

# **Social Capital and College Sport: In Search of the Bridging Potential of Intercollegiate Athletics**

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Intercollegiate athletics in the United States have been linked with enhancing the sense of community between students on campus (Clopton, 2008). Still, little evidence confirms that maintaining a prominent athletics program contributes to the social capital of students on campus who follow those teams. Consisting of networks of relationships based on trust and norms of reciprocity, social capital is disaggregated into bonding (tightening connections between similar individuals) or bridging (establishing new connections with other members of the campus community) varieties (Putnam, 2000). Results suggest that fan identity detracts from a student's overall social capital and showed no contribution to one's bridging social capital. This notion has potential ramification in higher education policy development as the connection between student affairs and athletics is increasingly encouraged (McKindra, 2008).

Communities today are becoming increasingly complex with intricate networks, challenged economies, and even a divided citizenry. In fact, in many parts of the world, the distance between socioeconomic levels is growing (Lardner & Smith, 2007). A similar notion of community was conceptualized by Putnam (2000) when he referred to the decline of social capital in the United States and the crumbling of community. Putnam described the impact of social networks upon the functioning of the overall society and the role of communities in fostering such networks, using the metaphor of bowling to illustrate the decline of social capital and community where more people bowl today than ever before. However, rather than bowling together in structured leagues where social networks could be created or nurtured, people today bowl separately with select friends on their own individual schedules. With this, Putnam pushed for the use of sports and recreation to play a role in the regeneration of social capital and its enhancement of crumbling communities in today's society. Sport has been linked to community development (Chalip, 2006) and community ownership and engagement (Jarvie, 2003), and recent research alluded to the potential of sport to enhance social capital of its participants (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). While select research in sport and social capital has looked at the connection with direct sport participation and social capital, even

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less research has explored the idea of indirect sport participation and its connection with social capital. Still, Palmer & Thompson (2007) discovered an active connection between a community of sports fans and social capital while Heere & James (2007) examined the creation of social networks through the numerous group identities of fans of sports teams. However, a dearth of literature exists regarding the impact of team identification on social capital of college students, where the college experience in the United States possesses a unique intersection of sport culture and campus community.

Intercollegiate athletics play a major role in shaping the social culture on a college campus in the United States (e.g., Beyer & Hannah, 2000), yet the value of this impact is still highly contested (Sperber, 2000). For instance, while team identification of college students enhances their perceived sense of community (Clopton, 2008), questions regarding the value orientation of such a community and the actual benefits derived from this community remain as this team identification has also been found to detract from students' grade point average (Clopton, 2009). Still, the ability of athletics on a college campus to impact overall community and social networks among fans exists in accordance with the findings of previous research on sports fans, community, and social capital (e.g., Palmer & Thompson, 2007). While athletics on a college campus serves as a significant element in the construction of community, a dearth of literature exists analyzing the directional impact of athletics upon the overall university community. Therefore, the intent of this research was to explore the relationship between the team identity of college students, its relationship with social networks on campus (i.e., social capital), and the extent to which these social networks are aligned with the overall mission of higher education.

## Social Capital

The use of social capital as a tangible benefit that is both derived from, and contributes to, a community and its social networks is taken from Putnam (2000) who placed an emphasis on the *quality* of social networks and the choice of each individual actor within those networks. Also salient to the creation of social capital, both of individuals and that of a collective community, are trust and norms of reciprocity. It is here that Putnam diverges from previous interpretations of social capital (e.g., Bourdieu, 1997) where social capital is less a by-product of individual choices within social networks, and more determined by preestablished structures of social class. With Putnam, a larger lens of autonomy is afforded the definition of social capital, particularly in viewing social capital as a multifaceted resource, where social capital was further disaggregated into action-specific levels of *bonding*, and *bridging* social capital. Bonding social capital, which is most like Bourdieu's view that social capital is generated and reproduced within one group of actors, is that which describes those relationships built within homogeneous networks and constructed of tightly-knit feelings of trust and security. Such social capital is described by Putnam as what is necessary to help us "get by" (Putnam, 2000) when confronted with difficult times or adversity. Bonding social capital is most likely to be found in groups where members possess very similar characteristics, such as members of an athletics team, church members, union workers, or fraternity

brothers, where a common value system is shared and maintained within the group. Groups with high bonding social capital benefit from a strong sense of group identity. It is often this core value that contributes most to the extent of the “bond” of bonding social capital and has the potential to have a negative impact within a community. This is also why Putnam (2000) has referred to bonding social capital as “the darker side of social capital (p.350-351),” and has been seen limiting growth of a community’s entrepreneurial members (Leonard, 2004), reinforcing antisocial behaviors such as those exhibited by street gangs, and excluding certain races or ethnic groups (Amara et al.). This darker side of bonding resonates throughout social identity literature (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, Saguy, 2007) where the salience of identifying with certain groups encourages a certain amount of exclusion and derives certain outcomes associated with such exclusion leading, in essence, to a sense of *hyperbonding* within the group.

