The Ties That Bind: Examining Division I Athletics as a Social Anchor

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Peyton J. Stensland
University of Cincinnati

Olzhas Taniyev
Roanoke College

Zach Scola
University of New Hampshire

Farah J. Ishaq
State University of New York College at Cortland

Zach Wilkerson
University of Kansas

Brian S. Gordon
University of Kansas

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Given the important role Division I athletics play on a college campus as well as in the community it resides, the purpose of this study was to examine how the perceived relationship quality of two potential social anchors, a state flagship university and a Division I athletics department, dually impacts social capital and community identification among both students (N = 423) and community members (N = 202) alike. The findings support the main purpose of social anchors, which are described as constructing a deep sense of community and trust within a community's social networks (Clopton & Finch, 2011). The university acted as a social anchor when all the respondents were combined as well as singularly in the community and university context respectively. Most importantly for the field of sport management, the authors found the athletics department at this university was an effective social anchor among all respondents as well as within the singular student setting but not for the singular community context. This study has a practical application as it provides convincing evidence that the university and its athletics department uniquely benefit the students and community members.

Keywords: Perceived Relationship Quality; Social Capital; Community Identification; Collegiate Athletics

E mbedded throughout local communities across the United States, university campuses offer individuals an array of opportunities involving education, research, service, multicultural involvement, and overall value development. Based on Colclough and Sitaraman's (2005) distinction of social capital, these academic institutions can theoretically serve as a social anchor for the diverse network of individuals connected through their common experiences. Defined by Clopton and Finch (2011) social anchors are "any institution-which can take the form of social, economic, physical, political, legal, etc.-that acts as a support for the development and maintenance of social capital and social networks" (p. 70). Similar to that of a university, Katz and Clopton (2014) proposed the potential for university athletics to act as social anchors for their respective communities. These athletic programs provide stakeholders with a common experience involving tradition, excitement, and collectiveness that ultimately create a sense of community and feeling of belonging.

Although the relationship between a university and its respective community has been explored in previous literature, scholars have primarily focused on the university's contribution to the community's economic sustainability (Dempsey, Bramley, Power, & Brown, 2011; van Weenen, 2000). In order to create this relationship, the university-community relationship must make sense economically over time, must incorporate and manage key environmental resources, and the university must find ways to integrate into the host community (Dempsey, Bramley, Power, & Brown, 2011). While the three-pronged paradigm of sustainability is key for a long-lasting relationship between a university and its local community, the current study aimed to explore the potential role of Division I athletics acting as a social anchor within the community and university contexts.

While Katz and Clopton (2014) identified universities and small school (i.e., Division III) athletics as potential social anchors (Katz & Clopton, 2014) in the university context, their findings were less definite among community members and the potential role of Division I athletics acting as a social anchor has gone largely unexplored. These prominent universities and their respective athletics should be considered as potential social anchors because they have become engrained in their local communities and provide the surrounding area with economic development, technological advancements, social cohesion, and overall cultural values. Additionally, Division I athletics provide the university as a whole with national exposure and these programs have the ability to attract the attention of the students, the local community, and the media outlets (Oriard, 2009).

Further, understanding the role relationship quality plays in generating social capital has not been investigated previously. Because relationship quality plays an integral role in the initial attitudes that a consumer might have towards an organization, it has been thought to be the best predictor in understanding what connection exists between the consumer and the product, in this case the university or university athletics department (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). By understanding the psychological foundations of perceived relationship quality within university and university athletics, the potential exists to predict and examine specific behaviors of sport consumers. These behaviors help establish the importance of considering relationship quality as a predictor of social capital and demonstrate the logical connection between the two constructs (Roberts, Varki, & Brodie, 2003). Taking into consideration the existence of these largely unanswered questions relating to universities, athletics, and perceived relationship

quality, empirical research concerning the potential for Division I universities requires further investigation.

Given the important role Division I athletics plays on a college campus in terms of financial commitment and student enrollment (Berkowitz & Schnaars, 2017; Pope & Pope, 2014) as well as in the community it resides, the purpose of this study was to examine how the perceived relationship quality of two potential social anchors, a state flagship university and Division I athletics, dually impacts social capital and community identification among both students and community members alike. The results of this study will indicate whether a state flagship university and its respective Division I athletics operate as a social anchor among the university community as well as the municipal community as a whole.

Conceptual Background

The Role of Collegiate Athletics

Because of the national prominence and brand recognition of Division I intercollegiate athletics, it is imperative to understand how they benefit their respective university and general community's needs. Described as a 'front porch' by Bass, Schaeperkoetter, and Bunds (2015) "NCAA Division I athletics departments frequently serve as the most visible faction of a university" (pp. 92-93). This visibility has been created through television coverage, promotional campaigns, alumni networks, and financial commitments by the university. Based on this exposure, athletics may serve as the initial draw to a university for certain external constituency groups (Bass et al., 2015).

Due to the landscape created by intercollegiate athletics, universities have the ability to capitalize on the visibility generated by successful athletics. This exposure of college sports' success has been found to have a direct connection with the number of student applications submitted to a school (Pope & Pope, 2014). Additionally, scholars have found indirect benefits generated by athletics in the form of increased monetary donations (Goff, 2000; Pope & Pope, 2009) and graduation rates (NCAA 2017; Tucker, 2004). These advertising effects connected with Division I intercollegiate athletics teams' on-field success, have been shown to create publicity and raise the profile of a university (Tucker, 2004). Similarly along this notion, Goidel and Hamilton (2006) discussed the positive impact athletic success had on enhancing the public's perception of the university's academic quality. Lovaglia and Lucas (2005) echoed these findings and discovered a link between Division I intercollegiate athletics and academic prestige.

Further, athletics have often been credited for being a central aspect to the branding and marketing processes of academic institutions (Toma, 1999). As stated by University of Pittsburgh athletic director, Scott Barnes, college sports are "not the most important room in the house, but it is the most visible" (Longman, 2009, para. 18). Because of the national presence of athletics, universities as a whole serve as a unifying force and become the focus of "conversation, publicity, and, now, mass media" (Clopton, 2007, p. 95). This ability to bring individuals together has given university athletics a platform for communal involvement within the university and local community (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). Additionally, these sport programs have been known to develop fan communities of alumni, students, faculty, and community residents (Toma, 1999). The connection these fan communities have to each other span past the physical component of attending games. In fact, these fan communities still have value to an athletics department and remain connected to each other through non-traditional forms of

consumption such as message boards and subscription packages. While attendance issues have become a problem (Scott & Masterson, 2014), there are a multitude of ways for fans to stay connected with each other, the team, and the university.

