

# Becoming Sport Fans: Relative Deprivation and Social Identity

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## Abstract

This study explores how people become sport fans by elucidating why people support teams even when they are unsuccessful. This study fills a gap in the literature on sport fan behavior by applying Relative Deprivation and Social Identification Theories to understand sport fans' seemingly irrational behavior. We conducted a series of interviews with 17 sport fans with diverse backgrounds. Findings suggest that interaction among Community Identification, Relative Deprivation, Team Identification, Sport Involvement and Representativeness of a sport team helps explain why people support certain teams and become fans, regardless of team success. Findings suggest that team Representativeness in a specific community is one of the most important factors influencing people to become fans. We also found that sport involvement is very important, especially if relative deprivation can elicit team identification from people with little to no sport involvement. Further research may identify the exact relationship between sport involvement and relative deprivation.

**Keywords:** fan behavior, team identification, social identification, relative deprivation, representativeness

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between sport fans and their teams can include love and affection as well as monetary commitment. Fans' emotional and monetary commitments are easy to understand when teams do well in the standings. However, this attachment seems illogical when teams struggle; yet, most fans continue with their support. Studies show that fans with strong psychological attachment to a team maintain their support, regardless of the team's winning percentage (Funk & James, 2006; Harada & Matsuoka, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Madrigal & Chen, 2008). The fan-team relationship, then, is built upon a strong psychological connection.

Due to the important of this psychological connection with a team, studies have explored the issue through diverse lenses, such as the outcomes of team identification (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Laverie & Arnett, 2000), cognitive, emotional factors or behavioral factors (Madrigal, 1995; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, 1993), and scale development for psychological connection (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000). In this line of inquiry, team identification is a common construct in understanding sport fan behavior (Funk & James, 2001; Heere & James, 2007; Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2006; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann, Waddill, & Polk, 2011).

Team identification influences nearly every aspect of sport fan-ship, from cognition and affect to conation and behavior (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2006; Madrigal, 1995; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Melnick & Wann, 2004; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). A sport fan who has developed a strong identification with a sport team tends to 1) watch more games than general consumers, 2) intend to pay more for tickets, 3) purchase and spend more for team collectables, 4) be easily satisfied with the team, and 5) support the team regardless of its winning percentage (Madrigal, 1995; Rhee & Kang, 2002; Wakfield, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Therefore, team identification is a key factor in fan relation management. Although the outcomes of team identification have been studied extensively, little is known about the antecedents of sport team identification (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002).

Research on team identification has used Social Identity theory and Relative Deprivation theory. Although these are

useful theories, few studies have examined the antecedents of sport team identification by incorporating both theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the purposes of this study are threefold: a) to identify the antecedents of sport fan's team identification by applying Relative Deprivation and Social Identification Theory, b) to examine the dynamic interrelationships among sport fan's identification toward various targets, such as team, group and community, and c) to provide useful insights for marketing a sport team and its community. This study also fills a gap in the literature on sports fans by using Relative Deprivation theory and the team representativeness of a community to explain how people become fans.

### *1.1 Theoretical Framework*

One of the most influential frameworks for research exploring sport fans is Social identity theory (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). It has been used as a theoretical foundation to explain social groups and members' behavior. According to this theory, people find and express their identities from a group with which they are affiliated. Identity is salient when people from one group (in-group) see those from another group (out-group) as different. In other words, identification occurs when people use the terms "us" and "them" to compare and distinguish each other. This type of classification brings homogeneity within the in-group, as well as the belief that out-group members differ from in-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identities emphasizing commonalities within and outside a group thus serve as a basis for community formation.

An important feature of modern competitive sport is its representational status of a community. Followers of a particular team tend to hold strong feelings and devotion as they identify with team successes and failures. As sport historians note, the strength of this identification is rooted in the early stages of sport team/club formation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When sport teams were first organized, neighborhoods, professions, ethnicity, schooling, and social class were interwoven, and formed the basis of the congregation (Adelman, 1990; Goldstein, 1991; Hardy, 2003; Smith, 1988; Wong, 2005; Wong, 2006). These early clubs drew supporters within club membership, as well as non-member admirers of their team's athletic skills and accomplishments. Generally speaking, supporters, club members, and team players knew each other. The nature of early competition remained largely local, as transportation and media coverage presented but two barriers for a wider audience. Hence, fans of the club were mostly limited to a certain locale or region. As one of the earliest organized sports, baseball provided an instructive example of the identification between team and its geographical limitation by including the term, home (or home base), as part of the sport's lexicon; as in one must stride to return home. Given the intimacy between team and supporters, there was very strong reciprocal identification.

While fans of early sport organizations identified with their teams in large part due to their proximity with the club (in terms of location and other common characteristics), this community expanded as advances in technology included those without initial ties to the team. Anderson (1991) proposed an alternate view in community formation – an imagined community in which face-to-face or personal contact in any form was not a precondition to become identifying oneself with a larger community. While Anderson's treatise was mainly concerned with nationhood, the concept of Imagined Community can be applied to sport, a social institution that provides a reference point fostering solidarity and creating social identities to people (Nathan, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, the utility of this concept allows expansion of community identification beyond the limits of a neighborhood or a city. This is especially relevant in today's global economy, in sport and otherwise. A fervent fan of the Houston Rockets needs not have to be born and raised in the city. For that matter, the fan may not have even visited Houston, but can still identify with the team by watching games on television, purchasing team merchandise, or receiving team news on social media.

In a review of the literature, Kepe (1999) points out three common definitions of community: community as a spatial unit that is based on locality; community as an economic unit that consists of people who "share common interest, control particular resources or practice similar economic activities to make their livelihoods" (420); and community as a web of kinship, social and cultural relations – "people who share a history, knowledge, beliefs, morals and customs, and who have ties of kinship and marriage" (421). As an expression of identity, a community can be an antecedent of team identification because a sport team can include at least two, if not all three, of the above definitions. For example, if a sport fan identifies with a particular sport team and the team is perceived as representing a certain community (such as one based on geography), the attachment is strong (Heere & James, 2007). Although all sport teams are space-bound, their representativeness can be embraced by a school, city, state, or country. Residents of this geographic community tend to show fan loyalty due to their identification with a place where they were born and have lived (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999). Jones (1997) found that the two most frequently cited reasons by fans for supporting their favorite soccer team were that it was the local team (53%) and

that the fan was born in the town or city (10%). Moreover, people also identify with teams representing their parents' home town (Rhee, 2008). While communities are not necessarily bound spatially (Anderson, 1991), geographic location often constitutes an important factor in the construction of one's social identity.

Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) can also be useful in understanding sport fan behavior. In the realm of psychology, RDT was developed to explain people's perception of their deprived feeling and emotional consequences (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Starr, & Williams, 1949; Runciman, 1966; Townsend, 1979). This theory suggests that the feeling of deprivation comes from relative and not absolute standards of comparison. People tend to compare themselves with another group, person, or even household (Runciman, 1966). In the context of spectator sport, sport fans may use a rival team or other teams within the league as reference groups. Since competition against an opponent underlies the basis of sport, this theoretical framework can be a powerful tool in understanding why people become sport fans.

Researchers have combined Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory into a coherent analytical lens (Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Tropp & Wright, 1999; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). Pettigrew (1967) was the first to integrate Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory as part of his investigation into racial inequality in the U.S. Relative Deprivation Theory explains inequality and social injustice in society, while Social Identity Theory focuses on how individuals identify with and behave as a part of a social group. When applied to research in sport, this theory covers the cognition of the sport team (Wann, & Brandscombe, 1990) and of the team in terms of in-group situations (Hogg, 1996). Although the two theories have different foci, both compare others to self, and can serve as an important basis for investigating behavior and phenomenon (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). Relative Deprivation is a subjective feeling rather than an objective reflection of circumstances. Feelings of deprivation come from a sense of comparative entitlement by the disadvantaged, as they feel they deserve favorable conditions granted to others (Tropp & Wright, 1999). Social identity perspective distinguishes between in-group and outgroup members through social comparisons. Individuals also make social comparisons that favor the in-group when group identities are salient (Brewer, 1979) and when they identify with the in-group (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990) as they strive to maintain positive views of their group (Tajfel, 1981).

Although the two theories differ in their approaches and emphasis, when combined they offer a new lens for research. First, both are concerned with understanding the self compared to others in order to define one's own world and the world of others (Kawakami & Dion, 1995). In this sense, both value the importance of standards in social comparison (Hogg & McGarty, 1990). The establishment of social identities and a tendency to compare with others contribute to an individual or a group to take collective and corrective action.

This framework leads to the following questions:

1. How does community identification relate to team identification?
2. How does community identification relate to relative deprivation?
3. How does relative deprivation associate relate to team identification?

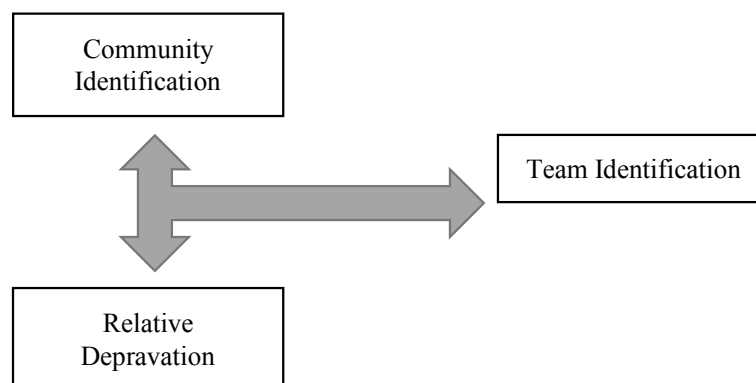


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 2. Method

This exploratory study sought to gain new insights into the relationship between Team Identification, Community Identity, and Relative Deprivation. It also provides description of fans' experiences with their relative deprivation. Research used an interpretative framework with an emphasis on experience and interpretation. Interpretive research is concerned with meaning and seeks to understand people's definitions and understanding of situations. This study is based on semi-structured interviews using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). On the basis of theoretical deliberations, we designed a semi-structured interview using questions from four related fields:

1. Participants' sense of identification with their hometown
2. Participants' experience with their sense of relative deprivation
3. Participants' experience with their sport team
4. Participants' belief of relationship among their team identification, relative deprivation, and regional identity.

After the interviews, the study explored: a) each participant's sport involvement; and, b) his/her perception of the local team's community representativeness.

### 2.1 Sampling of Participants and Ethical Consideration

Since personal relative deprivation is a sensitive topic, we used snowball sampling, requiring participants to recommend fans who may have experienced a sense of relative deprivation. We selected participants who showed a sense of community identification toward their hometown and knew about the team culture of their local sport team. After preliminary interviews, a participant's pool was selected (Spradely & McCurdy, 1972). From the participant pool, we selected those who wished to continue to take part in this research. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and told that the entire database (i.e. digital voice recorders, typed transcripts, field notes, and other related materials) would be destroyed upon completion of the analysis (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007). We also indicated that most identifiers - except where necessary to highlight an argument - would be removed from materials for presentation of the findings.

Despite the sensitivity of the topic, mutual trust and rapport were established. Participants spoke freely in detail about their experiences. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, or if they preferred, in the home of a friend. This added to their sense of comfort, security and trust. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours each.

Interviews were conducted until definite themes became evident and the information became saturated (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In total, 17 participants from six different regions participated. Participants from cities (Seoul, Dae-gu, Gwang-Ju) and provinces (Je-Ju, Gang-won, Gyong-Ki) of Korea were chosen for this study. All were born after the 1970s. Most had a college degree, and all had been fans of their local teams for more than 10 years, believing that they were highly identified fans of their teams. Among 17 selected participants, twelve males and five females took part in more than one in-depth interview besides the preliminary interview.

### 2.2 Data Analysis

The interview material was analyzed using qualitative content analysis developed by Mayring (2000). The single interview served as the unit of analysis, and therefore the study focused on individuals' views of their experience with their teams, as well as their experience of relative deprivation. Coding units were the single propositions. A deductive, theoretical-based procedure was combined with an inductive, material based procedure for the formulation of the categories of analysis.