While bonding social capital drives the focus of benefits inward, bridging social capital actually promotes the creation of social networks in an outward direction, thus, garnering the label as the most important type of social capital by Putnam (2000). The essential element to bridging social capital is its ability to form across heterogeneous networks of individuals within a specific community and even beyond. These social networks are “bridged” across gender, race, socioeconomic class, etc. Bridging social capital is also embodied by a broader sense of trust within a community, such as social trust (Cox & Caldwell, 2000) or generalized trust. Important here is the exchange of trust—not between close friends or family members—but a weaker, more superficial trust that can be exchanged between members outside one’s proximal networks and into the broader community. While weaker in strength, these relationships open doors of potential toward diversity into one’s personal or professional life and begins to broadly augment the connection of the overall community itself. It is also through these diverse relationships that an individual is able to “get ahead” (Putnam, 2000), for bridging social capital can be parlayed into other forms of capital such as financial capital (Leonard, 2004) or human capital (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, for example, has been recently linked to the use of social networking internet sites (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and volunteering with a nonprofit organization (Wesinger & Salipante, 2005).

In higher education, bridging social capital underlies numerous academic and social outcomes that student affairs administrators actively pursue. While bonding social capital is readily apparent in homogenous groups such as athletics and Greek organizations, bridging social capital is often measured by the ability of students to adjust or adapt into the collegiate environment. The notion of students adjusting and engaging into their academic and social environment is the foundation of student development theories where a student’s ability to adjust, adapt, and integrate is the most fundamental predictor of persistence to graduation (e.g., Astin, 1993). Still, Wintre & Bowers (2007) show that the relationship between the multifaceted notion of adjustment and academic and social outcomes like graduation, grade point average, and attrition remains complex.

Further complexities lie also, in the relationship between sport and social capital; and, moreover, with sport and bridging social capital. Overall, the social institution of sport seems to possess potential in generating general levels of social

capital. Interestingly, despite its potential for social capital capacity, the institution of sport in society has shown overall to be weakly embedded and positioned in society, where members of sports groups are found to be less embedded into civic life and other social environments when compared with other community, professional, and religious organizations (Perrin, 2005). However, such a position within society has actually been found to be strong in comparison with other social institutions within the community (Seippel, 2008), and that the true impact of sport upon social capital is widely undecided (e.g., Coalter, 2007). In fact, Putnam's notion of sport being able to generate networks linking individuals and groups within a community has resonated in past literature where sport provides opportunities for civic engagement (Harris, 1998) and can positively impact community development (Misener & Mason, 2006). Past research has similarly iterated where sport has enhanced social capital construction in rural communities (Atherley, 2006), among specific members of communities (Amara et al., 2004) and through community ownership and engagement (Jarvie, 2003). Notably, however, is the lack of presence of communities examined within the United States, where Putnam (2000) examined the decline of social capital. Since, scant research has explored social capital within communities in the United States, particularly in the relationship between sport and social capital.

Further contested among the relationship of sport and social capital is the type of social capital that might come from the institution of sport and to what extent such social capital is impacted by the size, type, orientation, and location of a sport organization (Coalter, 2007). In numerous cases, sport has enhanced both bonding and bridging social capital (Atherley, 2006; Palmer & Thompson, 2007). Though, notably, sport's ability to improve bonding social capital seems to approach overbonding or hyperbonding, where certain classes of peoples are excluded from the particular sport community. Such social capital is, indeed, not beneficial to the overall community and is often overlooked in past literature. In fact, sport's most common ability to generate social capital seems to be toward the hyperbonding end of the social capital spectrum and approaches what Putnam (2000) referred to as the "dark side" of social capital (p.350).

