

Examining the Antecedents of Female Participation
in Fantasy Football

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ABSTRACT

The majority of research investigations examining the motivations for fantasy sport participation have primarily focused on male participants. Generally neglected, however, has been the reasons women choose to participate or avoid fantasy football leagues. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to extend this line of inquiry to another consumer population. By doing so, investigating the female motivations, degree of participation, and level of satisfaction, may contribute to the understanding of why females participate in fantasy football, and why more females do not play.

Collectively, findings from this study suggest a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influence fantasy football participation among females; however, certain factors may inhibit one's willingness to join a league. The motivations to participate in fantasy football were investigated through the voices and experiences of women who identified as avid NFL fans, but were not members of a fantasy football league, and women who identified as fantasy football users. Through the voices of 10 women it was conveyed that participating in fantasy football could help them achieve a variety of goals. For instance, the women felt actively competing in a fantasy football league allowed them to increase their knowledge of sport, experience a heightened sense of excitement when watching professional football, keep up with their favorite NFL players, showcase their sport knowledge, socially interact with males and co-workers, assert their competitiveness, play with family, and bond significant others. While the participants expressed a number of positive outcomes associated with playing, they also discussed certain factors that discouraged participation rates among female football fans. For

example, the women identified fantasy football as an area that highlights aggressive competition from males, promotes male exclusivity, acts as a site for male domination and female disempowerment, and considered it too time consuming because of a complicated format. By examining the women who participate and those who do not, I identified unique differences that might have shed light on how the NFL can enhance or encourage fantasy football participation among women. Further, this examination called additional attention to why marketers in the NFL have failed to attract the female consumer, and the possible consequences of their lack of understanding.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Encountering tremendous growth in recent years, fantasy football has quickly become one of the most popular spectator sports in the United States (Ballouli, Hutchinson, Cattani, & Reese, 2013). In fact, the Fantasy Sports Trade Association (FSTA) reported there were 33.5 million fantasy sport participants for the 2013 season, with 77 percent of users playing fantasy football (FSTA, 2013; Petten, 2013). Such habitual commitment to playing fantasy football has allowed it to become a prosperous industry, generating an estimated \$1 billion in consumer spending (FSTA, 2011). Given the popularity and economic success of this type of sport, an increasing amount of researchers in the field of sport management have started to examine why sports consumers' utilize electronic and online media (i.e., fantasy sport platforms) as a supplementary outlet for sport consumption (Ballouli et al., 2013; Drayer, Shapiro, Dwyer, Morse, & White, 2010; Dwyer & Drayer, 2010; Hur, Ko, & Claussen, 2007; Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Kim, Ko, & Ross, 2007; Randle & Nyland, 2008).

Research focusing on fantasy sport participation has primarily explored around the typical demographics of those who participate, men, and the specific motivations for their participation (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007). For instance, several studies have shown that fantasy sport has created a new type of sport consumer (Davis & Duncan, 2006; Dwyer & Kim, 2011). These consumers are generally in a higher socioeconomic class, tend to be Caucasian, male, average at the age of 34 years old, and attain at least a Bachelor's degree (Davis & Duncan, 2006; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; FSTA,

2013; Perry, 2013). In terms of motivations, empirical investigations suggest participation in fantasy sport is influenced by motivations such as, sport knowledge, vicarious achievement, drama, attachment to players, control, social integration, competition, economics, family, and escape (Ballouli et al., 2013; Davis & Duncan, 2006; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Lee, Lim, Perderson, & Miloch, 2010; Lee, Won, & Green, 2013; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Ruihley & Billings, 2012; Trail & James, 2011).

With fantasy football's overwhelming popularity, researchers have recently begun to devote attention to understanding why people participate in the spectator sport; yet, the majority of this research has also singularly focused on male participants because of the demographic they represent within fantasy football. For example, Davis & Duncan (2006) took a qualitative approach when they examined the appeal and experiences of participating in fantasy football for males. Their findings displayed that control, sport knowledge, competition, and social interaction encouraged men to participate because fantasy football reinforced their masculinity (Davis & Duncan, 2006). Subsequently, in a similar effort Ballouli et al. (2013) also used qualitative techniques to investigate motivations to participate in fantasy football among males. Their findings displayed vicarious achievement, control, competition, sport knowledge, economics, and social interaction as motives to play fantasy football (Ballouli et al., 2013).