In particular, sense of community (SOC) has been heavily studied in relation to college campuses across the nation. This characteristic allows members to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of support (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan & Wandermans, 1986). Similar to the indirect benefits universities receive from branding and marketing processes, sense of community has been viewed as an important link to attract and retain students (Warner & Dixon, 2011). By creating a positive and engaging campus community, universities are able to impact the overall student experience (Nuss, 2003; Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011). For example, sense of community has been shown to increase student outcomes such as academic performance, student retention, and graduation rates (McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990; Warner & Dixon, 2013).

Further, the connection between sense of community and the university's athletics programs has been of interest to scholars in recent years. This interest stems from the perception that sport is a setting that draws people together, creates a common interest, and generates a sense of community (Schimmel, 2003). The use of sports to connect individuals together is evidenced through college football fans wearing university-related apparel, soccer followers wearing jerseys bearing the nation's flag, and Green Bay Packers' fanatics donning foam cheese hats. These examples illustrate the connection individuals form with both the team and the local community each team represents. Similarly, Chu (1989) stated, "By affiliating with the [university] team, by caring for its scores, we declare allegiance to an interest greater than oneself—the community" (p. 160).

This affiliation and loyalty is shown through social identification where individuals are drawn to others with whom they share similar characteristics with (Hogg & Terry, 2000). By identifying with a team, fan community, or university, individuals gain a sense of self based on the group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Group membership inherently adds value and emotional significance to one's life because of the connection made with others. With social identification, people define and evaluate themselves based on the groups they associate with. In terms of sports, basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cutting off reflected failure (CORFing) have been known to correlate with an individual's identification level (Kwon, Trail, & Lee, 2008). Those fans who are highly identified with the group are more likely to BIRG and less likely to CORF based on the team's success (Kwon et al., 2008). By fostering a sense of belonging, the group can weave into one's social identity and positively impact their connection with others.

Advancing the connection between sense of community and university athletics, Katz and Heere (2016) discovered individuals who identified with a sport team had increased involvement with the university. Their results also showed that identifying with a new sports team helped participants feel more connected and feel a part of the larger university campus community (Katz & Heere, 2016). Another study examining the importance of sense of community on intercollegiate football programs found SOC had a positive influence on satisfaction, retention, current support of athletics, and future support for athletics (Warner et al., 2011).

In order to foster these relationships and enhance the sense of community among fans, athletics departments are consistently developing new campaigns to attract people to their product. In particular, sport organizations have used social media to effectively strengthen their professional, personal, and community relationships by building and maintaining two-way

communication with fans (Wang & Zhou, 2015). Providing fans with unique group sales and theme nights are another way athletics departments develop a relationship with their fan base. Hispanic heritage games, military appreciation nights, and youth appreciation events are just a couple examples of how an athletics department can tailor events toward a specific audience. Further, in-game experiences such as Wi-Fi services, merchandise, game-day promotions, and concessions are of vital importance to fans and have been a focus of emphasis for athletics departments in recent years (Cooper, 2015). Finally, athletics departments evoke a sense of reciprocity with fans through their loyalty programs. By offering rewards such as end-of-season banquets, post-season tickets, or merchandise discounts, fans are more likely to view their relationship with the organization as meaningful (Deloitte Consulting LLP, 2015).

Despite the plethora of research surrounding college sport and sense of community, the existing literature does not examine an athletics department or university as a social anchor. Without this examination, these institutions may not understand how they can impact their members in terms of social capital and community identification. Additionally, viewing these institutions through the lens of a social anchor could help local communities discover how relationships are created and maintained, which may lead to community development and growth (Clopton & Finch, 2011).

Social Capital

Another well-documented topic in the literature on community development is social capital. It has been acknowledged that social capital acts as a catalyst for intellectual development and social inclusion and, therefore, civil society and city communities depend on it to survive (Jarvie, 2003). Modern literature on social capital stems from theories created by well-known sociologists such as Bourdieu, Coleman and the political scientist Putnam. Because of the historical underpinnings surrounding social capital and communities, a variety of definitions exist. For example, Bourdieu (1986) identified social capital as resources that provide access to a group of goods, and Coleman (1988) referred to the term as a combination of aspects of social structure that its participants can use in their pursuit of interests. The common underpinning of each definition relates to the creation and exploitation of personal relationships in order to gain the benefits associated with them.

While those definitions are heavily cited in the literature, the current study will utilize Putnam's (1995) definition for the examination of this sport specific context. He defined social capital as, "the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 66). Notably, social capital can serve as a catalyst for not only social trust but also accumulated skills and knowledge as well as social norms of reciprocity (Putnam, 2000; Theeboom, Schaillee, & Nols, 2012).

Considering social capital manifests itself in a wide variety of forms in a community, it is important to describe the characteristics of these social networks, which, in turn, lead to "the emergence of social trust" (Putnam, 2000, p. 67). Community is viewed as a bundle of social relationships (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005), which are constantly changing based on the societal context. Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan (2006) believed these relationships among community members are valuable and even necessary resources for communities because they constitute a community's social capital. Moreover, it is important to recognize the main idea behind social capital is that well-connected individuals are more likely to achieve desired outcomes through mobilization of other resources (Agnitsch et al., 2006). This disparity explains

the nature of relationships as well as highlights the underlying motives within a specific community.

Common experiences ignite the aforementioned social relationships present in a community and consequently result in an attachment or bond among the members of a particular community (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005). Community development also stimulates opportunities for memberships, which, in turn, lead to satisfaction of mutual needs, shared emotional ties and support (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986). It is important to note that a sense of emotional belonging derives from social relationships formed in a community or a social group (Delanty, 2003; Tajfel, 1981).

Prior research highlights two types of communities including a simple community and a complex community. In particular, simple communities are typically smaller in size and their members share a single dimension of everyday lives (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005). By contrast, complex communities are referred to as communities that "contain many more groups or divisions, and typically include numerous activities in the life worlds of their members-work, family, and friendships" (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005, p. 478).