Conversely, Putnam's (2000) most important facet of social capital, bridging social capital, has also been connected with sport and sport involvement. Past research efforts indicate that sport has proven to reach out across diverse demographics such as age, class, and race (Harris, 1998; Palmer & Thompson, 2007). In fact, it was Harris (1998) who described sports as "communal endeavors" (p. 146) where social networks are created and subsequently transcend nearly all classes of people. Still, this bridging potential of sport remains relatively untested, and even contested, as sport has always possessed an introverted orientation, such as that found with Seippel (2008). Sport has even been referred to as being among the least linked institutions in society, failing to generate a social or political discourse that integrated its members into a meaningful practice of citizenship (Perrin, 2005).

Putnam (2000) also posed the question regarding a potential relationship between an individual's indirect sport participation and any social capital connection. While most research has explored direct participation in sport clubs and organizations, a few studies have looked at communities of sport fans and the presence of social capital. Palmer & Thompson (2007) analyzed a community of

football supporters and found that team identification fostered both bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital showed tendencies of hyperbonding where certain antisocial behavior is reinforced, such as a failure to embrace diversity within the fan community. While hyperbonding was a concern, following sport and associating with fellow supporters provided for the all-important bridging social capital where belonging to the group afforded each member access to a range of resources, benefits, and networks that they otherwise might not have been able to reach (Palmer & Thompson). This notion also was suggested by Heere & James (2007) where identifying with a sports team or community remains a complex, multilayered production and typically contains the maintenance of multiple social group identities. Thus, the maintenance of multiple of identities will have the potential to see an accompaniment of networks and relationships across these identities and, subsequently, the presence of bridging social capital. While more research is necessary, it does seem viable to suggest that team identification does exist as a potential “bridge” of social capital.

Similar questions resonate throughout college campuses where the challenge of building campus community faces an increasing number of barriers (Strange & Banning, 2001). College campuses are heavily dependent upon a strong sense of community as students have been found to experience beneficial gains from a strong campus culture (e.g., Flowers & Pascarella, 1999). Interestingly, the quality of this campus community is not independent of the presence of sport in the form of highly-competitive athletics, as intercollegiate athletics poses a significant role in the formation of campus community through tradition and ritual (Boyer, 1990). Colleges and university have also benefited from the unique position of intercollegiate athletics in the United States as a cultural entity (Beyer & Hannah, 2000) and few elements of an institution possess the ability to “confer a sense of identity (Toma, 2003, p.78)” than that of athletics on a collegiate campus—a notion supporting the previous literature (Heere & James, 2007). Still, little empirical research exists exploring the individual and community benefits (i.e., social capital) derived by students on the campuses of these institutions where big-time athletics programs are maintained. Further, while these big-time athletics programs have been acknowledged to impact the college students attending these institutions, the quality of impact and the positive or negative benefits accompanying the impact remains in doubt (Sperber, 2000). For instance, team identity of students across multiple college campuses was found to enhance the overall sense of community that was perceived by the student respondents (Clopton, 2008). However, the actual value orientation of the community being reinforced was not assessed, in addition to not addressing any connection between team identity and extent to which a college student might identify with the university overall, as university identity remains highly predictive of a successful college experience and an outcome sought after by student affairs administrators (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2002). In addition, like such organizations as fraternities and sororities, a sense of community enhanced by the presence of athletics would be a negative contributor to the campus community if the values central to that group are antithetical to the overall institutional mission (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). In essence, the bonding potential of team identity on an athletics campus has been found among these other student groups and would align with previous findings on fan communities (Heere & James, 2007; Palmer

& Thompson, 2007). From this, two questions remain regarding team identification and social capital on college campuses today across the United States. First, this study was necessary to explore for a connection between team identity and social capital, while controlling for the overall university identity of the student. In essence, I sought to build upon previous literature where sense of community (Clopton, 2008) and even social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010) were positively impacted by team identity. Yet both of these previous studies fail to capture the extent to which this relationship was in line with the overall university community. This hypothesized relationship is displayed in Figure 1, below. Second, this study sought to explore *bridging* potential of team identity, as no research exists connecting team identity of college students on campus with bridging social capital. Such a question requires an exploration into the ability of one's team identity to contribute to new, diverse social networks that extend outward into the overall campus community. Using team identity to predict a college student's bridging social capital, above and beyond the contributions of one's university identity, a second hypothesized relationship is depicted in Figure 2. Here, these social connections would be necessary for the integration of college students into the overall academic and social fabric of the university and for their adjustment into the campus community. Overall student adjustment has been couched in the framework of bridging social capital, mostly since resources in diverse peer networks are often acquired, aggregated, and exchanged to an extent that influences social processes and resulting outcomes such as adjustment (Crosnoe & Needham, 2004). Further, it is the connections through bridging social capital that connects individuals across otherwise disconnected groups or community organizations, which facilitates this adjustment into the community (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005).

