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## **Lived Experiences of College Football Fans in the Southeast United States: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto  
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.baej-ju7k>  
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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL FANS IN THE  
SOUTHEAST UNITED STATES: AN INTERPRETATIVE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Kinesiology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto

May 2021

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

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by

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May 2021

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## ABSTRACT

### LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL FANS IN THE SOUTHEAST UNITED STATES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto

While a number of sport-related studies have explored sport fandom and its effects quantitatively, there is a lack of research that exists surrounding the lived experiences of fans, and thus any potential health-related benefits derived through fandom. The present study qualitatively explored the lived experiences of college football fans in the Southeast United States with aims to identify any potential health related benefits derived through fandom experiences. Eight participants were interviewed utilizing semi-structured interviews. Interviews were analyzed via interpretative phenomenological analysis. Results are discussed within the context of positive psychology and identity theory and suggest that participants experienced phycological and social well-being benefits as a result of their football fandom experiences and rituals. Furthermore, with respect to identity theory, results suggest that being a fan of the team provided a sense of self-purpose or meaning to participants that goes beyond just enjoyment for the game.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the individuals that made this thesis possible.

First, I would like to thank my thesis and graduate advisor, Dr. Ted Butryn, for your guidance and expertise that has allowed me to not only pursue this research project, but also to prevail within the Kinesiology graduate program at San José State University. Thank you for always believing in my abilities, ideas, and my potential as a graduate researcher, student, and professional. Additionally, I am profusely thankful not only for your past and continued confidence in me to succeed in this program, but also in my present and future endeavors. Your actions to challenge me have shaped me into a researcher and individual that I am proud of. I am sincerely grateful to have pursued my graduate career under your guidance and within the Department of Kinesiology at San José State University.

To Dr. Cole Armstrong, Dr. Tamar Semerjian, and Dr. Michael Dao, I would like to thank you all individually for being a part of my thesis committee during these especially trying times. Your expertise, guidance, assistance, and feedback has helped me in numerous ways, not only within my research, but during my time as a graduate student. I am especially honored to have had you all on my committee, and am grateful for all the knowledge and experience I have gained through your guidance.

Further, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the fans who volunteered to participate in this study. Without your willingness and openness to share your experiences, my research vision could have never been possible.

And lastly, to my family and friends, thank you for everything you have done for me throughout my graduate school career. It is through your generosity, words of

encouragement, and presence that I have been able to pursue this degree. Without you as a support system, I could not have pushed myself to be the best student and researcher I could be.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

That college football is a highly popular cultural phenomenon is evidenced by the National Football Foundation (NFF) and College Hall of Fame's most recent report (2017-2018) that deemed college football the nation's second most popular sport, right behind the National Football League (NFL). The significance of college football both sociologically and economically is also illustrated by the 47.6 million fans that attended games in 2017, the 200 million unique fans that consumed 355 regular season games in 2017, and the 122 million television viewers of the 39 postseason bowl games (The National Football Foundation & College Football Hall of Fame, 2018). Indeed, a 2017 gallop poll found that 56% of United States (U.S.) adults considered themselves fans of college football. This percentage reflects a two percent increase from 2011, and accounts for more than professional baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer fans (National Football Foundation & College Football Hall of Fame, 2018).

With respect to why college football fandom has seen such a dramatic growth, scholars have suggested that motivations for becoming a fan might involve the low level of skill needed to become a fan, the low cost associated with team identity, and the ability for all types of individuals to engage in fandom despite age or ability levels, among others (Wann & James, 2018; Zillman et al., 1989). For young adults, becoming socialized into college football fandom could be the result of the desire to form new bonds and fit in (Trail, 2018). Trail (2018) also suggests that an individual's college team may act as a way for them to maintain connections with friends despite locational differences. Identity theory (Stryker, 1968) would suggest that identifying oneself as a

fan could provide meaning to the individual that is reinforced through social interaction and that one's self concept and self-esteem are influenced by team identification. Further, sport provides a space and place for families to spend time with one another, for individuals to escape from the sometimes harsh realities of everyday life, and simply acts as an entertainment outlet (Wann & James, 2018). Certainly, a broad range of research exists exploring the motives behind sport fandom generally and college football specifically. However, the psychological benefits of college football fandom remain relatively unexplored.

Scholars studying sport fandom have aimed to make distinctions between sports spectators and fans. While levels of interaction between an individual and a sport or team are important in making these delineations (Wann & James, 2018), psychological connection has also played a prominent role in differentiating the two terms that have commonly been used interchangeably within fan identification literature (Trail et al., 2003; Wann & James, 2018). For example, the Psychological Continuum Model developed by Funk and James (2001) aims to identify how one's psychological connection to a sport or team influences an individual's level of fandom. Given that researchers have taken a psychological approach in addressing the relationship between an individual and a sport or team, it is viable to uncover the potential psychological benefits that result from these often deeply emotional connections.

The tight-knit relationship between universities and sports is a unique aspect of the U.S. (Chu, 1982) that originated from the effort and interest of college students (Ervin & Rosser, 2017). In the Southeastern U.S., football is not only popular, but it has significant

cultural meaning as well. While many studies have investigated the motivations behind sport-spectating in football (Correia & Esteves, 2007; Gargone, 2016; Gencer, 2015; Neale & Funk, 2006; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Wann, 1995; Woo et al., 2009), few scholars have examined sport fandom and its effect on psychological well-being, specifically in the Southeast U.S., where collegiate level football is historically rooted and culturally honored (Borucki, 2003). Indeed, college football in the South continues to be an integral part of popular culture in the Southeastern United States, and the psychological benefits experienced by fans is a notable phenomenon that warrants investigation.

Inoue et al. (2015) conducted a large review study, in which they analyzed 135 studies related to spectator sport and population health published between the years 1990 and 2014. The authors reported that only 9% of studies that explored the relationship between sport consumption and well-being can be found in sport management journals, while the rest were published in other journals within fields such as medicine, public health, psychology, and the social sciences. Addressing the relationship between sport consumption and well-being within sports management literature could provide potentially informative information that would allow sport management professionals to optimize on the spectator and fandom experience. Indeed, Kim and James (2019) suggest that, “Understanding and promoting sport consumer well-being are essential for legitimizing sport in the policy sector and for building long-term relationships with sport consumers” (p. 119). This lack of representation of well-being within the sports

management domain prompts for further investigation in this emerging area of sport consumption and its influence on well-being.