Coleman (1988) believed continuous relationships and the closure of social networks stimulate trust development. In contrast, Putnam (2000) believed, trust derives from the "dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital" (p. 19). Research pertaining to trust, distinguishes between 'thin' and 'thick' trust in social networks (Newton, 1997; Williams, 1988). To be specific, 'thin' trust relies on indirect secondary relations, while 'thick' trust exists within close-knit organizations and derives from daily contact among individuals (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005).

The nuances of trust are critical for understanding the two types of social capital: bonding and bridging (Putnam, 2000). Wuthnow (2002) identified bonding as the interpersonal solidarity present among individuals within small groups or local communities. In one of the more recent studies, bonding was defined as, "interactions between relatively homogenous social networks" (Welty Peachey, Borland, Lobpries, & Cohen, 2015, p. 89). Clopton and Finch (2011) asserted that bonding is a form of social capital that members of a community utilize to "get by" in difficult times. It also emerges as a form of social capital to support members of the community through their reliance on relationships built on thick trust (Williams, 1988).

By contrast, bridging social capital encompasses connections among disconnected groups and communities (Kavanaugh et al., 2005). In this case, relationships are developed based on thin trust, which according to Newton (1997) is less personal. One of the evident benefits of bridging is its ability to "facilitate the exchange of information between distinct groups and help to expedite the flow of ideas among groups" (Kavanaugh et al., 2005, p. 120).

Social Anchors

Drawing from the work conducted on social capital, Clopton and Finch (2011) re-conceptualized social anchors to include the bonding and bridging form of social capital development. Specifically, these researchers referred to social anchors as "any institution-which can take the form of social, economic, physical, political, legal, etc.-that acts as a support for the development and maintenance of social capital and social networks" (Clopton & Finch, 2011, p. 70). Colclough and Sitaraman (2005) reasoned that it is the common experiences that occur

within a place that create the basis for a community. More to the point, Stacey (1960) accentuated the following:

> For those who are still part of the traditional small-town society, who own, manage, or work in its traditional shops and smaller factories, who provide the traditional service, who belong to the close-knit and long-standing groups in clubs and pubs and who accept the traditional standard, there is certainly some sense of community, some feeling of belonging. This is expressed through loyalty to the town and its established institutions (p. 177).

Goodsell (1997) suggested that social anchors include schools, sports, and corporations. Interestingly, Clopton and Finch (2011) insisted that in order to qualify as social anchors the institutions must establish an environment in which development of social capital in the form of bonding and bridging can occur and members are encouraged to personally identify across demographic boundaries. Clopton and Finch (2011) explain how various social anchors (e.g., social institutions) provide stability and a foundation for the development of the entire community network. With regard to expectations of social institutions, the researchers note that they "must enhance or construct a sense of community, trust, or reciprocation within social networks" (Clopton & Finch, 2011, p. 72). These social anchors play a role in establishing collective identity, which is "rooted originally in Social Identity Theory, where individuals construct social identities (beyond that of a personal identity) to which they actively associate and maintain" (Katz & Clopton, 2014, p. 290).

In social identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can classify itself according to other social categories (Stets & Burke, 2000). Two processes including social comparison and categorization initiate the development of a category perceived as "in-group" by an individual (Burke & Stets, 2009). In this context, a social group is referred to as "a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Further, a group represents a collection of individuals who perceive themselves as members of a particular social category, share similar emotional involvement, and tend to evaluate their group according to other members' views (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These groups can be formed along social institutions such as universities and neighborhood associations (Clopton & Finch, 2011). These "ingroups" present at institutions demonstrate common social behaviors and identifications that can lead to increased social capital, which can provide benefits for the individuals through bridging and bonding. These benefits of social capital are especially noticeable within college campus communities, where students constantly adjust, adapt, and integrate, and therefore they (i.e., college campuses) are dependent upon a strong sense of community (Astin, 1993; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999).

Nevertheless, studies exist regarding the impact of college athletics on sense of community. Clopton's (2008) investigation was one of the first to inform that team identity of students enhanced the overall sense of community. Heere and James (2007) argued this could perhaps be attributed to not only sports teams' ability to serve as a source for group's identity, but also their representation of other aspects of community life. The authors posited that, "team identity is a type of group identity that is influenced by the relationship an individual has with other external groups that the team is perceived to represent" (Heere & James, 2007, p. 321). While both these studies discuss the connection between identity and sense of community, neither of them considered the relationship identity had with social anchoring. Thus, "it is

important for social anchors to exist as a medium for which individuals can identify, embrace, and exist as an overall community identity" (Clopton & Finch, 2011, p. 73).

Another study analyzed how college athletics impacted the students' social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010). The scholars found that, "the extent to which the college student respondents identified with their university's athletics teams played a significant role in their reported levels of social capital" (Clopton & Finch, 2010, p. 392). However, the Division III institution athletics teams' inability to contribute to the overall community identity and serve as a reliable social anchor is rather interesting (Katz & Clopton, 2014). It highlights the fact social anchors do not exist within a dichotomy, but rather on a continuum where social capital, and collective identity are balanced (Clopton & Finch, 2010). These results illustrate the need for further examination of athletics departments as social anchors. Taking these findings into consideration, the authors believe it is exceedingly important to understand not only the structure of a community but also various group dynamics within that community that may impact the existence of social anchors.

Social Anchors and Perceived Relationship Quality

Although social anchors have been previously linked to identification, perceived relationship quality may be a better fit for examining the impact of social anchors due to the close theoretical linkage. This basis is made because of the four central relational constructs of perceived relationship quality: trust, commitment, self-connection, and reciprocity (Kim, Ko, & James, 2011). Similar to the association between social capital and trust (Newton, 1997; Williams, 1988), the relational construct of trust encompasses the overall perceived reliability of the entity (Kim et al., 2011). The personal perceptions of commitment encapsulate the amount of devotion or dedication an individual reports having to a given entity. The scholars also portray the ability of the individual to relate to the entity of interest is measured using self-connection. Finally, reciprocity is utilized to discover the personal perception of the aptitude of the entity of interest to give back to the individual that is invested in the entities (Kim, et al., 2011).