In the first step of analysis, original quotations were prepared for the coding procedure. Each response was divided into smaller paragraphs consisting of concise statements on the value of each dimension. The authors then independently viewed and coded a section of these paragraphs. Subsequently, coding was discussed and a consensus was reached. Due to the adopted inductive approach, codes were formulated as closely as possible with the original text. When all quotations had been coded, the authors structured the codes by sorting them thematically and by establishing main and subcategories. The main categories represented the central themes of the participants' responses, and subcategories were composed of similar experiences. One month later, transcripts were once again encoded to ensure intra-coder reliability. No major differences were found. The obtained characteristics of the categories were analyzed in terms of the theoretical questions and their corresponding effects. Validation of statements of relationships among concepts and completion of categories that required further refinement were then carried out.

### 2.3 Evaluation of the Process

In this study, truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality were adopted as the criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Truth value refers to the true value of the participants' experience and perception and how they were decrypted and analyzed. Materials used in this study such as transcripts were sent back to the participants for verification. Transcripts were shown to researchers not involved in this study in order to clarify concepts.

Applicability concerns how results of one study may be applied to other situation, or the compatibility of the results. In this study, applicability was achieved by repeatedly checking statements of participants until theoretical saturation was achieved, in which no new properties, dimensions, consequences, conditions or actions were evident.

Consistency concerns obtaining a similar result from the same data. If another researcher examines the data and comes up with similar result, consistency is achieved. The research method, data gathering, and analyzing process are clearly stated. During the categorization stage and revision stage, Qualitative Research specialist, Sport Management and Sport Sociology scholars were consulted in order to maintain consistency. In addition, comparing the data and result with non-scholarly literature and consulting with two other researchers who are not engaged in this study secured consistency.

Lastly, neutrality concerns being free from a bias or prejudice. In quantitative studies, validity and reliability answer this question. For this study, research notes on preexisted knowledge, assumptions, prejudice, and bias were kept throughout the data collection and analysis stages in order to maintain neutrality.

### 3. Results

Because Community Identification, Relative Deprivation, and Team Identification are comprehensive, versatile factors, the relationship among them can have several interpretations according to the authors' point of view. In this study, Community Identification was defined as the feeling of affection and attachment as a member of a group, regardless of one's current residence. Individual experiences from childhood until now with his/her hometown was one significant factor for building community identity. Community identification is a complex process because it involves a dialectic between an individual and his/her environment. To understand how and why an individual comes to identify with a certain group, the process must be analyzed macroscopically as well as microscopically.

Relative Deprivation refers to a feeling of inequity when a person believes s/he deserves to be treated fairly, but is not. Because this emotion involves perception and judgment, it is very personal and hard to generalize. In order for Relative Deprivation to occur, an individual anchors his assessment by comparing his/her predicament with a reference group or person.

This study explored how people view this complex relationship among Community Identification, Relative Deprivation, and Team Identification with their own experience. Results may inform other researchers as well as other stakeholders in the field of sport management to better understand the relationship among three factors.

#### 3.1 Community and Team Identification

One of the significant contributing factors to community identification is geography (Heere & James, 2007). Ahlbrant and Cunningham (1979) defined community identification as attachment to a certain region and satisfaction about the attachment. They found that people with greater level of attachment with their region and high satisfaction showed stronger sense of belonging and devotion. This sense of identification with a region acts as social glue to bind people together. Most participants in this study stated that they had a high level of community identity.

Participant 14 is currently living in Il-san (a satellite city of Seoul) and works in Seoul, but claimed that he identified with Choong-chung province. He felt his roots are in Ye-san (one of the city in Choong-chung province). From the testimony below, the fact that he was born and raised in Choong-chung, his childhood memories, and success by Choong-chung residents played an important role in building an identity with his hometown.

I left my hometown 23 years ago, but I spent my younger years in Ye-san, and my parents still live there. So I believe myself as a man of Choongchung province. I do have a sense of pride being a man of Choongchung. We have great ancestors and national heroes such as Bong-Kil Yoon, Gwan Soon Yu. Our town is known as the town of nobility. I am proud of our town. (Participant 14, teacher)

Participant 4 is from Je-ju. Despite the current situation in Je-ju, he claims that his Community identity is with Je-ju. Like participant 14, he identifies with and takes pride in the success of people from his hometown. Other participants from Je-ju showed similar responses, a 'concern for the people from their hometown.'

Of course I'm proud of being a Je-ju man. Of course the Je-ju Island has a lot of problems. But still I'm

proud to be a man of Je-ju. When other people from Je-ju become famous, I feel like that is my success. Sometimes people are nice to me because I'm from Je-ju. I think this could be a nice edge to be born in Je-ju. (Participant 4, social worker)

To share a sense of identification within a group or community, people must share particular characteristics such as culture, historical backgrounds, and linguistic characteristics. These similarities are the focal point of identification. Psychologically, identification comes from loyalty and support for the in-group and the home town or the representative of the in-group (Hobsbawm, 1983). Representatives of a certain region can come from diverse sources. A politician, artist, or sport team can all be representatives of a region. Following participants revealed the dynamic between their teams and their hometowns in their testimonies.

I'm from Gwang-ju and I love Gwang-ju. I support the Kia Tigers the baseball team that represents Gwang-ju. I don't really have any reason to support Kia. I love my home town, and the fact that the team represents my home town is enough reason for me to support. Actually, I liked Haitai Tigers (the former owner of the Tigers) better but now the Kia Tigers is representing Gwan-ju. I support the team. (Participant 7, Professor)

I'm from Kang-won. I don't think I have great pride of being a Kang-won man. But, I still love Kang-won. I love pro-soccer but we don't have a soccer team. I have supported the basketball team representing Kang-won. I don't like basketball much, but if a pro-soccer team representing Kang-won enters the league. I would definitely support the team. (Participant 16, Lecturer)

I support the Daejeon Citizens. The team represents Daejeon and the team is built in peoples' hands. I am so regretful that I didn't purchase the stocks when the team offered them to the public. They are not the best team in the league and they are not doing well now but still I support the team because they represent our city. (Participant 14, teacher)

The above participants live in the Seoul metropolitan area, but the testimonies above show that they support the teams representing the place they believe to be their hometown. They place great importance of the local sport team as a representative of the community, even though they may not like the sponsors or the sport. Two testimonies reveal these aspects, according to the representativeness of the team.