Within their research, Inoue et al. (2015) outlined the categories of population health of primary focus within the 135 articles analyzed. It was found that 47% of the articles were related to sport spectatorship and health, and 24% were on the relation between sport spectatorship and physical well-being. However, only 20% of the articles dealt explicitly with sport spectatorship and its effect on mental well-being, and only 15% were studies directly related to sport spectatorship and social well-being. The effect of sport consumption on mental and social well-being should not be overlooked, as studies show that spectator sport provides consumers with communal interaction and social bonding (Melnick, 1993; Wann, 2006b). This supports the notion that while research exists surrounding the many benefits of sport consumption, research on the benefits of sport spectatorship typically focuses on the health and physical domains of well-being, as opposed to the psychological and social domains of well-being (Doyle et al., 2016).

Some research has taken a positive psychology approach to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption. Positive psychology shifts the focus of traditional psychology that is primarily concerned with eliminating and correcting mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Instead, it aims to identify ways in which individuals can maintain human flourishing as well as examines processes that maximize well-being. Doyle et al. (2016) utilized a positive psychology approach to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption within an Australian football league and found evidence that domains of well-being were activated by number of spectator

experiences. Positive psychology as it relates to well-being theory acted as a theoretical framework that helped make sense of the data.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of the existing research on sport fandom and its effects has been done quantitatively, and thus the lived experiences of fans, and the nuances of any potential health benefits derived from it, remain unclear. A few studies have used a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of college sport fans. For example, Epstein (2014) utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the fandom of UCLA alumni, focusing on the meaning making, feelings, and motivations surrounding the men's football and basketball teams. Similarly, Ervin & Rosser (2017) studied the experiences of highly engaged men's basketball fans as well as the social experiences as a result of team identification at Desert University (DU) using a phenomenological analysis. A more recent type of phenomenological research is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which is concerned with individual lived experience. IPA aims to explore how individual experience is perceived, interpreted and described on a subjective level as opposed to seeking an objective truth (Smith et al., 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). An IPA approach is taken because of its aim to understand the experiences undergone by individuals through first-person description (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Thompson et al., 1989), as well as to make an attempt in contributing to the lack of qualitative approaches within sports management literature, that have been called upon for an increased need by sports management researchers (e.g., Edward & Skinner, 2010; Hoeber & Shaw, 2017).

## **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of college football fans in the Southeastern U.S. using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), with aims of identifying any potential health-related benefits derived through fandom.

## **Definitions**

**Identity theory.** Role identities are an important component of identity theory, which are “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy...” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 256). Individuals self-construct their own subjective and personal identities as a result of the social interactions amongst others and within different groups (Mead, 1934; Lock & Heere, 2017). Meaning, that individuals can occupy a number of roles in society. Burke & Reitzes (1981) suggest that meaning is given to these identities when an individual interacts amongst others socially, and it is within these instances that individuals derive a sense of self-meaning and that which they are able to define themselves as individuals.

**Well-being theory and positive psychology.** Well-being is a construct of different sets of measures and subjective factors, known as elements (Seligman, 2011). These elements are subjectively measurable and constitute to one’s own well-being. Seligman’s (2011) proposed five measurable elements of well-being theory include positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). The goal of positive psychology is to turn from the traditional focus of psychology that aims to correct and eliminate mental illness to identifying ways humans can maintain human

flourishing and flow as well as examining processes that maximize well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

**Interpretative phenomenological analysis.** IPA aims to explore the views, perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and descriptions within a topic of investigation under study on an individual and subjective level, as opposed to the seeking of an objective standpoint or truth (Smith et al., 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

### **Limitation**

This study focused exclusively on college football fans in the Southeast U.S. and at one particular institution. This represents just a marginal portion of college football fans not only in the South, but in the entirety of the U.S.

### **Delimitations**

1. Participants were required to be a current student or alumnus of the University under study.
2. Participants were required to be season ticket holders for the current or upcoming football season.

## CHAPTER 2: JOURNAL ARTICLE

# Lived Experiences of College Football Fans in the Southeast United States: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto  
San José State University

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## **Literature Review**

### **College Sports in the United States**

A unique aspect of the U.S. is the formal and tight-knit connection of sports and universities (Chu, 1982). Collegiate level sports are culturally significant to American society (Beyer & Hannah, 2000), and Chu (1982) asserts that given the large budgets and cultural embeddedness, no other country takes college sport as seriously as the U.S.

Moreover, but it is suggested that sport, including intercollegiate sport, can be used as a vehicle for immigrants and international students to become socialized into American culture (Allen et al., 2010). Indeed, university team spirit can be witnessed across the U.S. where individuals wear their university team gear and represent their fandom with team memorabilia. Interestingly, intercollegiate sports in the U.S. were first implemented by the efforts and interest of college students that ranged from a milieu of sporting activities (Ervin & Rosser, 2017). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, athletic programs and organizations were primarily student-operated. It wasn't until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that students started to lose control over their self-mandated athletic programs (Covell & Barr, 2010). Although it is apparent that students no longer govern and organize athletic programs at American universities, students still identify with their college sports teams and play an integral role in the fandom of university sporting events (Ervin & Rosser, 2017).

College football in particular has been a popular college sport since the 1890's after colleges started to play games against one another (Watterson, 2002). It soon became apparent that college football at universities were drawing in large crowds, attracting potential students, impacting alumni loyalty, and fostering a sense of community and identity amongst students (Watterson, 2002). Although college football was nearly confined to Northeastern states until the later 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rooney, 1969), Southerners during the early 1890s decided to adopt "the fashionable sport of the Northeastern bourgeoisie as a cultural component of their modernization program" (Doyle, 1997, p. 28-29).

### ***College Football in the Southeast United States***

After the American Civil War between the Union and Confederate states, Southerners felt a strong sense of subordination towards their Northern neighbors (Borucki, 2003). The feelings of defeat that stemmed from the fall to the North elicited Southerners to find novel means of regaining superiority over their Northern counterparts. Southerners also became aware of their inferiority to other parts of the country given that the region suffered from greater infant mortality, poverty, lower life expectancy, and illiteracy rates compared to other regions of the country during this time (Bain-Selbo, 2017).