Specifically, the constructs of trust and reciprocity are central tenants of social capital further supporting the decision to analyze the presence and impact of social anchors through the utilization of perceived relationship quality. According to Clopton & Finch (2011), "for an institution to be a social anchor, it must enhance or construct a sense of community, trust, or reciprocation within social networks (p. 72). Notably, social capital can serve as a catalyst for social trust through accumulated skills and knowledge as well as social norms of reciprocity (Putnam, 2000; Theeboom, Schaillee, & Nols, 2012). Given the association between trust and bonding social capital (Newton, 1997; Williams, 1988), it is logical to conclude that positive perceptions of relationship quality may impact the generation of social capital.

Further, from an organizational perspective, understanding the interests of stakeholders and assuring their well-being are instrumental in the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984). These institutions must articulate their shared sense of value in order to create strong reciprocal relationships with their stakeholders. Specifically, Freeman, Wicks, and Parmar (2004), stated, "Managers must develop relationships, inspire their stakeholders, and create communities where everyone strives to give their best to deliver the value the firm promises" (p. 364). Interests of all shareholders should be parallel to the organizations where all parties win over time (Venkataraman, 2002). Through this creation of value, trust and reciprocity can develop among stakeholders which can impact positive relationship quality.

In addition, hallmarks of positive relationship quality include the level of devotion between actor and entity, the degree of relation between the entity and actor, and the perceived level of investment the entity puts towards the actor. Besides the pivotal role of trust in generating social capital, Wuthnow (2002) identified bonding as the interpersonal solidarity present among individuals within small groups or local communities. Therefore, it can be construed that solidarity is fostered by the degree of relation, level of devotion, and how much effort is being invested by the individuals involved, all key components of relationship quality. Based on the conceptual parallels between relationship quality and social capital detailed above, the current researchers attempted to further contribute to this study by examining the impact of relationship quality in lieu of identification on social capital and community identity. Past research has identified perceived relationship quality as a greater predictor in measuring the strength of a relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006), and "may be used to encapsulate the unique psychological bonds formed between a sport consumer and a team" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 566).

Hypotheses Development

As the purpose of this study was to examine the impact that an individual's perceived relationship quality with two potential social anchors, university and university athletics, may have on their social capital, the following hypotheses were developed (see Figure 1 for conceptual model). In a similar fashion to Katz and Clopton (2014), the authors have broken social capital into two components, bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and also included community identity as an external outcome which social anchors should be measured through (Katz & Clopton, 2014). More specifically, in order for an entity to be considered a social anchor, it must generate bonding and bridging social capital as well as community identity (Katz & Clopton, 2014). In order to assess if the university and university athletics acted as social anchors, the relationship between perceived relationship quality and social capital (bonding and bridging) and community identification was assessed. This relationship was assessed among three groups: university students, community members with no direct connection to the university or athletics, and a combination of university students and community members. Thus, the hypotheses have been generated according to each social anchor (university or university athletics) as well as by each group.

Figure 1.

The Conceptual Model
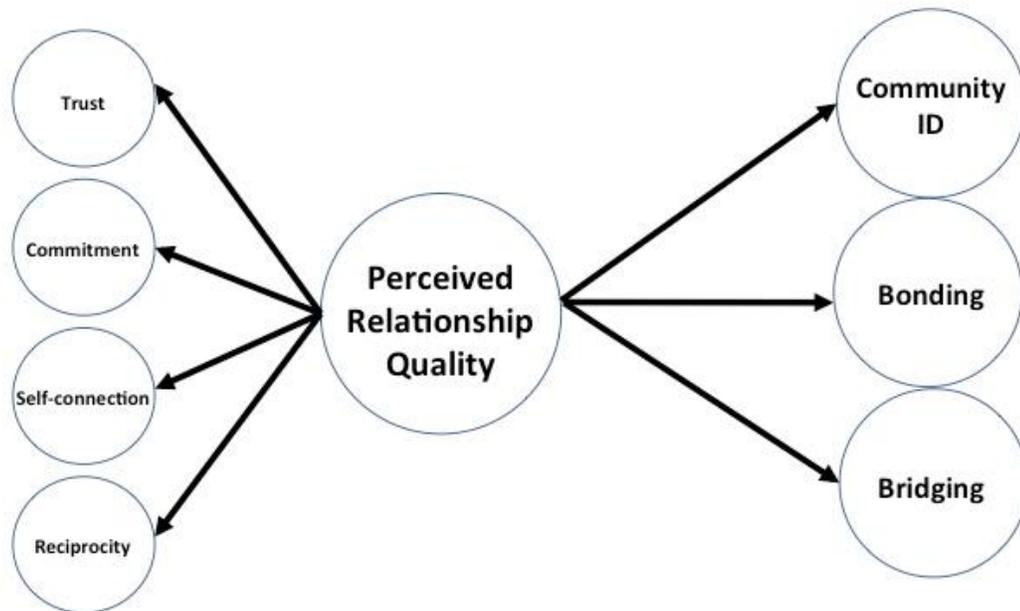
The University as a Social Anchor

     Using the university as a social anchor, the researchers examined how an individual's perceived relationship with the university would impact their social capital as well as community identity. Putnam (1995) described social capital as the networks and communities which individuals become a part of because they add to their life. A social anchor is the specific institution or aspect of the community that holds the group together and helps promote social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2011). Based upon the definitions of social capital and social anchors, an individual's current university or the university that represents their city could be considered an effective social anchor. Clopton (2011) found university identification had a strong and positive correlation with bridging social capital. Past studies show that the university can act as a strong social anchor for students, but not for community members (Clopton, 2011; Katz & Clopton, 2014). However, past studies have primarily examined regional, Division III institutions in mid-sized communities whereas major state flagship institutions with Division I athletics have not been examined previously.

     Kim et al. (2011) conceptualized perceived relationship quality as the collective of four central relational constructs: trust, commitment, self-connection, and reciprocity. Given the association between trust and bonding social capital (Newton, 1997; Williams, 1988), it is logical to conclude that positive perceptions of relationship quality may impact the generation of social capital. Further, one specific type of relationship, social bonds, creates a logical connection between social capital and perceived relationship quality (Roberts et al., 2003). In addition, hallmarks of positive relationship quality include the level of devotion between actor and entity, the degree of relation between the entity and actor, and the perceived level of investment the

entity puts towards the actor. Besides the pivotal role of trust in generating social capital, Wuthnow (2002) identified bonding as the interpersonal solidarity present among individuals within small groups or local communities. Therefore, it can be construed that solidarity is fostered by the degree of relation, level of devotion, and how much effort is being invested by the individuals involved, all key components of relationship quality. As a result, we would expect to see a relationship between an individual's assessment of relationship quality and the generation of social capital. Essentially, a significant and positive relationship between relationship quality, social capital, and community identification will confirm that the university acts as a social anchor. Therefore:

> H1a: Perceived relationship quality with the university significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among all respondents.