Of course I love Je-ju. I understand that Je-ju has problems but it doesn't change the fact that I love Je-ju. Je-ju is culturally deprived compared with other cities. We didn't even have a sport team before Je-ju united. I thought things would be different with the professional sport team. I'm disappointed. They are not trying to communicate with the people of Je-ju. They only have a few players who are from Je-ju on the team. I love Je-ju, there is no doubt about it. But I don't think just being in Je-ju doesn't make a sport team the representative of Je-ju. (Participant 4, social worker)

I love Gwang-ju. Why? I speak the dialect and I have certain characteristics of the people of Gwang-ju, however I don't really like Kia tigers. I was crazy about Haitai tigers (the former team). But I don't believe that Kia is representing Gwang-ju as Haitai did. They are the same team with different name but they are not the same. The uniforms have been changed and playing style has been changed. They don't represent Gwang-ju. (Participant 8, office worker)

For participants 4 and 8, their view of community identification and team identification deviates from the unquestioned loyalty to everything local. Their identification with the city does not extend to the sport team in the region. They do not believe that their local teams are representing their home town. For them, representativeness involves both team identification and community identification. Location is only one factor, and representativeness also means the sharing of a history, culture, community characteristics. At the least, it implies involvement with the community. This demonstrates that team identity has a close relationship with a team's representativeness. It seems that the representativeness of a team can be a leading attribute for team identification. Especially in major metropolitan areas nowadays, multiple sport teams exist. Not all teams in a city represent their city, at least not for everyone in the city. However, it's important to understand that fans do not automatically perceive a team located in the region as their representative. In order to become a representative, teams must put in extra effort.

### 3.2 Relationship between Relative Deprivation and Team Identification

Relative Deprivation is a subjective concept. An individual can experience an economic, cultural, social, or historical deprivation when compared to another person or a group (Walker & Smith, 2002). When experienced by a group or community, relative deprivation is also more likely to induce collective action than absolute deprivation (Kawakami & Dion, 1993). Relative deprivation does not disappear when socioeconomic status improves. Even then, people tend

to have higher expectations, and the improved situation reveals gap between their expectations and reality. When they make this comparison, they recognize its inequity. Collective action, such as social demonstrations or coups may ensue (Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Lim, 2003).

In this study, participants had their share of personal, group, social, cultural, and economic relative deprivation. They had diverse opinions about the concepts covered. They were asked to define relative deprivation in their own words and discuss their own experiences.

If you are talking about Relative Deprivation, you can't miss Kangwon. Most people believe that Jeonra province is the capital of deprivation but that is just not true. Of course they had been politically deprived in the past, but what kind of benefit did Gangwon had? .....Because of the geographical situation, we always had to give up our rights. We can't develop our land because of military restrictions, environmental purpose, to protect Seoul's water service, and so on. We are experiencing severe economic deprivation. (Participant 16, lecturer)

My home town is being deprived of in many ways. Choongchung is being deprived industrially, culturally, and economically. Clearly other provinces and cities have their own color culturally and many other ways, but we don't have any. Some cities are known as city of culture and some are known as city of movie and animation. Other than the fact that my home town is closer to Seoul we have nothing. (Participant 14, school teacher)

People living on Jeju Island don't realize that they are being deprived but people who have been on the main land realize that people on Jeju are being treated unfairly. People think that Jeju is a place for tourism but the fact is there is nothing for the locals to enjoy. And there is the big historical deprivation about 4.3. Almost every locals are related to that incident. But no one on the main land seems to care about it. Anyway people of Jeju are full of deprivation. (participant4, social worker)

The participants had a well-defined understanding of relative deprivation and were able to discuss their share of relative deprivation in detail. It seems that every participant have their share of social, historical, economic, and cultural deprivation. The important thing is that the participants feel the relative deprivation from each other. From their statements, it is clear that relative deprivation is very much a personal and subjective assessment as every individual differs in the importance on the degree and types of deprivation.

I graduated from college got my Ph. D. and became a professor of a university. I was not socially and politically treated better than people from Kyungnam province because I'm from Jeonra province. There are more corporation leaders from Kyungnam than Jeonra. There are more political leaders from Kyungnam as well. That is just a beginning of deprivation of people of Jeonra. (Participant 7, Professor)

Daegu had its glorious moments but now its economy is going downhill. I don't think all the people in this baseball stadium are here because they are fans of the team but they are here because there is nothing else to do and it is a vacation season. The economy is really downhill in Daegu. Those factories in Daegu are moving to other cities. It is really a sad situation. (Participant 2, self-employed)

At first I was disappointed that we didn't have a sport team even though Il-san is the 10th largest city in the nation. I was envious of Suwon and Seoul because they have a team to support. KB soccer team, which is a second division team, came into town. I supported the team sincerely but now the team is betraying us by refusing to promote to the first division. Well we lost the team. I think I was better off when we didn't have the team. I feel worst now. (Participant 12, college student)

According to the testimonies, the participants expressed two types of relative deprivation. First, people were deprived of something they never had. This could be viewed as the traditional type of relative deprivation. The second type occurs when something one once had is taken away. Daegu was one of the biggest industrial cities in South Korea. Recently Daegu's economy declined and people of Daegu were struggling compared to others and with their own past.

### *3.3 Relationship between Relative Deprivation and Team Identification*

According to the Relative Deprivation theory, individual experiencing relative deprivation would set up an action strategy to improve his/her situation. When experienced as a group, people within the group would act collectively to improve the group situation (Dion, 1986). These action strategies can appear in diverse forms, but the focal point of the strategy is the improvement of self-esteem or self-status. To improve their situation and social status, people tend to participate in a collective action, which can lead to radical behavior (Yoo, 2000). Participation in sports or support

for a sport team seems to be a preferred collective action strategy for participants over more radical alternatives. It is important to note that participants may be reluctant to disclose their more radical actions. This study was concerned with sport, and the focus likely directed participants' attention in that area. Research does show, however, that one of the most distinctive reasons for participating in a sport or supporting a sport team is to improve participants' identity (Yoo, 2000). Identification with a sport team, then, becomes a relatively safe avenue to express and relieve a community's deprivation.