Southerners were able to assert their regional honor by turning to sport, particularly the inter-regional games beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. The “Crimson Tide” also known as the University of Alabama’s football team, was the main source of regaining feelings of superiority. This is because the Crimson Tide was the first Southern collegiate level football team to upset power teams in the Northern and Western U.S. (Borucki, 2003). The strength and virtue that the Crimson Tide offered for Southern states allowed Southerners to regain a sense of pride that was lost following the fall to the Civil War. Further, the North experienced great economic expansion following World War II. Consequently, Northerners looked down at their Southern neighbors as “uneducated hicks” who were subsequently left behind during this expansion while the North became more industrialized (Barnhart, 2008). College football further acted as a way for Southerners to reign superiority and establish Southern pride (Barnhart, 2008).

In particular, the 1926 Rose Bowl is commonly referred to as “The Game that changed the South” as well as the most important game in Southern history (Groom, 2000). This game was the South’s first appearance in the lucrative Rose Bowl, which resulted in a surprising triumph for Alabama against the Washington Huskies (Cooper et al., 2009). Not only was the Crimson Tide representing its home state, but it was standing for the entire Southern region (Groom, 2000). Doused by the reputation of being inferior, the South saw the 1926 Rose Bowl as an opportunity to hang their collective hat (Cooper et al., 2009). The Alabama triumph provided the opportunity to diminish the stigma surrounding the belief that Southern football was inferior (Doyle, 1997). Moreover, the South was burdened by political and social isolation from the American cultural mainstream resulting from a historical demoralizing military defeat (Doyle, 1997). An Alabama victory resulted in the restoration of Southern regional pride and honor (Borucki, 2003). The bigotry directed at Southerners following the Civil War left a tainted imprint on the lives of those living in the South, where feelings of regional glory were lost to the cultural mainstream.

The love of college football as an important part of Southern culture is evidenced by a study undergone by Gibson and colleagues (2002) that examined the meanings, rituals, and practices of fandom surrounding the University of Florida (UF) Gators football team. Participants described instances of traveling hours for games, never missing game days, and scheduling family and friend-oriented events around game days. They also noted on how they couldn’t imagine their lives without UF football. Scholars assert how Southern football fans have planned events such as weddings, births, and even funerals around

sacred fall Saturdays in the name of college football (Barnhart, 2008). Clearly, football in the South means a great deal to the population and the dedication they assert cannot be seen as prominently in any other parts of the country.

Unique Southern history had consequently shaped the way Southerners viewed and regarded themselves, especially in relation to the North. The love for and excellence of college football teams in the South acted and continues to act as a way to positively represent and separate the South in a redemptive way (Bain-Selbo, 2017). Although the institution under study is not as historically tied to early Southern culture as is the Crimson Tide for example, with average home game attendance hitting 43,274 spectators in the year 2015 (NCAA, 2016) and considered to be within a mid-major NCAA athletic conference, the fan base reflects a contributable role in the current Southeast collegiate-level football culture.

### **Sport Fandom**

A range of motives have been identified to explain why individuals become fans of sports and teams. Given the prevalence and recurrence of these motives within past literature (e.g., Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail et al., 2000; Wann, 1995), Wann & James (2018) identified the eight common motives surrounding sport fandom as: group affiliation, family, aesthetic, self-esteem, eustress, acquisition of knowledge, escape, and entertainment. Although past literature has identified aspects of sport that make it attractive to spectators and fans, sport fandom lacks a concrete, universally agreed upon definition (Toffoletti, 2017). However, it is important to make the distinction between sport spectators and fans because they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and not all

spectators identify as fans (Follett, 2015). One important distinction that delineates spectators and fans is the level of psychological connection an individual has with a sport or team, known as team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). A method that has been used to measure the level of identification that an individual has with a given team is the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann & Branscome, 1993). It consists of a 7-item measure that asks questions such as, “How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of this team?”, and responses are recorded on an eight-point Likert-type scale. The range from 1 (*low identification*) to 8 (*high identification*) determines the level of identification one has with a team, with overall lower scores indicating lower identification and overall higher scores indicating higher levels of identification.

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) constructed by Funk & James (2001) aims to identify how one’s psychological connection to a team influences an individual’s level of fandom. The model consists of four levels or boundaries that operates along a vertical continuum, with each level increasing in psychological connection to a sport or team as one moves up the continuum. The four levels consist of awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). Spectators, as proposed by the PCM, are individuals that have a “low-level” connection with a certain sport or team and may be influenced by social-psychological and demographic based motives to attend sporting events. An individual like this would be suggested to fall on the attraction level of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001). A fan, however, as suggested by the PCM, has a stronger psychological connection to a team that takes on a more intrinsic meaning. Persistent

loyalty towards a team will also be evident. An individual with these characteristics would fall on the attachment or allegiance level of the PCM (Funk & James, 2001).

Other scholars have aimed to make a distinction between sport spectating and fandom. Pooley (1978) asserts:

Whereas a spectator of sport will observe a spectacle and forget it quickly, the fan continues his interest until the intensity of feeling toward the team becomes so great that parts of every day are devoted to either his team or in some instances, to the broad realm of sport itself (p.14).

Further, Wann et al. (2001) define fan identification as a psychological connection with a team, where the performance of a team is self-relevant to an individual. They also go on to describe how fans identify with their preferred sport or team, whereas spectators attend sporting events for more extrinsic reasons and may have little interest in the game itself. Scholars have also considered levels of interaction in their delineations between the two terms. Wann & James (2018) define sport fans as “individuals that are interested in and follow a sport, team, and/ or athlete, while sport spectators are those who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media (radio, television, etc.)” (p. 367). Indeed, psychological connection as well as interaction have been used to make distinctions between sport spectators and fans.