> H1b: Perceived relationship quality with the university significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among university students.

> H1c: Perceived relationship quality with the university significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among community members.

Athletics as a Social Anchor

Based upon the definitions already stated, university athletics should be considered a potential social anchor (Clopton & Finch, 2011). The notion that feeling like a member of a team can generate social capital has been tested and student athletes have been found to have overall moderately high social capital (Clopton, 2012) and team identification was hypothesized and originally found to enhance social capital (Clopton, 2008; Heere & James, 2007). Despite the obvious fit that identifying with a team may have with increased social capital, more recent research has found conflicting results.

In opposition to his earlier study, Clopton (2011) found team identification not only failed to positively impact social capital but also detracted from social capital while controlling for university identification. Additionally, another study found both students and community members' team identification did not significantly impact individual's bridging or bonding social capital but did positively impact student's community identity (Katz & Clopton, 2014). Being as this study was conducted at a flagship state university with prominent Power 5-level athletics, athletics may be more impactful as "athletics programs are often central to the branding process of universities, as spectator sports in college build communities of fans out of alumni, students, community residents, and others" (Katz & Clopton, 2014, p. 287) and can help create a greater sense of community among these groups as well (Clopton, 2008). Based on the conceptual parallels between relationship quality and social capital detailed above, it would stand to reason that perceived relationship quality could have a positive and significant relationship with social capital and community identification. Furthermore, the setting of a state, flagship institution with Division I athletics and a historically successful men's basketball program versus a Division III institution may aid in fostering those relationships. Therefore:

H2a: Perceived relationship quality with the university's athletics significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among all respondents.

H2b: Perceived relationship quality with the university's athletics significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among university students.

H2c: Perceived relationship quality with the university's athletics significantly and positively impacts an individual's social capital and community identification among community members.

Methods

Research Setting and Data Collection

Data was collected at a large, public Midwestern United States university as well as the community in which it is located. Both internal and external university stakeholder groups were included as participants in this study. A convenience sampling of undergraduate sport management students (N = 423) was utilized as internal university stakeholder participants. The external university stakeholders consisted of community members with no direct professional relationship with the university, including faculty and staff (N = 202). The researchers were able to recruit community members through direct email contact and assistance of neighborhood association leaders. Contact information was posted on the city website and consisted of 47 neighborhood associations with the names, emails, and phone numbers of 50 individual leaders listed. Once the neighborhood association leaders were contacted, lists of community resident emails or monthly meeting times were received from several neighborhood associations. Based on the provided information for each association, surveys were conducted online via email link to Qualtrics software survey sent by the neighborhood association's presidents to their respective community members.

In all, the total number of participants included 625 individuals, with 423 representing the undergraduate sport management students as internal university stakeholders and 202 representing the community members as external university stakeholders. Study participants completed a 57-item online survey created using Qualtrics software or an in-person paper survey. Participants were asked to respond to four key components within the survey, including perceived relationship quality with the university and with university athletics (12-items each), community identification (6-items), social capital bonding (10-items) and bridging (10-items), and demographic information (7-items).

Measures

Perceived relationship quality. Perceived relationship quality was measured using Kim's (2009) Sport Consumer-Team Relationship Quality scale. This scale consisted of four different constructs that make up perceived relationship quality, including measures for trust (4-items), commitment (4-items), self-connection (4-items), and reciprocity (4-items). Each

measure consisted of multiple items and was completed using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Such items included "I can count on (university/university athletics)," "I am committed to (university/university athletics)," "(University/university athletics) reminds me of who I am," and "(University/university athletics) pays attention to what I get relative to what I give them." This scale was adapted in the context of this study to include items for both the university itself and university athletics, resulting in 24 total items.

Social capital. The social capital scale was adapted from Williams's (2006) Internet Social Capital Scale (ISCS), which is comprised of two subscales, including Bonding Social Capital and Bridging Social Capital. Specifically, Williams (2006) created two versions of his ISCS, one scale that should be utilized in the "online" context and the other to be utilized in the "offline" context. For the current study, the authors utilized the "offline" version which omitted any wording specific to "internet or online" activities. Further, Williams created one scale for offline use that "accounts for bridging and bonding in the offline context" (p. 605). Each subscale presented ten different items for interpretation using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Any mention of online/offline Internet terms was removed in order to apply to the context of this study. The bonding social capital subscale included items such as "When I feel lonely, there are several people I can talk to" and "There is someone I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions" (Williams, 2006), while the bridging social capital subscale included items such as "Interacting with people makes me want to try new things" and "Interacting with people makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking" (Williams, 2006).

Community identification. In order to obtain community identification, Mael and Ashforth's (1992) model of organizational identification was adapted for this study. Community identification, in this case, was described as the extent of an individual's identification as a member of the community in which the university is located. The six-item organizational identification model was reworded to specifically apply to the context of this study by using the name of the community. Participants were asked to respond to questions such as "When I talk about (my community) I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'," "I am very interested in what others think about (my community)," and "(My community's) successes are my successes" on a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Demographics. Demographic information was collected via a seven-item survey. These items included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years lived in town, student status (students only), resident status (community members only), and professional connection with the university (community members only). The questions regarding resident status and professional connection with the university allowed researchers to determine that the participants can be included based on the aforementioned criteria requirements regarding their connection with the community and university. The student population demographic included 220 male participants and 203 female participants with an average age of 20.2. 321 participants identified as White, 36 as Black, 24 as Hispanic, 17 as Asian, and four as Native American. There were 21 missing data points for ethnicity in the student participants. The community population included 33 male participants and 167 female participants with an average age of 38.5. One hundred and seventy community

members identified as White, five as Black, 16 as Hispanic, five as Asian, 11 as Native American and three as other.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using MPlus Version 7.31. In order to evaluate the relationships proposed in this study, this study incorporated the recommendations from Kline (2005) in regards to how to evaluate a model that has measurement and structural components. Evaluation of the model involves two steps where the basic principles of analyzing a confirmatory factor analysis and structural model apply. The first step of this approach was to examine the measurement model by means of a confirmatory factor analysis in order to further the validation process. To achieve this, the measurement model with all measures underlying their respective factors was modeled and the fit was evaluated. After scale psychometrics were assessed for the community and student contexts, the structural model was constructed in order to assess the proposed relationships.