Therefore, the following two hypotheses were used for the current study.



**Figure 1** — Team Identity Impacting Social Capital



**Figure 2** — Team Identity Impacting Bridging Social Capital

## Research Hypotheses

H1: Team identity will provide a positive impact upon the social capital of the student respondents, above and beyond the impact of one's university identity.

H2: Team identity will contribute to the bridging social capital of the students and will positively impact the ability of college students to adjust to the campus community.

## Method

### Selection of Population and Sample

The population was limited to traditional-aged, undergraduate students attending schools at the NCAA Division I level as members of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Of the total population, 41 institutions maintained active, and accessible, online campus directories and were included in the study. After obtaining permission from the institutional review board, student names and e-mail addresses were randomly chosen out of online campus directories. Once a complete list of names and e-mail addresses was established, the subjects were uploaded into [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) for each institution.

### Instruments for Data Collection

**Social Capital Assessment Tool (SCAT).** To obtain the dependent variable for the current study, the SCAT was used to measure the amount of social capital perceived to exist on each campus through student respondents (Krishna & Shrader, 1999). The SCAT was adapted from its original form which had previously been used to establish social capital in communities around such issues as economics (Narayan, 1999) and culture (Latham, 1998). Five-items were adapted from the instrument including statements around the two salient constructs of social capital: trust and norms of reciprocity, or social networks. These statements ranged from "Most students/faculty at this university are basically honest and can be trusted," to "Students/faculty are always interested only in their own welfare here," to "I feel accepted as a member of this university." With an interitem correlation mean of .39, the SCAT reported an acceptable Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .75.

**Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).** To examine the "bridging" ability of this social capital, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The use of the SACQ in assessing college student adjustment is widespread (Taylor & Pastor, 2007), as adjustment has been examined with social support, self-esteem, and stress (Freidlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007), expectations (Agliata & Renk, 2008), and student gender (Enochs & Roland, 2006), among others. Here, bridging social capital is operationalized by the extent to which the SACQ indicates each student is able to adjust within the collegiate environment. Such an ability to adjust and thrive in new relationships and social environments would be indicative of "getting ahead," (Putnam, 2000) or of looser personal relations that open doors of potential through

more diverse relationships (Newton, 1997). The SACQ was particularly chosen for its distinct subscales and their role in assessing the intricacies of bridging social capital. Specifically, among the key constructs attached to bridging social capital have been one's level of involvement in local work (here, academic), feeling included in several groups of friends and emotional belonging, and institutional attachment (Kavanaugh et al., 2005). For the purposes of the current research, then, 19 items were adapted from the original SACQ across four subscales: Academic Adjustment (i.e., I have been keeping up to date on my academic work), Social Adjustment with Other People (i.e., I have been busy meeting and making friends since coming to college), Personal/Emotional Adjustment (i.e., I have been feeling tense or nervous lately), and Goal Commitment/Institutional Attachment (i.e., In general, I am glad to be a student of this university). Further, each subscale reported reliability estimates of .85, .83, .80, and .85, respectively.

**Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES).** Using the CSES, university identity was defined as the extent to which each student identified as a member of his or her college or university. Students responded to 16 items assessing their level of identification with a group along a seven point Likert scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The CSES has an original Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .85 and has been used for university identification in past research (e.g., Clopton, 2008; Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999). Further, with four subscales of membership identity, private identity, public identity, and overall identity, the CSES contains statements like "In general, I am glad to be a member of the social groups to which I belong," or "I am a cooperative participant in the social groups to which I belong."

**Sport Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS).** The hypothesized predictive independent variable was ascertained by the Sport Spectatorship Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), which measures the extent to which individuals identify with a sports team or program. This seven-item scale asks the subjects such questions as "How important to you is it that the (school's teams) win?" and "During the season, how closely do you follow the (school's teams)?" (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). With a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .91, the SSIS has been used in many research studies to assess an individual's team identification level and the extent to which that affects integration into, and perceptions of, the university (Wann & Robinson, 2002), and alumni contributions (Wann & Somerville, 2000).