### **Identity Theory and Sports Fans**

Although sport fandom and fan identification research has mostly made use of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), researchers argue for the use of identity theory as well in examining fandom (Jacobson, 2003; Lock & Heere, 2017). It is suggested that team identification can influence one’s self-concept and self-esteem (Lock & Heere, 2017;

Trail, et al., 2000). Role identities are an important component of identity theory, which are “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy...” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 256). Individuals self-construct their own subjective and personal identities as a result of the social interactions amongst others and within different groups (Mead, 1934; Lock & Heere, 2017). Meaning, that individuals can occupy a number of roles in society, such as sports fan, daughter, and student. Burke & Reitzes (1981) suggest that meaning is given to these identities when an individual interacts amongst others socially, and it is within these instances that individuals derive a sense of self-meaning and that which they are able to define themselves as individuals. Therefore, it is possible that becoming a fan of a team is part of some broader, more reflective meaning that goes beyond just enjoyment for the game.

### **Well-Being Theory and Positive Psychology**

Well-being is a prominent influence and link to one’s health (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). Well-being is not merely a directly measurable entity, but a construct of different sets of measures and subjective factors, known as elements (Seligman, 2011). These elements are subjectively measurable and constitute to one’s own well-being. Seligman’s (2011) proposed five measurable elements of well-being theory include positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment (PERMA). Each of these elements must satisfy three properties in order to be considered an element: (1) it must contribute to well-being; (2) many people must pursue it for the sake of itself, and not for the sake of obtaining any of the other elements;

and (3) it is explained within itself, independently and exclusively from any of the other four elements. Again, these elements and properties do not define well-being, but are vital contributions to feelings of well-being

The goal of positive psychology is to turn from the traditional focus of psychology that aims to correct and eliminate mental illness to identifying ways humans can maintain human flourishing and flow as well as examining processes that maximize well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It was generally believed that focusing on subjective well-being (SWB) was the best way to measure well-being, suggesting that increasing positive effects and decreasing negative effects would lead one to gain a positive sense of life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This is referred to as the hedonistic approach to well-being. Positive psychology takes up a new approach that acts as an extension to hedonia, known as eudaimonia. The eudemonic approach to well-being focuses on human flourishing and maximizing one's human potential. This approach suggests that happiness is not so much an end state, but living a fulfilling life that maximizes well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Doyle et al. (2016) used this approach to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption within an Australian football league and found the activation of four PERMA domains evidenced by a number of spectator experiences. The findings suggested that sports marketers and sport organizations could benefit by fostering purposeful and engaging spectator activities and spaces that foster and support PERMA domains so that the sporting consumers experience is enhanced.

## **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Although qualitative research in sports management is much more prominent than it was in past decades, Hoeber & Shaw (2017) still argue that a variety of qualitative research approaches are lacking in sports management literature that “take into consideration other values and ideologies that help to broaden and deepen research” (p. 5). Edward & Skinner (2010) identify the need for more work in sports management research that’s makes use of phenomenology and asserts that it “has the potential to be used with great effectiveness in the field of sports management research” (p. 374).

Phenomenology is a resourceful data collection technique used by qualitative researchers to explore the unique and subjective lived experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology is best suited when exploring how the experiences of individuals unfold within a contextualized space with respect to the social and cultural constructions of that space (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Phenomenology is unique and lacks simple characterization because it exists within the realm of the subjective experience of individuals, making it complex and multifaceted (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Smith and colleagues (2009) describe how IPA is concerned with, “understanding personal lived experience and thus with exploring person’s relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (phenomenon)” (p. 40). IPA aims to explore the views, perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and descriptions within a topic of investigation under study on an individual and subjective level, as opposed to the seeking of an objective standpoint or truth (Smith et al., 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Phenomenological analysis has been used previously by scholars aiming to explore the lived experiences of collegiate-level sports fans. In an attempt to explore the meaning making behind alumni fandom, the feelings associated with alumni fandom, as well as the motives behind alumni fandom surrounding the men's football and basketball teams of UCLA, Epstein (2014) utilized phenomenological analysis and identified three distinct findings. First, UCLA alumni were able to make a clear distinction between their dedicated fandom to their Alma Mater and other professional sports teams, including how their connection to UCLA makes their sports teams more attractive. On top of this, it was found that team fandom allotted an opportunity to strengthen interpersonal relationships, allowing for a sense of community to engender amongst fans. Lastly, it was found that being an NCAA UCLA team fan was a part of alumni identities.

Ervin & Rosser (2017) also used a phenomenological analysis to explore the experiences of highly engaged men's basketball fans as well as the social experiences as a result of team identification at Desert University (DU). It was found that fans had strong connections with the team and the experiences they had surrounding the team contributed to their identity as a fan; being a fan of the basketball team was a part of how they identified themselves as an individual. Not only this, but student participants described instances where being a fan was a part of something outside of themselves. Given that IPA is particularly suited to how people take up and make meanings of their lived experiences, and the fact that scholars have used IPA to examine fan experiences, IPA is well-suited to the current study.

## **Methods**

This section will first outline the participants for the study, and the means of recruitment. The data collection process will then be explained in detail, followed by a step-by-step overview of the data analysis procedures. Finally, the ways that academic rigor or quality (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) was established will be highlighted.

### **Participants**

Keeping in line with previous IPA studies in sport, and on fans in particular (Epstein, 2014; Ervin & Rosser, 2017), the present study included 8 participants and each participant was a current alumnus of the University under study. To ensure that participants had an investment in being fans of the team, participants were season ticket holders for the current or upcoming season. Following SJSU IRB approval, purposeful sampling (Smith & Osborn, 2015) was utilized to recruit participants most appropriate for best addressing the research question (Wilde & Murray, 2009). Through purposeful sampling, 8 men and women were recruited (4 male and 4 female) between the ages of 25 and 86 ( $M = 37.38$ ). Participants were scouted through my personal contacts given my past and present affiliations with the University and the football team. From there, a snowball sampling technique was then utilized to recruit other potential subjects based upon current participant connections and recommendations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In doing this, I asked participants from my own personal contacts if they knew of any potentially interested individuals who would fit within the study's inclusion criteria.

## **Procedure**

Following IRB approval and the successful recruitment of participants, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant that ranged between 30 to 65 minutes in length and yielded approximately 65 pages of single-spaced typed text. To address the exploratory research objective, semi-structured interview questions were utilized in order to gain a deep, rich understanding of the lived experiences of college football fans of a medium-sized, NCAA Division I Institution in the Southeast region of the U.S. (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The Institution in question is also considered to be within a mid-major NCAA athletic conference. This Institution was chosen because it represents a contributable part of Southeast college football culture, while also acknowledging the need to explore college football fandom at universities that are representative of mid-major athletic conferences at the NCAA Division-I level.

