sure that he or she was familiar with the exploits of Gator greats such as Emmitt Smith, Wilbur Marshall, and the holiest of holies, Danny Wuerffe. (Clarke 1999)</i></p> <p><i>My oldest son has the spirit</i></p> <p><i>It is like religion to me.</i></p> <p><i>I am a "convert."</i></p> <p><i>You just get a high off watching the FSU Seminoles play...it's something that gets into you.</i></p> <p><i>I have one friend named Zane. When I first met him he was an Auburn fan. Now he bleeds garnet and gold, just like I do.</i></p> <p><i>It's my number one priority, all I think about. The order goes—God, Country, Notre Dame. You could say I'm very loyal.</i></p> <p><i>I think the connection goes even deeper than a connection to my father. I think it is the connection to the religion.</i></p>
<p>Enduring involvement—through off-season</p>	<p><i>Q: When football season gets here, how do you feel? A: Giddy. It's exciting.</i> <i>Q: Don't you get sick to your stomach? Are you sick to your stomach right now? A: I get sick. I get nervous...I start counting down 90 days before kick off—that's when I start counting down.</i></p> <p><i>I just love it. I loved it when I played and I love to watch it now. It is one of</i></p>

	<p><i>my favorite things to do. I can't wait until fall every year for kickoff. It's really hard to make it through the summer without it.</i></p> <p><i>You know Jeff has been living for football to come. You know he had his wedding ahead of time. Why? Because he couldn't have a wedding during football season.</i></p>
<p>DESACRALIZATION</p>	<p><i>When I was at BYU I was a rabid fan. I waited in line all night for tickets in the card section twice. I went to all the games. I was emotionally attached to the team. I was depressed when they lost. Now I still watch their games if they are on television, but I don't even know who the players are anymore. Now if they lose—okay, they lost. I still root for them but no more than I do for Cal State (current local school).</i></p> <p><i>When I got my PhD at Ole Miss, I was an intense fan of the team. They had Archie Manning then and they were great. But after that they had nothing. I lost total interest in my alma mater and went to my children's schools such as Stanford. I lost complete interest in Ole Miss because they had nothing.</i></p>
<p>PROACTIVE SUSTAINING BEHAVIORS Rituals (Birrell 1981)</p>	<p><i>Saturday was a big day because we'd get together—Oh yes, when my son was growing up Saturday was a big day because we were all football-oriented because Alabama is a big football state—that's all we do. It's like that's what you were supposed to do—sit down on Saturdays and watch football. That's not all we did with the neighbors but during football season that's all people do.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Tell us what you do on game day. A: Oh, I try to get all my chores done early, and my errands run early, and my food cooked early so I can be ready when the game comes on. Or if we're going to the game we leave early, early, early to get there so you'll have time ahead of time to go to someone's house or look around, especially during homecoming. Like today we came here real early, to come over here with friends and watch all of the other games before we go to our game. So that's what we do on game day. Oh, on game days I don't want nothing else interfering. I want the groceries in the house. I want the shopping done. I want everything done, finished and I want to be able to concentrate on my game.</i></p> <p><i>It's a ritual. We have always done the same thing. We made sure the children were taken wherever they were supposed to go and whatever, around the game times. And we had to make sure we were there before the games. We don't want to miss a thing. The food is important. We had to have food today.</i></p> <p><i>We have a big cook-out in the morning, there's a grill in all these RVs, and just have breakfast in the morning, hang out tomorrow, go shopping.</i></p> <p><i>Oh, you mainly have a beer or two or three and wait for the cars to move so you get your RV in position. If you notice, a lot of people travel as a group and they always have a little formation and if there's two of us we park side by side. If it's three of us we usually form a U shape. And if it's four of us, we form a box.</i></p> <p><i>We'll go to the quadrangle and participate in all the activities, and we'll walk around and visit, we know a lot of the people around here. When you travel a lot, no matter where you go, away games or home games, 75% of these people are the same. So, although you don't necessarily talk to them, you know them. Like these folks here—we know them and we don't see them</i></p>