## Method of Data Collection

Prenotification letters for participation were sent electronically to 4,800 randomly-selected students from the 41 BCS institutions chosen for this study. Subsequently, survey links were sent to all students for completion. The surveys were completed by 1,578 students for an overall response rate of 32.90%.

Further, responses were eliminated ( $n = 326$ ) that either failed to fit within population parameters (i.e., age, full-time status, undergraduate, etc.) or were dropped due to missing or incomplete information. The final tally of responses came to 1,252 for a final usable response rate of 26.08%.

**Responses.** Of the total sample included in this study ( $n = 1,252$ ), a slight majority, 52.08%, of the respondents were women ( $n = 652$ ) while the remaining



subjects were men (47.92%;  $n = 600$ ). Notably, while female students ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $S.D. = 0.90$ ) recorded significantly higher scores than male students ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $S.D. = 0.86$ ) in social capital ( $t[1251] = -2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ); males ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $S.D. = 1.70$ ) showed significantly higher levels of team identification ( $t[1250] = 5.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than did their female counterparts ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $S.D. = 1.62$ ). Further, an overwhelming majority of the sample were white students ( $n = 1074$ ), who showed greater levels ( $t[1250] = -5.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of social capital ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $S.D. = 0.86$ ) when compared with the nonwhite college student respondents ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $S.D. = 0.93$ ). These white students also reported a greater team identity ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $S.D. = 1.67$ ) than the non-white students ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $S.D. = 1.71$ ;  $t[1249] = -3.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The sample of college students also established an average age of 20.07 ( $S.D. = 1.69$ ) with half of the respondents living off-campus ( $n = 626$ ). Overall, the college students in the sample reported moderately-high levels of social capital ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $S.D. = 0.88$ ) across the 41 institutions. The sample of students also displayed a moderate level of team identity ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $S.D. = 1.68$ ).

## Analysis of Data

To analyze the data for the relationship between team identification and social capital, two multiple, hierarchical regression equations were constructed utilizing the independent variable (team identification) to predict the dependent variables (social capital and bridging social capital [overall student adjustment]). Each regression equation was constructed based off of Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model. The I-E-O model, used throughout college student development research, arranges variables for college students according to *inputs* (gender, race, age and state residence), *environments* (year in school, housing hours worked, membership in Greek social fraternity or sorority, athlete status, GPA, and team identification); and *outcomes* (social capital/bridging social capital). Control variables were either dummy-coded before inclusion—among these were race (coded as white respondents or nonwhite respondents), state residence (in-state residence or out-of-state residence), Greek membership (member or nonmember), and athlete status (athlete or nonathlete)—or entered continuously, while team identity, university identity, social capital, and bridging social capital (overall student adjustment) were derived from their respective scales. Results are displayed in Table 1 in the following section.

## Results

### Team identification and Overall Social Capital

In the initial regression analysis, team identification was included in the final model, beyond university identity and the aforementioned demographical variables. Results showed that, in accordance with previous research, team identification maintained a significant relationship with the overall social capital of the respondents—even beyond the contribution of the extent to which each respondent identified with the university. This contribution, while significant, was nominal in magnitude ( $R^2\Delta = .002$ ,  $F[1,1238] = 4.65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, most notable in the findings was

**Table 1. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Predicting Overall Social Capital and Bridging Social Capital Measures (N = 1252)**

Variable	Regression Equation for Overall Social Capital			Regression Equation for Bridging Social Capital (using Student Adjustment Variable)		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1						
Gender	-0.24	0.20	-0.03	0.63	0.53	0.03
Race	0.54	0.32	0.04	1.39	0.83	0.04
Residency	0.15	0.21	0.02	0.73	0.54	0.03
Age	0.23	0.10	0.09*	-0.91	0.26	-0.12***
Step 2						
Year in School	-0.21	0.13	-0.07	1.65	0.34	0.17***
Campus Residence	-0.10	0.21	-0.01	-1.57	0.55	-0.07**
Hours Worked per Week	-0.01	0.01	-0.03	>0.001	0.03	>0.001
Greek Status	-0.22	0.27	-0.02	-3.42	0.71	-0.10***
Athlete Status	0.37	0.42	0.02	0.39	1.09	0.01
Grade Point Average	0.37	0.20	0.04	1.01	0.52	0.04
Step 3						
University Identity	0.20	0.01	0.63***	0.64	0.02	0.68***
Step 4						
Team Identity	-0.03	0.01	-0.06*	0.03	0.04	0.02