Gaining a detailed understanding of college football fandom experiences keeps in line with phenomenological analysis because phenomenology is concerned with how a phenomenon is experienced within an individual's consciousness (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Ervin & Rosser (2017) used a similar approach in their study that made use of phenomenological analysis to explore the experiences surrounding being a highly identified fan of DU basketball. The use of semi-structured interview questions allowed me to direct the interaction between myself and the participant but also allowed the participant space to reflect on their own thoughts and experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The advantages of conducting semi-structured interviews are that they enable for broad exploration of a topic and unanticipated thoughts or ideas to come to the surface

(Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The use of probing questions was also used to gain a clearer picture and understanding of participant stories and subjective realities (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), which is key for exploring the views, perceptions, experiences, interpretations, and descriptions sought out by IPA. The use of synchronous online interviews were conducted using a web-based video conferencing platform (i.e., Zoom). This method was chosen based on convenience for both the participants and myself. A web-based video conferencing platform also provided participants the comfortability as well as anonymity to share stories they may have felt uncomfortable doing so face-to-face within a shared space (Smith & Osborne, 2015; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

An interview guide that consisted of semi-structured questions designed to elicit college football fan experiences was also utilized. Before each interview, participants were briefed on the nature of the study. Interview questions were developed and adapted from similar research that studied individual-level benefits of sport spectating (Doyle et al., 2016), and other IPA studies within sport management and sport psychology. Questions and follow-up probes were employed until full saturation of the topic was reached, and when no new relevant information was being elicited form participants (Morse, 1995). Pseudonyms were employed for each participant throughout the discussion of the results to maintain confidentiality. Interviews were audio-recorded with verbal consent from participants and were transcribed verbatim post-interview.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed the phases outlined by Creswell (2016) to ensure consistency and reliability of the procedure. First, the transcribed interview text was read thoroughly

and re-read to fortify familiarization with the data. In the left-hand margin of the text, codes were identified next to interesting content that evidenced significance towards the research objective. Once codes were identified, they were listed out and then grouped together in order to eliminate overlap (Creswell, 2016). Once grouped together, I identified any emergent themes in the right-hand margin. The process of identifying codes from raw data and developing them into themes can be thought of as a funneling process (Creswell, 2016). Themes were developed based on common responses and consisted of the patterns of thoughts, expressions, or words consistent by the participant (Braun et al., 2016). Similar themes were then grouped together to form more overarching themes and listed within a theme table. This process was done for each participant interview transcript. Once each transcript was reviewed, a final theme table was constructed and grouped together based upon the themes of all the participant interview data. In order to establish that the results were an accurate reflection of participant responses and experiences, “member checks” were utilized. Member checks allowed research participants to provide feedback on the summary of key findings to help improve the accuracy and credibility of results (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

### **Academic Rigor**

I am in a position of closeness and connectedness to the current study as well as with the participants given my past and present affiliations with the University and football team under study. Given that I studied at this particular institution during my undergraduate career and am a past and current spectator of the football team, a bracketing interview was utilized prior to the interviewing of any participants (Dale,

1996). This was done in order to establish any biases that could potentially influence the interpretation of results (Dale, 1996). Participating in the bracketing interview allowed me to identify and refine the flow of the interview guide, and as a result, questions were both added and omitted in order to gain better clarification on a topic as well as make questions less loaded. This interview also furthers the current study's academic rigor by identifying the need for reflexivity. Reflexivity is a continuous process that is concerned with acknowledging, recognizing, and examining how a researcher's biases, background, and values play a role in their research practice (Palaganas et al., 2017).

A critical friend was also involved, who had no direct connection to the topic under study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The purpose of a critical friend is to "provide a theoretical sounding board to encourage reflection upon, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations of events in the field and the analysis of the data as it is generated" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, pp. 182-183.). The critical friend is a scholar with expertise in qualitative research, generally, and also IPA specifically. The critical friend provided feedback regarding the interview guide and approach, and also reviewed each transcript so that he could provide feedback throughout the data analysis process.

## **Results**

Analysis of the interview data yielded four major themes. This section details these themes, which are 1) positive emotions, 2) relationships, 3) identity, and 4) accomplishment.

## **Positive Emotions**

The first major theme involved the positive emotions that fans experienced related to their experiences. Positive emotions, including excitement, happiness, and pride, were elicited by both on-field and off-field experiences that included attending both home and away games, and experiencing victories. Within well-being theory and positive psychology, positive emotion is suggested to be a subjective element that contributes to one's well-being (Seligman, 2011). All participants expressed feelings of positive emotions related to their fandom experiences. For example, Tyler (P5), a 27-year old alumni explained the feelings of intensity and thrill he felt within the stadium on game-day:

It's like when you hear that one part of that song where you get that feeling at the back of your neck when you just hear that one note that just rings with you. It's deafening. It's almost like a shot of adrenaline. It's one of the most intense experiences for me because I mean people go skydiving and say like that's such a thrill because it's so short but for me because 3 hours of the biggest adrenaline rush for me so like that was the thing was it's not like a moment in itself but it encompasses many moments. And I guess like the feeling of that like anticipation before you even walk into the stadium makes the next game better.

Melissa (P4) also goes on to explain her feelings during an away game. Although she attended an away game as a visiting guest, she noted that walking around the stadium surrounded by her fellow fans was a prideful moment that may not have felt as great if she were by herself:

We're swarming to there as visiting guests and man it just felt like almost I would imagine if you walked by yourself that would feel like the walk of shame. But just being surrounded by your fellow [fans] you all of a sudden got a little pep in your step you're like hey fuck with me I've got a group of us here ok and you feel good walking in with your friends with your fellow fans.

An important aspect of experiencing positive emotions through fandom experiences was witnessing victories, which is consistent with past phenomenological literature that found intense joy after highly identified university sports fans witnessed the success of their favorite team (Ervin & Rosser, 2017). Jackie (P6), an 86-year old alumni also described how she felt after a team success by saying, "I am so excited. I cannot go to sleep when I get home. It takes me until one or two o'clock to try and control my mind and simmer down... it's just very exciting at game day. You just can't go to sleep".