Results

Assessment of Measures

Scale psychometrics for this study are reported in Table 1 and the measurement assessment was conducted on the sample including community members and university students. From a content (face) validity standpoint, it is important to note that this study utilized the "offline" version of the ISCS. Therefore, each item was not constructed with internet or online activities in mind. Rather, they were worded generally with the intent of being applied to the bevy of human interaction that occurs off the internet. In regards to psychometric testing, all factors had composite reliability scores (0.90 – 0.97) that were higher than the suggested cutoff point of .70, which provides evidence that the constructs are internally consistent (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The community identification items as well as all of the relationship quality items (athletics and university items) had factor loadings greater than 0.63 (Comrey & Lee, 1992) and loaded on their respective factors appropriately. The bonding dimension of social capital underwent some item modifications due some of the items having factor loadings below 0.63 as well as lacking discrimination from other items underlying the same dimension. The bonding dimension ended up with a total of eight items. The bridging dimension retained all 10 of the original items.

Table 1

Scale Psychometrics for all respondents

Construct	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Relationship Quality (athletics)		.95	.67
Trust			
1. (Athletics) has integrity.	.71		
2. I can count on (athletics).	.84		
3. (Athletics) is reliable.	.80		
Commitment			
1. I am devoted to (athletics).	.91		
2. I am committed to (athletics).	.94		
3. I am dedicated to (athletics).	.90		
Self-connection			
1. (Athletics) image and my self-image are similar.	.80		
2. (Athletics) reminds me of who I am.	.84		
3. (Athletics) and I have a lot in common.	.80		
Reciprocity			
1. (Athletics) pays attention to what I get relative to what I give them.	.61		
2. (Athletics) would notice if I did something that benefited the team.	.80		
3. (Athletics) constantly returns the favor when I do something good for it.	.90	.90	.59
Community identification			
1. When I talk about (my city), I usually say "we" rather than "they".	.76		
2. When someone praises (my city), it feels like a personal compliment.	.89		
3. When someone criticizes (my city), it feels like a personal insult.	.77		
4. I am very interested in what others think about (my city).	.76		
5. If a story in the media criticized (my city), I would feel embarrassed.	.66		
6. (My city's) successes are my successes.	.76		
Bonding		.94	.66
1. When I feel lonely, there are several people I can talk to.	.88		
2. There are several people I trust to help solve my problems.	.83		
3. If I needed an emergency loan of $500, I know someone I can turn to.	.65		
4. The people I interact with would share their last dollar with me.	.66		
5. There is someone I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.	.93		

6.	The people I interact with would help me fight an injustice.	.88		
7.	The people I interact with would put their reputation on the line for me.	.76		
8.	The people I interact with would be good job references for me.	.88		
Bridging			.97	.80
1.	Interacting with people makes me interested in things that happen outside of my town.	.89		
2.	I come in contact with new people all the time.	.82		
3.	Interacting with people makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking.	.86		
4.	Interacting with people makes me want to try new things.	.91		
5.	Interacting with people makes me feel like park of a larger community.	.93		
6.	Interacting with people makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.	.92		
7.	Interacting with people gives me new people to talk to.	.92		
8.	I am willing to spend time to support general community activities.	.87		
9.	Talking with people makes me curious about other places in the world.	.91		
10.	Interacting with people reminds me that everyone in the world is connected	.88		

Fit Indices	
χ^2	2062.77
df	573
χ^2/df	3.59
CFI	.94
TLI	.93
RMSEA	.062
SRMR	.055

Convergent validity was assessed by computing the AVE scores for the proposed constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE scores ranged from .59 to .80, which illustrated the presence of convergent validity among all the constructs included in this study. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the average variance extracted of each construct with the squared multiple correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results indicated all of the respective AVE scores were greater than the squared correlations between constructs (see Table 2 for results).

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Matrix, and AVE

Construct	Mean	SD	Correlation matrix (Φ): All respondents				
			1	2	3	4	5
1 University RQ	4.50	1.05	*.67*	.92	.81	.60	.60
2 Athletics RQ	4.43	1.16	.90	*.67*	.79	.58	.58
3 Community ID	4.26	1.40	.81	.79	*.59*	.71	.77
4 Bonding	4.37	1.15	.60	.58	.71	*.66*	.92
5 Bridging	4.50	1.68	.60	.58	.77	.92	*.80*

Note. (U) = university; (A) = athletics; SD = standard deviation; CR = construct reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; Mean scores and SDs for the four constructs are calculated using IBM SPSS statistics 24.0; The AVE value for each construct is shown in boldface italic.

Common method variance (CMV). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) posit that survey data where independent and dependent variables are collected at a single time from the same source may have their correlations corrupted by CMV. We addressed this potential issue from a procedural perspective by utilizing a different measurement scale for the four dimensions of perceived relationship quality then with our outcome variables (community identification, bonding, bridging). Further, in an attempt to control for a potential item-order bias effect, we put our outcome variable items before our items for perceived relationship quality as recommended by Schimmack & Oishi (2005).

Hypothesis Testing

All respondents. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the proposed constructs. The chi-square statistic was significant due to the large sample size and the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio was 4.3 ($x_2 = 2523$; df = 584). The CFI and TLI values were .92 and .91 respectively. The RMSEA value for the services model was 0.07 while the SRMR was 0.09. Collectively, these results indicate that the hypothesized model represents a good statistical fit to the data. Viewing the university as a social anchor, the path between relationship quality and community identification was statistically significant ($\beta = .81$; p< .01), indicating that relationship quality had a positive impact on community identification as expected. Relationship quality was found to have a positive effect on both bonding ($\beta = .60$; p< .01) and bridging ($\beta = .61$; p<.01).

In regards to athletics as a social anchor, relationship quality exhibited a positive and significant relationship with community identification ($\beta = .57$; p< .01), bonding ($\beta = .33$; p< .01), and bridging ($\beta = .30$; p< .01). Taken cumulatively, this indicates that athletics acted as a social anchor when viewed through the lens of the community and university samples combined (see Table 3 for results).