Daegu's economy is not like before and expectation of improvement is low as well. There is no doubt that people are experiencing Relative Deprivation. I believe that sport could play a great role in resolving Relative Deprivation. Maybe that is why we are focusing on Daegu IAAF World Championships in Athletics. This world class sport event would bring economic boost and bring people of Daegu together. They could take pride in hosting the world class event. The sport event would do a lot of good for this city and the citizens. (Participant 1, social worker)

In 1980, when formal president Jeon crush Gwang-ju with military force and, after a couple years later, he started the professional baseball league in order to distract the people from politics. The southeastern part of Korea is known for their amateur baseball and Jeon thought this was going to squash the southwestern part with pro-baseball. But in the third year, the Haetae Tigers started to win. Then people of Gwang-ju and southwestern part (of Jeonra province) started to identify with the team and by doing so they could diminish the Relative Deprivation with the supporting of their representative. I would say that by supporting the Haetae Tigers, southwestern people could strengthen their identification. (Participant 7, Professor)

Participants claimed that relative deprivation had a heavy influence on their team identification. They suggested that sport provided some relief from their relative deprivation. For participant 7, there is a strong relationship between the fan-ship of people of Jeonra and their relative deprivation. Responses also suggest a positive relationship between relative deprivation community identification and team identification.

The testimony of participant 7 supports the work of Kang (2003). According to the Kang, Jeonra baseball was the only pathway to express the people of Jeonra's resentment in the 1980s.

Supporting the team has a lot of meaning for the people of Jeonra in the 1980s. It is different from people of Gyeongsang who was supporting Lotte Giants, or people of Seoul supporting MBC Blue Dragons. With discrimination existing toward the people of Jeonra, it was not easy to admit that they were from the Jeonra province. The supporting of the representative of Jeonra was realistic and a psychological burden for them. People who couldn't even speak their own dialect in other provinces would gather together and support their team, speak in their dialect, and singing their songs. It was far different than any other team supporters. (Kang Joon Man, *Walking the modern history of Korea 80's*, p. 165)

The relation between Haitai Tigers and Jeonra province shows that relative deprivation facilitated the relationship between community identification of a certain region and team identification. Along with participant 7, other participants testified that sports unified the people of their region, and that sports teams played a role in expressing and relieving relative deprivation.

This is also the case in other parts of the world. Participant 7, who is a historian, related a story about Athletic Club Bilbao in Spain and the Yenbyon football team in China.

Basque is the slum of Spain just like Jeonra province in Korea. In Spain, they had a civil war and the Basques fought for their independence. They have a football team made only with their own ethnic players. In the Spanish League, having international players on their team is a common thing and to stay in the first division it is sort of a mandatory thing but they (Athletic Bilbao) refuse to have foreign players. Because of their characteristic, the Basque shows wild enthusiasm for the team even though their standings and performance are not the greatest. It is easy to locate this sort of phenomenon throughout the world. In China there is a football team with a minority Korean-Chinese. They too try to show the power of Korean-Chinese in China. (Participant 7, college professor)

The influences of relative deprivation on team identification are found in many cultures. Athletic Bilbao is representative of the Basque region, a community that has been suffering from relative deprivation in Spain. Aspiring to be independent, the Basques were treated harshly in the dictatorship of the Franco administration. Identifying with the independent spirit of the Basques, Athletic Bilbao has been adhering to the pure blood policy since the founding of the team in 1898, and it only recruit players with pure Basque heritage. This places a premium on heritage over talent and might be seen as a limitation. However, like the successful FC Barcelona and Real



Madrid with international talent, the team has never been relegated to second division (Giulianotti, 1999).

The evidence above demonstrates that relative deprivation has a positive influence on consolidating and cultivating team identification, and that sport teams can serve as representatives of a particular region and/or community. Representativeness plays an important role in the relationship between relative deprivation and team identification.

### *3.4 Relationship between Community Identification and Relative Deprivation*

Some scholars claim that people with a higher level of community identification are more sensitive to deprivation, and this feeling may lead to collective action (Kawakami & Dion, 1993; Park, 2003). However, others claim that experiencing relative deprivation would strengthen in-group favoritism thus strengthening the community. Salient personal or group identities lead individuals to engage in interpersonal comparisons, creating feelings of group relative deprivation (Han, 2003; Troop & Wright, 1999). Participants expressed contrary opinions on the relationship between community identification and relative deprivation. In the first case, community identification influenced relative deprivation.

I believe that it is obvious that when people are deeply identified with a region they would feel more sensitive to the Relative Deprivation. It is a sure thing. If a person is being attacked simply because he is from my hometown than I would stand up and try to defend him. A few days ago I watched a movie called "Magnificent Vacation". I'm not from Jeonra province but I felt the anger when I saw the movie. How would people from Jeonra feel? (Participant 15, lecturer)

In this testimony, participant 15 believed strongly that people with high level of community identification would feel high level of relative deprivation. This testimony is in line with the work of Park (2003).

Recently there are people who bond together because of the fact that they are relatively deprived. This might be a sign of being a great country. The poor people are dignified with their situation. Before, people of Joenra tend to hide their origin but now they don't hide anymore. Everything started with supporting the Haetae Tigers. (participant7, college professor)

When people experience strong relative deprivation, they tend to strengthen their in-group favoritism. This supports the work of Han (2003). People of Jeonra experienced relative deprivation over time and found a rallying point, the Haetae Tigers in this case, to strengthen their community identification. According to testimonies of participants and the literature, it is possible that relative deprivation and community identity are interaction factors. Studies show that community identification influences relative deprivation. In this study, however, the evidence points to an interaction effect between the two factors.