	<p><i>anywhere else but football games.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Do you have any rituals you do for games? A: No, I only plan my weekends around the games.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Do you have any FSU game day rituals? A: Yes, I do. I prefer to sit at home and watch the game alone. I don't like telephone calls and people at the door because I don't want to see or talk to anyone. I won't even turn the TV during commercials to check on the outcomes of other games. I prefer to eat chicken wings and chips during the game. I also dress from head to toe, even in my hat, all in FSU attire. When Florida State makes a big play or scores, I usually jump and holler. When someone like the Florida Gators score, I start throwing things and ranting and raving. At this point the game has gotten to me so bad that it's hard for me to sit there and be calm. I'm always on the edge of my chair, ready to throw the remote control through the TV if we make a bad play.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, I use Irish Spring soap on game day and usually wear the same Notre Dame shirt and hat. I also wear Champion socks and Adidas shoes because they are sponsors of Notre Dame.</i></p> <p><i>We will get to the stadium for a 6:00 (p.m.) game at least 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning.</i></p> <p><i>I wear my pendant everyday and T-shirts or sweatshirts on a regular basis depending on the weather.</i></p>
<p>Shrines (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999)</p>	<p><i>Q: Do you have reminders of the team/school in your home or office? A: Everywhere...signs and memorabilia...It says I'm proud to support my team. I know someone who has a piece of the field in their freezer. I also have a friend whose phone rings the fight song (informant then starts singing fight song).</i></p>
<p>Display behaviors (Madrigal 1995, Fisher and Wakefield 1998)</p>	<p><i>Sure do, my closet is completely full of Alabama clothes and shirts.</i></p> <p><i>He's got championship shirts hung around the house.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Now you have your hat and shirt on. Do you wear that around home and friends when it's not game time? A: Game wear. This is not game wear. This is "before game wear". And you have got to have socks that say "Alabama" on them. And, you go with something with a collar on it.</i></p> <p><i>Q: How do you advertise you're an FSU fan? A: Jewelry, T-shirts, and I've purchased children on the way Seminole attire.</i></p> <p><i>I also have a miniature Doak-Campbell stadium with custom gold goal posts.</i></p> <p><i>I have coffee mugs, bowls, clothes, shirts and a Notre Dame teddy bear. I have everything with Notre Dame on it. I even have a Notre Dame necklace that I wear. It is a Fighting Irish pendant. It has their mascot in gold. I wear my pendant every day and T-shirts or sweatshirts on a regular basis, depending on the weather.</i></p>
<p>Creative efforts</p>	<p><i>They made seven quilts.</i></p> <p><i>Bear Bryant needlepoint.</i></p> <p><i>Jay Daves' homepage featuring the University of Arkansas and University of Michigan sports teams http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jeda/index.html</i></p>

<p>Collecting (Belk 1988)</p>	<p><i>I have the hats, shorts, and shirts. I even have the FSU dress socks and tie, so when I go out I can still show my support. I have my golf bag, which is an FSU product, and my golf club covers are even Florida State products. If it has FSU on it, I have to have it. Sometimes it doesn't even matter about cost. I even have car magnets so when you go out to the game you can put them on the car. When FSU won the national championship, I had to go out and find the Coca-Cola bottles that displayed this. I even collect NASCAR and found a FSU die cast piece that doesn't really fit into my collection, but I had to have it. If it is there to be bought, I will buy it....If someone doesn't know what to get me for a gift, I tell them if it has FSU on it, that will do just fine...I would probably prefer an FSU gift over something else. Because you just can't go wrong with an FSU gift.</i></p> <p><i>I have cups, hats, shirts, sweatshirts, sugar packets, bumper stickers, an autographed baseball, and an autographed helmet.</i></p> <p><i>I have coffee mugs, bowls, clothes, shirts and a Notre Dame teddy bear. I have every thing with Notre Dame on it. I even have a gold Notre Dame necklace that I wear. It is a Fighting Irish pendant. It has their mascot in gold.</i></p> <p><i>I know someone who has a piece of the field in his freezer.</i></p>
<p>Pilgrimages</p>	<p><i>When they played Washington we went out to Washington state, when they played Tennessee we went out there, we've followed them just about everywhere they go.</i></p> <p><i>They come up from Atlanta Georgia every weekend, we come from Huntsville, Alabama, and they come from Georgia.</i></p> <p><i>Q: So did all of you drive down for the game or have you relocated down here? A: We came from 3 different places. Two of them from Arkansas, Fayetteville and N Little Rock and Atlanta.</i></p>