Table 3.

Hypothesis Testing

Path	Hypothesis	Community/ student contexts Path coefficient	Community context Path coefficients	Student context Path coefficients
University Relationship Quality ➔ Social Capital	H1A H1B H1C	RQ⟶CID: .81* RQ⟶ Bonding: .60* RQ⟶ Bridging: .61*	RQ⟶CID: .64* RQ⟶Bonding: .15* RQ⟶Bridging: .28*	RQ⟶CID: .78* RQ⟶ Bonding: .52* RQ⟶ Bridging: .55*
Athletics Relationship Quality ➔ Social Capital	H2A H2B H2C	RQ⟶CID: .57* RQ⟶ Bonding: .33* RQ⟶ Bridging: .30*	RQ⟶CID: .55* RQ⟶Bonding: .12 RQ⟶Bridging: .21*	RQ⟶CID: .61* RQ⟶ Bonding: .31* RQ⟶ Bridging: .29*

Community context. The global fit indices indicate that the hypothesized structural model exhibits a good fit to the data (x_2/df = 1.6; CFI = .94; TLI = .93; RMSEA = 0.05; SRMR = 0.06). Collectively, these results indicate that the hypothesized model represents a good statistical fit to the data. The hypothesized relationships among the proposed constructs were examined as well. Viewing the university as a social anchor, the path between relationship quality and community identification was statistically significant (β = .64; p< .01), indicating that relationship quality had a positive impact on community identification as expected. Relationship quality was found to have a positive effect on both bonding (β = .15; p< .01) and bridging (β = .28; p<.01). These findings collectively supported H_1c in that the university acts as a social anchor for the community.

Viewing athletics as a social anchor, the path between relationship quality and community identification was statistically significant (β = .55; p< .01), indicating that relationship quality had a positive impact on community identification as expected. Relationship quality was found to have a positive effect on bridging (β = .21; p< .01), but not on bonding (β = .12; p<.01). Therefore, these results collectively do not support H_2c whereas university athletics does not act as a social anchor in the community.

University context. The ratio of the square value to the degrees of freedom was 2.78 (x_2 = 948; df = 340) The CFI and TLI values were 0.91 and 0.89 respectively. Both of these values were at or above the .90 threshold for an acceptable model fit. The RMSEA value of 0.05 was within the range of an acceptable fit of the data to the model. Finally, the SRMR value of 0.05

was well below the recommended cutoff value of .08. These results indicate that the hypothesized model represents a good statistical fit to the data.

The hypothesized relationships among the proposed constructs were examined as well. Viewing the university as a social anchor, the path between relationship quality and community identification was statistically significant ($\beta = .78$; p< .01), indicating that relationship quality had a positive impact on community identification as expected. Relationship quality was found to have a positive effect on both bonding ($\beta = .52$; p< .01) and bridging ($\beta = .55$; p<.01). These findings collectively supported H_1b where the university acts as a social anchor for the university.

Viewing athletics as a social anchor, the path between relationship quality and community identification was statistically significant ($\beta = .61$; p< .01), indicating that relationship quality had a positive impact on community identification as expected. Relationship quality was found to have a positive effect on both bridging ($\beta = .29$; p< .01) and bonding ($\beta = .31$; p<.01). These findings collectively supported H_2b that states university athletics acts as a social anchor for the university.

Discussion

In the present study, the authors investigated how the perceived relationship quality of two social anchors (i.e., university and university athletics) influence the two branches of social capital (i.e., bonding and bridging) as well as community identification for university students and members of community. Overall, the evidence suggests that the general university, as well as its athletics program, is beneficial for university students and the community alike. Although colleges and universities have been known to act as social institutions where successful sports teams provide a common connection for community members (Clopton & Finch, 2011), few attempts have been made to examine the connection between perceived relationship quality and the components of social capital and community identification. Therefore, the current study made a contribution to the literature and practice in terms of community members and their perceived relationship quality with universities and their respective athletics departments.

First, the relationship between perceived relationship quality of the university and elements of social capital and community identification among members of community was the most salient finding. The present findings indicated perceived relationship quality had a significant and positive impact on bridging, bonding, and community identification. These findings provided support for the notion that universities can be utilized as social anchors that provide individuals with a constant platform for social interaction (Bridger & Alter, 2006). This social interaction is based on the concept of trust which develops over time through multiple, continuous relationships (Coleman, 1988). Trust is also shown in this context because of the common experiences members share that helped forge strong bonds (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005).

In addition, our results suggested the specified university acted as a true social anchor because of its ability to "enhance bonding social capital, maximize bridging social capital, and is an ever-present marker with which the community identifies" (Clopton & Finch, 2011, p. 79). These findings support previous community research where individuals experience a sense of belonging and sense of support. They also align with previous literature linking sense of community on college campuses to positive student outcomes (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Also, because college/university campuses are known as an identifying marker of a town (Clopton &

Finch, 2011), they meet the criteria of a social anchor by providing a "constant platform for social interaction, [which is] another "consistent" feature of community and community development" (Bridger & Alter, 2006 p. 13).

In terms of the perceived relationship quality with university athletics, the present findings found significant connections between bridging and community identification in the community context. Although the perceived relationship quality of community members did not significantly impact bonding, these results are noteworthy on multiple levels. Our findings support those of Kraszewski (2008), who found athletics teams have the potential to consistently act as a social anchor within a community. Because of the excitement that surrounds Division I athletics and their specific programs, community members have the ability to create informal interactions and engage with a variety of individuals (Katz & Heere, 2013).

Additionally, the impact of relationship quality on bridging and community identification compliments previous literature that discusses how athletics are able to provide a readily available point of identification for a community (Heere & James, 2007; Katz & Heere, 2016; Warner et al., 2011). This collective identity felt by community members is vital to an individual's sense of self as people seek to create social categories as a way to make sense of the world (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These social categories can be created on game days where athletics support "communities that engage in the co-creation and collaborative consumption of the sporting event experience" (Hedlund, 2014, p. 64). In the current study, these new social networks and communities were expressed in the form of bridging and are based on a shared common experience.