Note for Overall Social Capital.  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $p < .01$  for Step 1;  $R^2\Delta = .01$ ,  $p < .01$  for Step 2;  $R^2\Delta = .35$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 3;  $R^2\Delta = .002$ ,  $p < .05$  for Step 4

Note for Bridging Social Capital.  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 1;  $R^2\Delta = .04$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 2;  $R^2\Delta = .46$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 3;  $R^2\Delta < .001$ ,  $p = .50$  for Step 4

\*values significant at the .05 level \*\* values significant at the .01 level \*\*\* values significant at the .001 level

the direction that team identity impacted social capital. After accounting for the university identity of students ( $\beta = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ ), team identity actually *diminished* the social capital of students, thus, acting in *opposition* to the university identity variable ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding ran counter to previous literature where identifying with athletics offered support of many communal benefits, including social capital on campus (Clopton & Finch, 2010) and sense of community (Clopton, 2008). While team identity detracted from the overall social capital, it was the relationship of team identity and social capital running counter to the relationship between *university* identity and social capital that was the most notable finding in the study. This finding failed to provide support for the initial hypothesis and is further discussed in the following section.

## Team identification and Bridging Social Capital

Using the same variable set to analyze the potential of team identification in predicting or promoting bridging social capital, the overall student adjustment total from the SACQ was used as the dependent variable. Not surprisingly, the university identity of the students provided a strong and positive impact upon the level of adjustment of the students ( $\beta = .68, p < .001$ ). However, team identity provided no significant contribution to the adjustment of college students ( $R^2 \Delta < .001, F[1, 1238] = 0.47, p = .50$ ). The lack of relationship between team identity and overall student adjustment suggests that team identity, perhaps, lacks the ability to generate bridging social capital across college students within a college campus setting by impacting their ability to adjust within the campus environment. Again, such a notion contradicts conclusions among extant literature where identifying with intercollegiate athletic teams provides college students with numerous sociological benefits. More importantly, this finding reiterates the question into the particular communal values that are reinforced among fan communities on campus. A similar finding occurred in the analysis when affiliation with a Greek fraternity or sorority negatively impacted the students' ability to adjust within the college environment ( $\beta = -4.81, p < .001$ ). The negative Greek presence has been alluded to before in student affairs literature where students in a Greek fraternity or sorority often show a proclivity for a higher sense of community and sense of bonding. This bond, or community, had negative implications, however, as the values being reinforced within this affiliation were not aligned with the overall campus culture (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

## Discussion

While the contribution of sport to the social capital of overall communities has been explored, no research has examined the relationship between sport and social capital within a college or university context. It was the aim of this research to provide a step toward understanding social capital construction and maintenance through sport and team identification among these college students. After using team identity, overall social capital, and student adjustment to frame the research, the study presented several notable findings.

First, and most salient to the current research, was the relationship that occurred between team identity and social capital. This study was the first to examine such a relationship while including the contributions of a student's university identity into social capital construction. It was looking above and beyond the contributions of one's university identity that it was found that team identity actually detracted from a college student's reported level of social capital. While the actual negative association between team identity and social capital was significant, its *impact* was minimal. However, it was the mere lack of a positive association that was the surprising result from the initial analysis. This finding was noteworthy on multiple levels, including running counter to the findings of past literature which has clearly indicated that team identity of students within a campus community has positively contributed to myriad social benefits, including integration into the university (Wann & Robinson, 2002), enhanced sense of community (Clopton, 2008), and—most recently—overall social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010). However, no study to date has been able to control for the use of a student's university identity. While team