Aside from experiencing positive emotions after a game day win, one participant even described a particular game day loss that had her feeling prideful regardless of the outcome, which is inconsistent with prior phenomenological research that found highly-identified university sports fans felt agony and negative emotion as the expense of their teams defeat (Ervin & Rosser, 2017). However, Melissa (P4) recalled one specific away game that resulted in a loss for her team:

I'm sure most people would think we feel defeated we feel lame you know the [opposing team] people had some smart words for us on our way out. But you know what? I was just proud of my team. The game we played, the athletics that you know occurred on the football field. We had great sportsmanship so you know I walked away out of an away stadium feeing real proud. Feeling good about myself and being very proud to be a [university mascot] fan. It can be hard to feel that way after a loss, but I still felt as proud as I did walking into that place.

Positive emotions related to fandom experiences was also evident when participants explained their feelings surrounding rivalry game victories. This supports prior research that found evidence of the activation of positive emotions within Australian football spectators witnessing rivalry game triumphs (Doyle et al., 2016). Five out of the eight participants recalled their most memorable game day experience during one particular

game that took place between the University and in-state rivals within the year 2014.

During interviews, some participants noted that in-state rivalry games were most memorable and exciting. Alex (P3) explained what makes games most memorable by saying, “I guess just because it’s those rivalry games, there’s a lot weighing on them”.

During this particular game in 2014, The University under study triumphed over the in-state rival team. Christy (P2), a 25 year-old alumni who was a student for this particular game recalled her experience:

It just felt like home. I don’t know. It felt like magic was in the air that day. We all looked at each other and we were just all smiles. Like how could this be happening? And you look over to the student section and they’re all doing the same thing. We all united as one at that point. People still talk about it to this day... it was a fight and it was memorable. And it was prideful.

Positive feelings related to fandom experiences was also shown when one participant explained his anticipation for future games, explaining how football games are a special event for him. Similar to research by Gibson and colleagues (2002) that found Southeast collegiate football fans planning events around their sacred game days, Cameron (P6) explained how he looks forward to experiencing those positive emotions by ensuring his attendance for future games. As he stated:

To me it’s special like there’s six days a year I ask off work. No matter if we have to or not there’s six days a year I have somewhere to be like I’ll plan around. I’ll go work sometimes that I normally wouldn’t want to work to make sure I’m off those six days or seven games however many we have. And that’s just it. It’s just a special atmosphere it’s a special place to me for sure and it’s like prior to kick off when it doesn’t matter who you’re playing everybody there is loud everybody there is making noise everybody there is excited.

In summary, the major theme of positive emotions was an important part of fan experiences. The results add support to literature that suggests (e.g., Seligman, 2011) and

shows (e.g., Doyle et al., 2016) that sport consumption can help contribute to individual well-being by affording fans opportunities to feel positive emotions. For participants in this study, positive emotions were evidenced during experiences related to attending both home and away games, experiencing victories and even experiencing certain losses.

## **Relationships**

The second major theme that emerged from the data analysis involved the deep relationships participants formed with other fans. According to well-being theory and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), relationships are a vital contribution to individual-level of well-being. Participant responses indicated that team-related events such as tailgating and spectating provide an opportunity for participants to make new friends, provide a place to reconnect with others, as well as help to strengthen existing relationships. This finding is consistent with previous research that used a positive-psychology approach to examine individual-level benefits of sports consumption (Doyle et al., 2016). Ryan (P1) explained how the football culture has contributed to his friendships by saying, “You know, you get to meet some great friends. I met some of my greatest friendships through [university name] football and it’s just genuinely a good time”. Melissa (P4) also noted how the football team allowed her to make friends with people she may not have met ordinarily if it were not for the activities surrounding game day by stating:

... Honestly like tailgating with Andy is how I met a lot of my friends that both of us have in common. Like Susie, Rachel, people like them that I wouldn’t have otherwise probably have met except for hanging out at a tailgate...

Another way that relationships were influenced through fandom experiences was when participants expressed how attending games afforded them the opportunity to reconnect with old friends. As Cameron (P6) phrased it:

Like for me now I like to go to games because a lot of the times I run into guys, guys and girls, I went to college with. So, I get a chance to see people that I don't get to see very often... And so like halftime I'll go down and walk around and go see people I might know.

Participants also acknowledged that attending games strengthened their interpersonal relationships. While discussing her friendships surrounding the team, Christy (P2) noted, "My little, I want to say that I introduced her to [university mascot] football. And I feel it's been nothing but growth from there for our friendship". Ryan (P1) even vocalized how attending rivalry games with friends allows him to strengthen his own friendships:

Just you know with that emotional investment I feel like with the rivalry games you know you draw closer to people. I know that if I'm sitting there with my friends and we beat [rival university names] and we're all emotionally invested in the game it's a close game and we win we're all going to come out feeling better about ourselves. You know and that builds friendships I'd say. Just like that mutual emotional investment.

The above quotes illustrate that attending football games enabled participants to interact with others and helped to maintain and strengthen interpersonal connections. This finding supports the notion that individual's college team may act as a way for fans to maintain connections despite locational differences (Trail, 2018). The relationship theme and the way that participants expressed how their fandom experiences impacted their interpersonal relationships related directly to previous research. Doyle et al. (2016) found that spectators of an Australian football league were able to strengthen existing relationships as well as create new ones given common interest in the team. Further,

Epstein (2014) reported that UCLA NCAA sports acted as a way to bring alumni fans together as well as to strengthen existing relationships. The results of this study adds support to literature surrounding the social-psychological benefits of sport consumption (Doyle et al., 2016; Wann, 2006c; Wann & Weaver, 2009).

## **Identity**

A third major theme that emerged from the data analysis involved fan identification. Specifically, participants in the study indicated that being a fan of their college football team was a part of who they are and how they identified themselves. This is consistent with previous phenomenological research surrounding collegiate-level fandom (Epstein, 2014; Ervin & Rosser, 2017). An important component of identity theory is the concept of role identities (Hogg et al., 1995), which are the self-definitions that people apply to themselves given their personal interactions and affiliations (Locke & Heere, 2017). Going beyond just enjoyment for the game, participants signified that being a fan of the team was like being a part of something bigger than themselves. For example, while reflecting on what it means to be a fan and what it is like to be a part of the football culture surrounding the University, Tyler (P5) stated:

It honestly feels like it feels like forever. It feels like it's never left. Feels like it won't leave. And it feels like I'll never... it's a definitive part of who I am as well I feel like it's one of those things like when you take those traditions on you don't just do them, it's now like a part of you.