The results of the present analysis demonstrated that the university relationship quality had a significant impact on the aspects of community identification and social capital components (i.e., bridging and bonding) among university students. With respect to a state flagship university's ability to impact bonding and bridging social capital, it was clear that the university has enhanced the sense of community, solidifying its status as a reliable social anchor. Additionally, this finding contributes to the notion that the benefits of social capital are becoming more ubiquitous within university campuses across the country. With regard to bonding social capital, which Welty Peachey et al., (2015) described as a series of meaningful interactions between homogenous social groups, the results of the current study further accentuate the university campus's exclusive ability to promote the environment where students can develop a meaningful sense of community and belonging through constant adaptation and interaction processes (Astin, 1993; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999).

Another key contribution was the divisional similarities and differences established between the current Division I athletics setting and the original Division III context utilized by Clopton and Katz (2014). Not only were the current researchers examining a different setting, they were providing further evidence to support the notion that academic institutions and athletics departments can serve as a social anchor. The subsequent findings were central to understanding a concept (universities as social anchors) that had only been tested once.

The findings of the present investigation are instrumental in deciphering the perceived relationship dynamics in the context of high profile athletics. The current study outlines the critical importance of the perceived relationship quality with the elite Division I athletics and how it in turn affects social capital's networks of relationships and collective identity among the student body. The results confirmed Division I athletics ability to serve as a focal point of identification for university students (Katz & Heere, 2016; Warner & Dixon, 2011; Warner et al., 2011). Considering the importance of both bonding and bridging social capital in development of

sustained university community, the role of athletics at a Division I state flagship university plays is particularly noteworthy. Evidently, reputable athletics can act as a catalyst for more meaningful member interactions within a university community, revealing the athletics' distinct ability to bring individuals together. Toma (2003) alluded to this phenomenon known as bridging social capital through the following quote:

> Only at a football game might you hear the entire university community…—all speak with one voice at one time shouting "Go Blue" at Michigan, or "Geaux Tigers "at LSU, or "We are Penn State." What ties together these diverse constituents… into a community is the expression of the collegiate norms, values, and beliefs they share and that bring distinction to their institution" (p. 76).

The finding noted above aligns with contentions highlighted in the previous research with regard to the upper echelon of athletics. Specifically, Katz and Clopton (2014) described 'big-time' Division I athletics as establishments where "the constant television attention, media reporting, massive stadiums/practice facilities, and raised status level of athletes makes existence of athletics impossible to ignore" (p. 299). Additionally, these college towns have been known to exist when a university's presence "exerts a dominant influence over the character of the community" (Gumprecht, 2003, p. 51). Consistent with previous scholars' supposition regarding well-known NCAA Division I athletics and their ability to impact the campus and community climate (Toma, 2003; Heere & Katz, 2014), the present investigation suggests that elite athletics institutions serve as a solid foundation for the facets of social capital.

While five of the six outcomes were significant in the current examination, they varied from the previous research conducted in the Division III setting (Katz & Clopton, 2014). These differences could be accounted for by the setting of both research studies. Although Katz and Clopton (2014) initially posited Division III institutions would have a positive relationship with their surrounding communities, their findings were not significant in the context of community members. Because the current setting shows community members reap social capital benefits from their relationship with the university and athletics alike, it suggests that division may matter. For example, larger universities have increased visibility and notoriety compared to lower level academic institutions (Katz, Dixon, Heere & Bass, 2017). Because of the larger presence these Division I universities and athletics departments have, they may surface as a social anchor because it is viewed as an institution with which community members can readily-identify (Clopton & Finch, 2011).

This study has a practical application as it provides convincing evidence that the university and its athletics uniquely benefit the students and community members. It is also exceedingly important to remember that the absence of social anchors in a community could significantly hinder the process of community development, potential of community identity, and social network development (Alonso & O'Shea, 2012). Unlike other studies that focus on deepening the understanding of various social capital aspects, not only did the current study examine the perceived relationship quality, but it also concentrated on distinguishing between the two categories of participants (i.e., students and community members).

The evidence suggests that university administrators along with athletics personnel should focus their efforts on promoting the connection among these two entities, the student body, and the community it resides in. Specifically, university administrators can utilize the findings presented in this study to more effectively develop the community growth strategies. In

a similar manner, by utilizing the data from this analysis, practitioners could avoid missing various opportunities to enhance the aspects of social capital (i.e., bonding and bridging) and community identification nuances among university students.

The authors believe the results of this study lead to several important implications for the athletics personnel. By concentrating on relationship quality enhancement strategies, athletics marketing staff could position their brand in a more appealing way. By utilizing this advantage, athletics marketing staff could concentrate their efforts on positioning their brand in a more appealing way. By using the evidence provided in this investigation, the athletics representatives could raise brand awareness and consequently increase ties for the university athletics through a more effective communication of unique values and heritage that are characteristic of the university name.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the significant findings, several limitations were present with this study. First, it is unclear whether these results could be replicated in other collegiate settings. The participants were surveyed in a context where the university was considered a Division I flagship institution with historical basketball success. The community in which the university is held is also nationally known as a basketball town. That being said, it should be acknowledged that the results might not be entirely generalizable. These unique factors associated with the current study's university, athletics, and the community might enhance the perceived relationship quality students and community members' experience. It would be intriguing to replicate this study in a different Division I collegiate context. In particular, future research could aim to discover if any similarities or differences exist between Division I universities regarding these proposed relationships. Because Division I institutions deviate in a variety of categories including athletics success and academic prestige, any findings discovered could provide further insight into how a university and its athletics impact social capital and community identification for the local members of the community.

Second, there were some limitations based upon the sampling decisions that were made. While our community sample did not have a connection to the university or the athletics program under examination, the same can not be said for the university student sample. Our university student sample was comprised of sport management majors which have a predisposition to liking and being interested in sport. Picking students who do not have a direct connection to sport would add further external validity to the study. Further, it would have been ideal to have a greater numerical balance between the student and non-student samples.

Further, the current study was the first to use the psychological lens of perceived relationship quality to discover the connections between social anchors and bonding, bridging, and community identification. While the current authors argued this framework was an appropriate way to assess an individual's relationship with a potential social, previous authors used different measures including team identification and university identification (Clopton, 2011; Katz & Clopton, 2014). Because the outcomes were discovered using different frameworks (perceived relationship quality vs. team/university identification), future research should continue to utilize different contexts (both university and athletics) in an effort to determine under what conditions a university and athletics acts as a social anchor for both the university population and the greater community alike.

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