In contrast, it is surprising that more attention has not been devoted to female participants as research from the FSTA (2013) suggest female spectators are increasingly engaging in fantasy football (Perry, 2013). In fact, recent polling data shows females

represent 20 percent of all fantasy football participants (Petten, 2013). Despite these findings, research examining female players and their reasons to participate in fantasy football has been minimal. In addition, with women composing 45 percent of the National Football League (NFL) fan base, 35 percent of those fans identifying as avid fans, both scholars and NFL executives may want to gain a further understanding as to why this consumer market does not reflect the female participation rate in fantasy football (McCarthy, 2008).

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to specifically develop a deeper knowledge of what motivates women to consume the fantasy football product, and what factors serve as demotivators toward participation. Drawing from self-determination theory as a theoretical lens, I used qualitative data collection methods to investigate the following research questions (Ryan & Deci, 2000):

RQ1: What motivates female fantasy football participation?

RQ2: What demotivates female involvement in fantasy football?

Current Study

As previously mentioned, investigations into the motivations of fantasy sport and specifically fantasy football participants have primarily focused on male participants. Generally overlooked, however, has been the female demographic. In light of this, the significance of this study lies in extending this line of inquiry to another consumer population. By doing so, investigating the female motivations, degree of participation, and level of satisfaction, may contribute to the understanding of why females participate in fantasy football, and why more females do not play. Further, I hope that by examining

women who participate and those who do not, I will identify unique differences that might shed light on how the NFL can enhance or encourage fantasy football participation among women. Lastly, this examination may call additional attention as to why marketers in the NFL have failed to attract the female consumer, and the possible consequences of their lack of understanding.

In pursuit of this research agenda, this thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter II contains a review of literature, including topics related to self-determination theory and intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in sport. Within Chapter III, I discuss the methods used to identify participants, collect focus group and individual interview data, and analyze the data. Chapter IV focuses on the findings and discussion, and Chapter V presents the overall conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, potential limitations, and additional research directions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several scholars contend that one must have a deep knowledge of consumer motivation in order to understand sport consumer behavior (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2004; Ko, Park, & Claussen, 2008; Trail & James, 2011). Motivations have been defined as factors that stimulate individuals to participate, and “provide purpose and direction for behaviors” (Hawkins et al., 2004, p.354). Because understanding motivation assists in answering the question of why people perform certain behaviors (McClelland, 1985; Vallerand & Losier, 1999; Weiner, 1992), different purposes such as obtaining feelings, achieving skills, and overcoming tasks may be grounds for a spectator to take part in fantasy football. Feeling a sense of accomplishment from winning a fantasy football game, using sport knowledge to make successful moves for your fantasy football team, and competing against league members with the goal of winning the fantasy football league are all examples of attitudes or behaviors that derive from fantasy football users. Therefore, fantasy football users attempt to obtain particular goals through their association in fantasy football (Vallerand & Losier, 1999).

There have been over forty motivations recognized within sport literature that predict sport consumption behavior among spectators and fans (Trail & James, 2011). In reference to self-determination theory, sport behavior can be categorized into two broad dimensions: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Pelletier et al., 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to willingly engaging in an activity for the enjoyment and satisfaction that originates from doing the activity. While, extrinsic motivation applies to

engaging in an activity to satisfy an external demand such as, a reward possibility, social status, or to elude from a penalization (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Deci, 1975). Due to the vast number of motivations identified within sport spectators, this review attempts to categorize the motivations relevant to fantasy football participation that have demonstrated to be significant in past sport consumer behavior studies. In the space below, I discuss self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999) in order to outline intrinsic motivations (i.e., sport knowledge, vicarious achievement, drama, attachment to players, and control) and extrinsic motivations (i.e., sport knowledge, social integration, competition, economics, family, and escape) towards female participation in fantasy football.

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory is an area that explores individuals “inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation” to participation in an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). According to Ryan & Deci (2000) individuals seek to participate in activities to fulfill three psychological needs that reinforce self-determination: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need to be self-governing in the management of a participated activity (deCharms, 1968; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). The need for competence insinuates that “individuals want to interact effectively with their environment” (Harter, 1978; White, 1959; Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p. 144). Relatedness applies to the need to identify or associate with others (Richer & Vallerand, in press; Ryan, 1993). According to which need is impacted or satisfied, will determine if the motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic (Vallerand

& Losier, 1999).