Ryan (P1) also goes on to explain what it personally means to him to be a part of the football culture and even acknowledges that his fandom is a part of his personality:

... So it's just you know you're a part of something. You know you feel like it's a part of you almost. Like it's a part of your personality. Yeah just [university

[name] football there's not really a big way to explain it. It's just something that is a part of me, that excitement, you can just feel it in the air and the atmosphere.

Within identity theory, identity salience is concerned with and conceptualized “as the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 257). Roles identities are suggested to be conceptually placed in a self-hierarchy, where identities placed at the top of the hierarchy are more likely to form the basis of action than those at the bottom (Stryker, 1968). Therefore, the more strongly someone identifies with a role, the more likely that role is to guide an individual’s actions (Hogg et al., 1995; Lock & Heere, 2017). Annie (P8), a 58-year old alumni while reflecting on her experiences noted that her involvement with the football team is pivotal during the season and that “It’s important enough that that gets put on my calendar and really I’m not going to not be involved unless you know there’s an illness or a death in the family”. As she described what keeps her coming back to the stadium, she stated:

Well I think that at this point in my life it’s just become... you know what I do. Like it would be something big life changing thing that would make me not have season tickets. Because that’s just a part of who I’ve been since whatever 1979.

Further, identity theory suggests that self-meaning of identities is derived through social interactions with others (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Davis et al., 2019), and that individuals are responded to by others in accordance to their role identities (Davis et al., 2019; Hogg et al., 1995). Two participants explained the instant connection between fellow fans at away games, and the simplistic bond that occurred when running into fellow fans in an away-teams territory. Melissa (P4) recalled her away game experience as visiting guests at a particular Institution in the Southeast U.S.:

It was an away game. I traveled down there with my friend Andy and we get to the football stadium and we're driving around...it's garnet [opposing team color] everywhere. And then we take a turn into a parking lot and it's all coming to the side...And like a beacon of hope there is [university team colors] in the parking lot and thankfully enough we park right beside these people and then a few more and a few more so all of a sudden you know there's like a little squad of us there. And like I said we just turned to these people next to us, and we don't know these people. All of a sudden we're having lunch with them, they're sharing their fried chicken with us you know. We're playing beer pong together and going back and forth between each other's tents. Just making friends with everybody...

Tyler (P6) also explained his personal experience at an away game where he recognized fellow fans and immediately reacted based on their common identity:

... We met this dude named Jack out in the parking lot because they had an RV lot close to like the gator bus that they take to the stadium and stuff. We met and there was this guy he had a flag pole and [university team] flags and I was like hey sounds like a nice guy. So we walked over there and met them and we drank with them for the better part of 6 hours...

The theme of identity and the ways that participants described how their fandom contributed to their identities related directly with previous research. First, Ervin & Rosser (2017) found that the experiences undergone by fans of a university marque sports team contributed to their identity as fans. Second, Epstein (2014) found that being an NCAA UCLA sports team fan contributed to alumni identities. Participants in the current study described instances of how fandom contributed to their identities, shaped their decisions, as well as influenced interactions between fellow fans. Identity theorists (Stryker, 1968) would suggest that given these self-conceptions and through these interactions, fans derive a sense of self-purpose or meaning (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).

### **Accomplishment**

The final minor theme that emerged involved feelings of accomplishment. Participants expressed their feelings of accomplishment as a result of fandom experiences

such as witnessing victories and extending fandom. Well-being theory and positive psychology suggests that accomplishment is a vital contribution to individual well-being (Seligman, 2011). One participant explained how she derived a sense of accomplishment as a result of the team's success. This is in line with findings within research conducted by Doyle et al. (2016), as well as adds support to literature that suggests a sense of accomplishment is felt when the success of one's favored team occurs (Wann et al., 2013). When explaining how she feels after a game day win, Melissa (P4) stated that she personally feels as if she contributed to the success herself:

Oh well I feel amazing. I Feel like I personally was on the football team and I personally did something to make this victory happen. I mean I always just feel really good... I feel like I really have put something into this at least put time, have put the money to get the tickets, you know put the energy into showing up watching the football game cheering them on so it definitely feels good. Like I said it feels like you did something yourself.

A sense of accomplishment was also evident when one participant explained how he was personally able to make impacts with how deep his fanhood resonated. Tyler (P5) while a dedicated fan, was also a cheerleader for the University and, therefore, the football team. Because he represented the football team, Tyler argued that he was not only regarded as a fan, but was also known for being one of the team's biggest fans given his cheerleading position. While Tyler still remained a loyal fan after his resignation as a cheerleader, he admits how it feels to have had the opportunity to make an impact on other people's fandom by stating:

...People knowing like how deep my fanhood went to me that was one of the coolest things was I made impacts with how much I loved [university name] football. That like I made it contagious, I made it fun and exciting because something already was fun and exciting it didn't need but just like some outrageous idiot to go over the top and to make it just that much more fun. And to

be known for someone that made others love it too... that was the coolest for me was spreading the contagion that is [university name] blood. I love it. God I love it.

Although very little research has attempted to identify how sport fandom can elicit a sense of accomplishment for those who participate, participant responses within this study suggest that feelings of accomplishment were felt as a result of fandom experiences that included experiencing wins and extending fandom. These findings add to the lack of literature that explores how fandom elicits feelings of accomplishment, and ultimately contributes to well-being. However, the findings add support to current evidence of accomplishment activation found amongst Australian football spectators (Doyle et al., 2016).