<p>Sacrifices</p>	<p><i>Q: What kind of lengths would you go to watch Notre Dame football? A: Anything possible.</i></p> <p><i>Q: So, if you are out of the country what would you do? A: Unfortunately, there is nothing I can do. That happened—we were out of the country and I could not see a game. I went nuts trying to find out what the score was. I finally found it overseas, which is not easy to do. My wife and I have been in a hotel when there is a Notre Dame football game on. We have to stay at the hotel until the game is over, then we can do something else...My wife and I were in Las Vegas once. I made her sit in the bar for the entire four hours of the game, then we could go out. We have been on cruises when Notre Dame was playing. One trip—there was an older man there. He was from Indiana and more loyal than I am. He kept calling from ship to shore to get an update on the game and I hung out with him until the game was over just so I could keep up with the score. Also when the little cruise newspapers come out, I can't wait to get my hands on it to see the score. If it is not listed, then I will track a USA Today down to get the score. Once I had to go halfway across an island and paid five US dollars for a USA Today paper just so I could see the Notre Dame score.</i></p> <p><i>I don't think my loyalty has become an obsession. But I do know that other people would say that it is way out of control, that it's an obsession. Most other people don't feel I should have to watch every play especially when FSU is blowing out the other team. It's my team and I have to watch it!</i></p>

	<p><i>I have missed so many events. I don't like to miss the games. If something is planned and the game is on, I won't go. I prefer to sit at home and watch the game. I have missed many weddings and birthday parties because most of them are planned on Saturdays. Saturdays are for FSU football. I have to see the whole game so I don't chance going somewhere and not being home in time to see the start of the game. I had to go to one family function, so I took a Walkman and listened to the game and watched the whole video when I got home.</i></p> <p><i>Usually, I have Notre Dame's schedule before they start playing the season. I know which games will be televised and I plan ahead. On occasion, I have had the television going and two different radios on trying to locate the game when it is not televised. My wife bought me a short wave radio so that I could pick up Notre Dame games when we lived in Wake Forest, North Carolina and I could not get all the games on TV.</i></p> <p><i>I attend 1 or 2 games a year. Every game is an away game for me, so I travel around 1,600 miles.</i></p>
<p>Sharing knowledge and extolling virtues of the team with others (Madrigal 1995)</p>	<p><i>I've made friends and taught some people who didn't know much about college football to be fans.</i></p>
<p>Recruiting others as fans</p>	<p><i>Q: Have you influenced others to use this "brand"? A: Yes, I have a friend that used to rag me about my team. Eventually he became a loyal fan.</i></p> <p><i>My parents are from Michigan, so I became a Michigan fan and now I'm going to turn my kids into Michigan fans My parents are from Michigan, so I became a Michigan fan and now I'm going to turn my kids into Michigan fans</i></p>
<p>Willing to bet against odds, but never against team.</p>	<p><i>Before we had children my brother and I had a bet on the FSU-UF game. The loser of the bet had to run around a campfire naked.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Have you ever bet on FSU football? A: I have bet many times on many games. I've lost big and won big. I do have one friend who is a Gator fan. He and I come up with huge bets. One year we tried the humiliation tactic. The loser had to wear the other team's hat to and from work for a month. That was humiliating for him. Everyone at the airport was razzing him because he had to wear my FSU hat for a month. He and I will always have these kinds of bets. As far as money bets go, I do those all the time.</i></p> <p><i>Q: Would your loyalty ever make you bet on a game even if you weren't confident in the outcome? A: Well, like the friend I was just talking about—this bet was a hard one for me to make. We had no chance to win this game. But, deep down inside I just knew we would. Later that year we made the same bet and I was worried. We lost and I had to wear a Gator hat to and from work for a month. Having to put that had on was the hardest thing I had to do, because I just can't stand that team.</i></p>