### *3.5 Community Representativeness and Sport Involvement*

To understand the relationship between community identification, relative deprivation, and team identification, team representativeness and sport involvement are important. Representativeness of a team is how strongly people of a certain region/community perceive the team to be representative of that region. When there are multiple teams in a region, it is difficult to determine which team represents the region.

Historically, sport teams built relationships with the people in a certain locale. Around the world, some teams have been in a neighborhood or city for a long time sharing its history with citizens. Over time, however, this relationship has extended beyond geographic boundaries of a neighborhood or a city. In other words, it is possible to have Seattle Seahawks fans in Oregon or, even across national boundaries in Canada. It is therefore more appropriate to recognize a community as a community of interests. In this study, community identification refers to people who share common bonds such as geographic location, heritage, culture, etc. Hypothetically, team identification by a person with high community identification can be influenced if s/he believes the team represents his/her community.

Zaichkowsky (1985) defines involvement as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests (p. 342)". A general idea of sport involvement is a person's perceived relevance to sports. Theoretically speaking, a person with high community identity and experienced or is experiencing relative deprivation would not resort to team identification if s/he has no interest in sport. From this notion, involvement in sport contributes to our understanding of the relationship among community identification, relative deprivation, and especially team identification. In this study, participants shared their thoughts about their involvement in sports and the representativeness of their sport team, and how and why involvement and representativeness influenced the relationship among community identification, relative deprivation, and team identification.

### *3.6 Community Identification, Relative Deprivation, Team Identification, and Representativeness*

From the testimonies of the participants, representativeness of a team was not a simple concept. Geographic location

did not affect the participants from making their decisions about representativeness. Participants believed that contribution, history, and relationship with the city and its citizens were the more important reasons. They also had diverse opinions about the effect of representativeness on team identification.

Long time ago, when pro-boxing was our favorite sports. They weren't even fighting for our country but we loved those boxers. Because we believed that they represented us. When they fought with the Japanese boxers and won, we thought we won over Japan. I had the vicarious satisfaction from the boxers. Of course, if a team sincerely represents my city, I will support that team. But just being there in my city is not what I call representation. If I was in Jeju, it might have been different. I think it will take some time for Jeju-United to truly represent Jeju. (Participant 5, graduate student, physical trainer)

When we didn't have a team in our city, I really felt deprived. After Goyang KB was founded in our city, I was and I try to be a loyal fan of the team. I watched almost every game on site. But when the team betrayed us and decided to stay in the second division rather than being promoted to first. I was angry. They made a promise and they didn't keep it. They said they would go to the first division. The Goyang KB is still located in our city and still playing in second division. But I don't think they represent our city and me. (Participant 12, University student)

Most people think that the representative team of Choong-chung is Han-hwa Eagles but I think differently. The home city for baseball was decided by the government in the 80's, not by the people. I believe that Daejeon Citizens are the real representative which was built with the citizens' hands. And of course people have the love and devotion for the team. Popularity is important but there are always some other meaning for every person. (Participant 14, school teacher)

According to these testimonies, representativeness is an important reason for fans to support a team and identify with that team. Results show that being located in a city does not necessarily make people think of the team as representative of their community. This is because a community can be bound by many interests other than location. In addition, this is not decided by popularity. Participant 5 believed that vicarious satisfaction is a key to sports. In order to bring out vicarious satisfaction, representativeness is necessary. Even if a person has a strong community identity, that person would not care for the team which does not represent him or her. In the same context, participant 5 explained why he did not support the Je-ju United.

Participant 12 has a different story. When Goyang KB was founded in the city, there were no professional teams in the region and Goyang KB became its representative team. But Goyang KB declined two offers to play in the first division. Afterwards, the team had many problems with supporters. Because of this incident, participant 12 no longer believed that Goyang KB represented his city, even though the team is still located in the same city. Participant 12's experience is interesting because location (the city in this case) both did and did not make a difference in the representativeness of a sport team. This speaks to the danger of over-reliance on geography as a certain way to acquire representativeness status.

Participant 14 thought that the origin of a team was the main factor for the representativeness. The most popular sport in Korea is professional baseball. In that sense, the most popular sport team in Choongchung should be and was the Hanhwa Eagles baseball team. But participant 14 thought differently because the roots of the baseball team came from the politics of the 80's and not on fan interests. In 1997, the team Dajeon Citizens was founded, and the team offered its stock for public subscription. After a second open stock subscription in 2006, it became a true citizens' team. Although participant 14 knew that the most popular team in Choongchung region was Hanhwa, he believed that Dajeon Citizens represented himself and his city due to the cultural origin of the team.

Kang (2003) explored representativeness when he covered Jeonra province and the Haetae Tigers. The home city of the Haetae Tigers was Gwangju. But the Tigers represented more than Gwangju and included the entire province.

When the Haetae team was formed, it had a characteristic as a team of Jeonra province rather than the team of Gwangju city. From the early stages of Korean baseball, the teams gathered players from their own cities such as Busan, and Daegu. The players didn't have the regional identity for their province. But Haetae gathered player from all over the Jeonra province (from north to south) and the players had strong regional identity for their province. Traditionally Jeonra province had great high school baseball teams and the enthusiasm for baseball was high in Jeonra province; hence Haetae could gather great players (from the province) without affecting their regional identity. With these facts, the professional baseball team brought people of Jeonra together as firm as they could be. The victory of Haetae Tigers were not just victory of Gwangju but also victory of Gunsan, Iri, Jeonju, and every other cities in Jeonra province. This brought the

Jeonra provinces Jeonrazation. (Kang Joon Man, *Walking the modern history of Korea 80's*, p. 165)

Kang (2003) claims that the historical relative deprivation the region worked as a catalyst for the team to become representative of the region. In addition, recruiting players within the region helped the team become a representative. He states that the relationship between the Haetae Tigers and Jeonra province went beyond the relationship between a franchise team and a franchise. The relationship evolved into one that linked sport with politics. Through baseball, Jeonra province became more united and baseball became an evaporation path of grudge.