## **Discussion**

This IPA study was an attempt to explore the lived experiences of college football fans in the Southeast U.S. with aims to identify any potential health-related benefits derived through fandom experiences. Given that college football in the Southeast U.S. is a culturally significant aspect of Southern culture (Barnhart, 2008), this study addresses how fans potentially benefit through their fandom rituals, with implications to optimize on fandom experiences. A lack of research surrounding the benefits that fans derive through sport fandom is wholly evident when one considers much of the existing research that aims to study the benefits of sport consumption focuses mainly on health and physical domains, leaving much left undiscovered about mental and social well-being benefits (Inoue et al., 2015). The current study contributes to the lack of research that aims to identify how sport consumption and fandom contributes to the psychological and

social well-being domains of individual well-being (Doyle et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2017; Kim & James, 2019), while also contributing to the lack of representation that exists within sports management literature that explores the influence of sport consumption on individual well-being (Inoue et al., 2015).

Evidence of positive emotion, relationships, and accomplishment as it related to participants fandom experiences is in alignment with past research that explored individual-level benefits of Australian league football consumption (Doyle et al., 2016). Additionally, results add support to prior research that found a positive relationship between sport spectating and long-term and short-term subjective well-being (Kim & James, 2019). Within the current study, positive emotions such as excitement, happiness, and pride were activated through fandom experiences such as attending both home and away games and experiencing victories. Second, football game experiences such as tailgating and spectating afforded the opportunity for fans to gain friends, reconnect with others, and strengthen existing relationships. Third, feelings of accomplishment by fans were evidenced as a result of fandom experiences such as witnessing victories and extending fandom to other individuals. Positive psychology and well-being theory would suggest that positive emotions, relationships, and accomplishment are vital contributions to individual level well-being (Seligman, 2011).

Further, there has been a call by sport management researchers for the increased use of identity theory in examining fandom (Jacobson, 2003; Lock & Heere, 2017). Within this study, we utilized identity theory (Stryker, 1968) to help frame the meanings that participants applied to their fandom, to explain potential reasons for the actions

undergone by fans, and to explain for the simplistic interactions and behaviors that existed between fans. Although social identity theory was utilized in their data analysis process, our findings support similar research undergone by Ervin & Rosser (2017) and Epstein (2014).

Findings of the current study have implications for sports management professionals aiming to optimize aspects of sport fandom experiences. The current study has demonstrated that participants experienced psychological and social well-being benefits as a result of their college football fandom experiences and rituals. Therefore, actions implemented by sports management professionals that target the activation of psychological and social well-being benefits may enrich and augment the experiences undergone by fans. With respect to the findings surrounding relationships as they related to fandom experience, we suggest targeting and fostering events that cater towards creating and maintaining relationships. For example, we suggest offering discounted group tickets and a communal space for new fans to mingle within the stadium. Further, creating a platform that allows fans to meet up and connect with fellow fans at away games would be a great way to meet other fans, provide incentive to travel and to attend, as well as supply a space for collective fans to engage amongst one other despite being in an away-teams territory.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

One potential limitation to this study was that it focused exclusively on college football fans in the Southeast U.S., and at one particular institution. This represents just a marginal portion of college football fans not only in the South, but in the entirety of the

U.S. We cannot accurately generalize to the broader population given the small population of participants interviewed, nor does qualitative research in general or phenomenology specifically aim to generalize in the traditional sense (Smith, 2018). In order to better understand how sport fandom contributes to individual level well-being and therefore increase generalizability, we suggest that future research examine college football fans of different geographical locations using a similar approach.

Lastly, what also serves as a limitation to the study is the age group of participants interviewed. Five out of the seven participants interviewed were in their mid or late twenties which means that this study did not truly account for the fandom experiences of older fans. Although we were able to interview two participants representative of an older population, we suggest that future research examine fandom experiences with participants that are diversely representative of vast age groups. In doing so, research data would generalize to a broader population and represent differentiating aspects as they relate to the fandom experiences of all generations.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Q: How did you first become a fan of your college football team?

Who or what introduced you to your favorite team?

Can you tell me what it was like to experience your first game?

Q: How dedicated are you to your college football team?

How far have you gone to make it known that you are a fan of your college football team?

Have you been in a situation when you were able to connect with others through common interest in your college football team?

Q: Walk me through a typical game day.

What is the atmosphere like leading up to the game?

What part of the game really sticks out to you the most?

Who do you typically share your game-day experiences with?

What would you say is your favorite part of the game-day experience?

What is it like within the stadium during game time?

Q: Tell me about your experiences associated with your college football team?

What experiences keep you coming back to the stadium?

What does it mean to be a fan of your college football team?

→ Do you feel as if you are a part of something bigger than yourself?

What is your favorite memory associated with a game of your college football team?

Q: What emotions do you feel on a typical game day?

Q: What are some traditions associated with your college football team?

How did you become socialized into these traditions?

Do these traditions resonate in the stadium?

How does it feel to be a part of this tradition?

Q: Do you have anything else to add about your experience of being a college football fan?

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT NOTICE

**Title of Study:** Lived Experiences of College Football Fans in the Southeast United States: An interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto, Graduate Student, San José State University

Dear Participant,

I am requesting your assistance in conducting a study surrounding the lived experiences of college football fans in the Southeast United States, specifically at East Carolina University (ECU). The results of the study are intended to increase our understanding of any potential psychological or social benefits that derive through fandom experiences. This study involves an interview ranging from 45 to 90 minutes in length, that will enquire information about your experiences as an ECU football fan.

Understand that your participation is voluntary. There are no risks associated with this study. You will be asked to participate in an interview regarding your experiences surrounding ECU football fandom. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University (SJSU). Any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering may be skipped. There are no direct benefits for the participants in the study, but your responses may provide potentially informative information that will be beneficial for sports management professionals aiming to optimize aspects of sport fandom experiences. Interview data will be digitally recorded and will only be accessible by the primary researcher and the faculty supervisor. Only participants names and emails will be collected, although participants will choose code names for the final writeup of the study and thus no identifying information will be released. The results of the study will be shared with the researchers at SJSU.

Your completion of the study indicates your willingness to participate. Please keep this document for your records.

If you have any questions regarding the study, you may reach out to me via email at [rosemarie.pacitto@sjsu.edu](mailto:rosemarie.pacitto@sjsu.edu), or by phone number (732) 232- 5984. You may also reach out to the faculty supervisor, Dr. Ted Butrym via email at [theodore.butrym@sjsu.edu](mailto:theodore.butrym@sjsu.edu). Thank you for your involvement with the study.

Sincerely,  
Rosemarie Rachel Pacitto