identity has a role in many of these outcomes, it can be assumed that it is one's *university* identity that generates the ultimate impact into leveraging group identity into its derived benefits. Thus, to accurately assess the relationship between college students identifying with their school's athletics teams and their resultant levels of social capital, valid research must include this university identity. In viewing the contribution of team identity beyond that of university identity, the direction of any contribution would indicate its position relative to that of the overall university identity. In other words, while university identity offered a significant positive contribution to the overall social capital variable, team identity detracted from this relationship. Rather than the negative relationship between team identity and social capital, where limitations exist in capturing the measure of social capital, it was team identity running counter to university identity in reference to social capital that is the most notable finding in the current study. And it is this particular finding that sets forth a number of questions raised in the process. Mostly, this result suggests a much more stringent reexamination of the benefits derived from team identity on a college campus. In fact, maintaining a successful, high-profile college sports program has been credited with enhancing the overall public image of the university (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006), enhancing the public's perceived academic prestige of the university (Lovaglia & Lucas, 2005) and its ability to improve the overall university identity of students is often asserted as one defense for investing in big-time intercollegiate athletics (Sperber, 2000). While identifying with athletics is a real and tangible connection to one aspect of the university, it could be that perhaps its impact may be more in line with the impact of other student programs on campus such as Greek organizations where bonding social capital and sense of community run high. But like Putnam's reference to the dark side of social capital, this bonded community within Greek organizations often reinforces outcomes that run counter to the mission of the overall university, including lacking an openness to diversity (Wells & Corts, 2008) and other prosocial behavior (Caudill et al., 2006). It is, perhaps, that the use of big-time intercollegiate athletics in the United States promotes the bonding among homogeneous networks which results in a significant connection with social capital levels (Clopton & Finch, 2010). However, this bonding social capital might create further divide, or even silos (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003), across the campus that serve as barriers to bringing the campus together and promoting the overall campus community.

This notion reverberated over to the second finding of the study where, again after including the contribution of one's university identity, team identity has no significant predictability with a student's overall adjustment into the college atmosphere—one aspect of bridging social capital. Past research has posited a positive relationship between team identity and university integration (Wann & Robinson, 2002) and sense of community (Clopton, 2008) and myriad examples of anecdotal evidence supports the assumption (e.g., Toma, 2003) that college sports—through providing a common bond and overall identity—can enhance the social integration, connections, and adjustment of its members. However, there has been no evidence that these connections are anything more than reinforcing a bonding social capital that fails to connect or integrate the college student fan into the *broader* social fabric of the university. It this connection with the broader university community that diversifies one's social network and empowers one to “get ahead.” It also this network expansion that affords an individual social mobility, reinforces Putnam's

belief that it is the most important aspect to social capital. For it is the connection of loosely-based, diverse relationships that truly set apart the most successful communities, organizations, or campuses. Sport's responsibility here is one of great magnitude for, despite its current position within any given community context, sport will always possess a unique potential to unite a diverse constituency. Particularly at the university level, fans of spectator sports can range in a wide, disparate demography and these big-time athletics contests have shown the potential to bridge across these diverse identities (see Toma, 2003). This potential, however, might be an ephemeral expression of unity within these communities of sport. While future research in this direction is imperative, it is also essential that these institutions hosting sport—particularly spectator sport teams in any community context—reexamine the actually numerous avenues by which community members connect or identify with their teams. This connection should also be explored to uncover the extent to which there is a reinforcement of the overall community by bridging across diverse identities, or if there is an enclaving of demographics through the use of silos that prohibit the community from becoming unified. Such a finding would echo the long-held sentiment of a divided social worlds of athletics and the university. While students in the large university settings have varied interests that are diverse as they themselves, not every student would be expected to have their social network enhanced by the presence of the athletics program. However, the budget of typical individual student programs pale in comparison with that of the typical college athletics department and, thus, athletics carries a unique responsibility of representing the student body.

## Limitations and Recommendations

The findings of this research were limited by a number of factors, each of which suggests that these findings should be generalized cautiously. First the overall use of the SCAT instrument was a five-item measure that does not delineate between bonding and bridging social capital. While empirical research has established the validity and reliability of the instrument, it is nonetheless an instrument that possesses potential limitations to these findings. Further, social capital is one measure that lies on a wide spectrum and can be confounded by a menagerie of factors in one's social structure. Thus, difficulty lies therein in attempting to control for the range of variables that impact an individual's level of social capital.

Based on these findings, one recommendation for future research is the creation of an empirically-established instrument measuring social capital in a sport-specific context. Because of sport's unique existence as a social institution, the extent of bonding and bridging social capital should be elucidated meticulously out of this relationship. This research will provide further clarity into the distinct connection between a sport community and social capital. Further, while the current research was able to use survey responses from across the United States to examine sport and social capital at the college and university level, follow-up interviews and focus groups are necessary to advance these findings. Specifically, these future studies should examine the individual construction of social capital and the elements of which sport provides this process. As Heere & James (2007) suggested, one's identifying with a team and the benefits derived is a balance of group identities.

It is within these specific identities that sport must be able to resonate; and it is this ability to resonate across multiple group identities that will define any social institution as a bridge-builder of social capital.

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