### *3.7 Community Identification, Relative Deprivation, Team Identification, and Sport Involvement of Sport Fans*

Sport involvement is a precondition for a fan to identify with a team. We hypothesized that even if people with a high level of community identification and high level of relative deprivation will not support a team if those individuals do not like sports. Participants had different opinions on this matter, however. The three examples below support the notion that without sport involvement one would not support a sport team.

Relative Deprivation wouldn't attract people uninterested in sport to become a sport fan. Uninterested people are uninterested people and that is that. Every sport event could be an important event for sport fans but for uninterested people it's just a normal event which doesn't interest them. Think about it. There are people complaining about playing football all the time during the World Cup season. (participant10, sport reporter)

You need a purpose or reason to support something. If you have no interest or reason to support, why bother to do anything. If a sport event is an event you are not interested, you wouldn't participate, I know I'm not going to a fashion show because I'm not really interested. (Participant 12, College student)

If a person supports a sport team, that means the person has sport involvement. People without sport involvement wouldn't support a team. During the Word Cup period, all of the Korean women went out to the street and cheer for the national team. I believe that those women had some sort of sport involvement. I just don't see that people without involvement would support a sport team. (Participant 7, College professor)

In these examples, interviewees firmly believed that sport involvement must exist for anyone to support a team. If a person was not interested in sports, the person would not support the team because it was not important enough for him/her to get to find out more about a team.

However, the interviews yielded contradictory evidence against the hypothesis in that sport involvement did not impact a person's support of a team if s/he had a high sense of community identity and relative deprivation. As some participants testify, people could support a sport team without sport involvement if they had high level of relative deprivation. They argued that one thing people really had to know is that who represents whom.

I understand that it seems Korean people love football. But if you look at the attendance of the K-league, it is doubtful somehow. In the case of the K-league, people are not going to the games because of the love of the game of football. Well, my wife is a non-sport fan and she never goes to any sports game. But she supports Korean national football team when playing with Japan. I think it is in her blood. The resentment that Korean people have against Japanese people started in the Japanese colonial era. That is what makes her support the national team. (participant 14, school teacher)

Well, I have some involvement with sport so I watch basketball and baseball on TV. My mother, she is from Gwang-ju and has no interest in sports. As far as I know, she doesn't even like baseball. But I remember that when Kia-Tigers was Hae-tae Tigers, she was rooting for Hae-tae Tigers with my father. I believe Hae-tae Tigers were playing Dae-gu Samsung Lions. It was strange. I knew that she didn't like sports. (participant 11, graduate student)

As far as I think, people need motive when watching sports. For non-sport fan, the motive would be even more important. That is why I think the story telling is important for sport team. Let's say that we cannot lose to Japan anymore because what they have done in the past. That sure make sense to me and that gives me motivation to support a sports team. Isn't that why media makes slogan like "The great victory of Tokyo"? (Participant 4, fire officer)

While the above interviewees believed that sport involvement was an important factor in making the decision to support a team, each also recalled specific examples of those non-sport fans supporting a team. High relative deprivation and high community identification, as in contests between Korea and Japan and between Gwang-ju and Dae-gu, seemed to be at work in motivating those not interested in sports to lend their support to a team.

Since relative deprivation is comparative, the degree and types of deprivation can change over time or disappear as circumstances improve or, in the case of the Korean-Japanese rivalry, memory fades as young generations Koreans have forgotten what it was like before. From a practical standpoint, it will serve sport teams well to remember that relative deprivation can mobilize support for sport fans and non-sport fans alike.

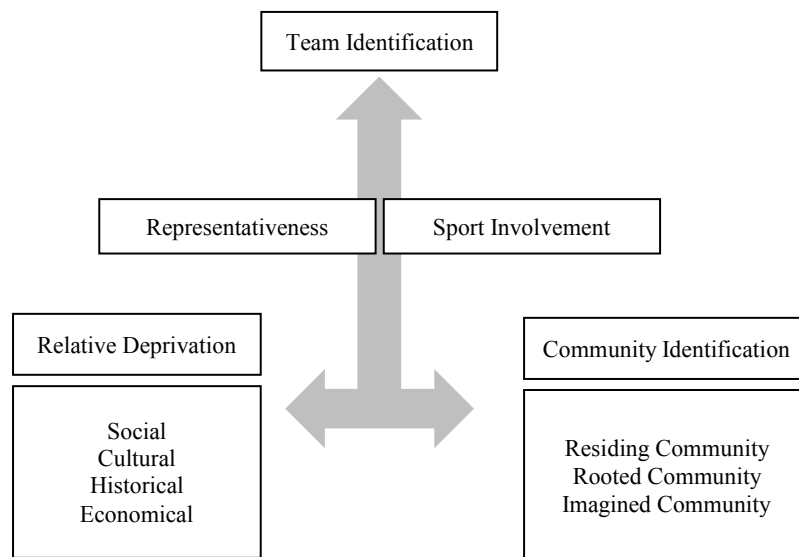


Figure 2. Modified framework

#### 4. Discussion

Prior research has found that team identification can predict fan behavior, directly affecting a team's financial success. Most studies on team identification, however, focus on the outcome and the antecedents of team identification have received scant attention (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Few studies have been conducted along this line of inquiry in the field of sport. This study revealed the relationship between community identification, relative deprivation, and team identification. We explored whether community identification and relative deprivation may work as antecedents of team identification.

Our findings suggest that community identification, relative deprivation, and team identification are closely related. Results show that community identification and relative deprivation are positively related to team identification. According to participants' testimonies, relative deprivation includes cultural, economic, social, political and historical aspects. The testimonies of the participants from Je-ju Island revealed that the people of Je-ju suffered from cultural, economic, and historical relative deprivation. Participants from Kang-won province also testified that people of Kang-won province experienced high levels of economic, political, social, and cultural relative deprivation. Participants of Jeon-ra province stated that they had been experiencing social, political, and historical relative deprivation which appeared to bring the people of Jeon-ra province together with their sports team. They clearly identified relative deprivation as a factor that increased their team identification.

The relationship between Relative Deprivation and Team Identification appears to have a positive relationship. According to Kang (2003) and the testimonies of participants from Jeon-ra province, the relation between Jeon-ra province and the Haetae Tigers went beyond that of a sports team and a city. The Tigers served as an expression of anger and frustration from the Jeon-raians' relative deprivation toward the rest of the nation. The people of Jeon-ra and their team shared their social, political, and historical pain together as well.

When examining the relationship between community identification and team identification, participants testified that the most important issue was the representativeness of the sport team. The relationship between community identification and team identification would be weak if a sport team was unable or unwilling to symbolize the

characteristics of a certain region (participant 4: case of Je-ju) and/or changed its characteristics that were considered to be part of region's social fabric (participant 8: case of Hae-tae Tigers changed to Kia Tigers). When this happened, the team would lose fan support. The importance of representativeness confirms the importance of public relations to a successful sport team. Especially for the people of Je-ju, who were experiencing cultural relative deprivation, they longed for a sport team that would rebalance the inequity. When a sport team was finally located in Je-ju, the team could not satisfy the needs of the people and lost credibility and the utility of representing Je-ju or its people.

In terms of the relationship between the relative deprivation and the team identification, participants pointed out several aspects of the relationship. People would participate in a sport event if it may restore their self-esteem, relieve their stress, address their relative deprivation. This is somewhat similar to the reason why people participate in collective action. In fact, supporting a sport team could be conceived as a collective action. The relationship between the people of Jeon-ra and Hae-tae Tigers illustrated such a case. As the people from Jeon-ra province suffered from political, economic, and social relative deprivation, the team Hae-tae Tigers gave people hope by reestablishing their self-esteem by winning. They also gave people an avenue to express themselves. Hence, both team identification and community identification have increased in that area.

As a catalyst that strengthens the relationship between a sport team and a certain region, relative deprivation serves this function elsewhere besides Korea. Take South Africa as an example. When apartheid was the law of the land, football was a sport that black South Africans turned to for hope, a respite from a hard life, and a chance to express their anger. After the dismantling of apartheid, football had become so entrenched in South African society that in 1996 it won the African Nations Cup (Lee, 2006). Similarly, Palestinian residents in Israel also formed a football club and competed against Israeli football teams. The Palestinian team also gave hope to its kin in Israel and a chance to express their feelings (Sugden, 2006).

While relative deprivation helps to shed light on team identification, this study reveals that representativeness also has a significant impact on sport involvement by fans. Representativeness can be defined as how much a sport team represents a certain region or a community as perceived by its supporters. The team should be able to represent the characteristics, emotions, history, and sentiment of a certain region and of the community. One reason that people consume a sport as fans is vicarious satisfaction (Lim, 1999). A prior condition of vicarious satisfaction demands that the team or athlete serves as a symbolic representation of the fans. Study participants stated that representativeness is a crucial element for their support of a sport team.

Our findings show that a team's representativeness includes diverse aspects such as relationship with the city or region, shared structure, roster composition, and certain characteristics of the city or region. Only when these sub-factors of team representativeness are met will fans embrace the sport team as a credible representative of them and their city. If not, fans will not support the team. From the case of Go-yang Kook-min Bank, the team broke its promise to fans that it would advance to the first division after it won the second division championship. Even though the team had a legitimate financial concern in its decision to remain in the second division, the broken promise turned out to be costly as in the form of a deteriorating relationship between the fans and the team.

On the other hand, Dae-jeon Citizens actively pursued their representativeness by opening their stocks to the public and the people of Dae-jeon invested in the team. Je-ju United struggled with fan support because it was relocated from another city and the roster did not have enough players from Je-ju. The Hae-tae Tigers' representativeness took a hit because the team changed its ownership structure by becoming the Kia-Tigers. People believed that the team's identity and its identification with the community have disappeared with a corporate team name and ownership. While these sub-factors can emerge in different ways, the consequences of losing representativeness remain the same.

## 5. Limitations and Future Research

Although the findings of the present research support the authors' research objective, due to the nature of the qualitative research and the uniqueness of the topic, current study holds several limitations.

We purposefully recruited participants who are likely to display some sort of relative deprivation. The feeling of relative deprivation, however, could come from any person from any region. Therefore, it is recommended that in future research the population of the study should be widened. Also, examining the change of one's belief, it would be better to observe the participant in longer period of time. The overall duration of the current study was rather short. To observe the true change in one's belief, we recommend future researchers to adopting a longitudinal research method.

Also, we recommend that researchers should have a better understanding of the concept relative deprivation. Most of

the previous research starts with the premise that relative deprivation stems from economic disparity. The findings of the current study and some of other studies suggest that the feeling of relative deprivation could stem from multiple sources (e.g., cultural, political, social, etc.). We suggest that in the future studies, the researchers should look into multiple facets of the origin of relative deprivation.

In line with the concept of relative deprivation, the corresponding concept of relative advantage should be looked into. The objective of the current research was to see the effect of relative deprivation on team identification. We believe that with the corresponding concept the effect of the relative deprivation could be explained better. In future research, both positive (relative advantage) and negative (relative deprivation) influence has on team identification should be examined.

## 6. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although the findings of the present research support the authors' research objective, due to the nature of the qualitative research and the uniqueness of the topic, the current study holds several limitations. Using snowball sampling, our recruited participants were likely to display some sort of relative deprivation. A study with a random sample may provide further insights as to the validity of our study. Moreover, the overall duration of the current study was relatively short. As changes in a person's feelings may come incredibly slow, adopting a longitudinal research method would be beneficial.

The findings of the current study and other studies suggest that the feeling of relative deprivation could stem from multiple sources (e.g., cultural, political, social, etc.). Most of the previous research starts with the premise that relative deprivation stems from economic disparity. We suggest that, in future studies, researchers should look into multiple facets of the origin of relative deprivation. A multivariate quantitative study may be useful in establishing the relationships, if any, among the different variables.

In line with the concept of relative deprivation, the concept of relative advantage deserves further investigation. Relative advantage is the positive feeling of a member for belonging to an organization when s/he compares his/her situation with others. Since the object of the current research examines the effect of relative deprivation, a negative feeling, on team identification, future research considering both positive (relative advantage) and negative (relative deprivation) influence will expand our understanding of team identification.

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