Due to the “ functional and experiential differences between self-motivation and external regulation,” self-determination theory considers motivations to vary in degree (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Motivations are therefore placed on a self-determination continuum that positions itself “from high to low levels of self-determination” as it moves from intrinsic motivation, to extrinsic motivation, to amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p.153). An example of the continuum can be seen in Figure 1 (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation positions itself as the highest level of self-determination, and is considered highly autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation covers a lower level on the continuum, and varies according to the state of autonomy within the specific motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

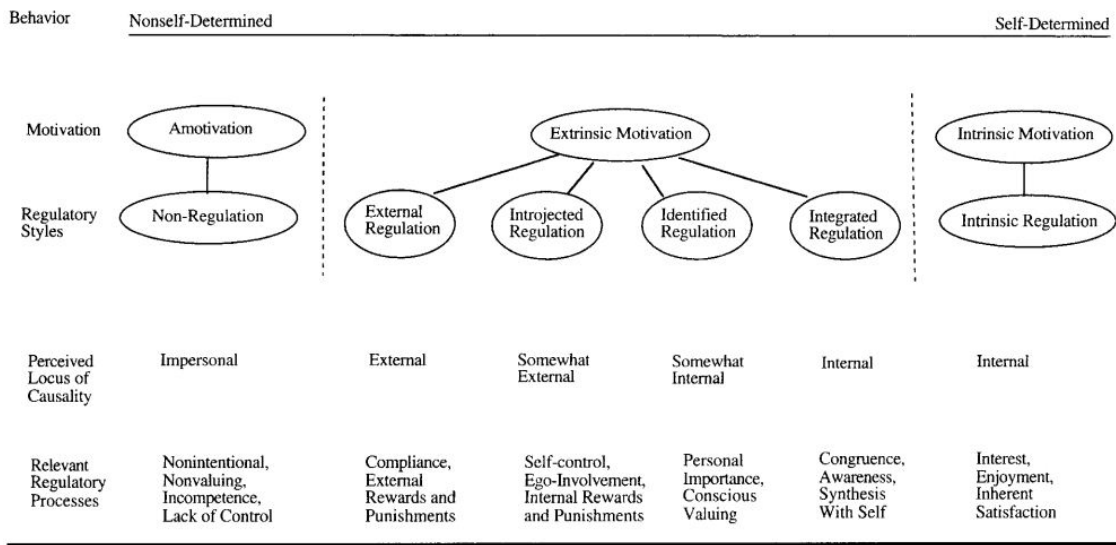


Figure 1
The Self-determination Continuum

Lastly, amotivation is the least self-determined as it signals the absence of motivation (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Amotivated behaviors reflect the least self-determined because there is no reason or willingness to involve in an activity (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Below I elaborate on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the fantasy football motivations that can be classified within these two themes.

Intrinsic Motivation

The most original form of self-determination is intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As explained previously, intrinsic motivation refers to freely participating in an activity for the pleasure or enjoyment it provides (Vallerand & Losier, 1999, Deci, 1971). Within intrinsic motivation, there are three subcategories: intrinsic motivation toward knowledge, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment, and intrinsic motivation toward experiencing stimulation (Vallerand, 1989; Vallerand et al., 1992,1993). Intrinsic motivation toward knowledge includes participating in an activity for the enjoyment of learning or gaining new knowledge (e.g., learning NFL player statistics through playing fantasy football) (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). In contrast, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment is produced from habitual preparation and is carried out for the gratification of bettering oneself or reaching new goals (e.g., feeling of achievement through fantasy football team win) (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Finally, intrinsic motivation toward experiencing stimulation relates to engagement for the satisfying sensation (e.g., thrill of watching athlete production to help win a fantasy football game) that is obtained from participating (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Within the intrinsic category, I have identified five motivations that may influence participation in fantasy

football among women: sport knowledge, vicarious achievement, drama, attachment to players, and control. In the following space I will discuss each motivation in detail.

Sport Knowledge. Sport knowledge refers to the need to acquire or gain information about a sport through outlets such as media, attendance, or participation (Trail & James, 2011). Because the structure of fantasy football calls for users to be knowledgeable about the NFL, sport knowledge plays a critical role in drafting and managing a successful team in fantasy football. In addition, past studies have indicated that individuals with greater perceived knowledge about sport had higher intentions to participate in fantasy sport (Lee et al., 2010, Ruihley & Billings, in press). Fantasy football may be appealing to participants who utilize it as a tool to gain or increase their knowledge, or to beat opponents (Ballouli et al., 2013; Davis & Duncan, 2006; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007).

Vicarious Achievement. Vicarious achievement applies to individuals who associate themselves with accomplishments attained by athletes or teams in order to satisfy their need for achievement (Ballouli et al., 2013). Spectators and fans have been attracted to watch sports because it allows them to live vicariously through the successful production of their favorite players and teams (Trail & James, 2011). Fantasy football provides this need by allowing participants to manage their fantasy football team. As a result, success from their team can indirectly enhance their ego or self-esteem because of the established association the individual has with his team (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Sloan, 1989; Trail & James, 2011, p.187; Wann & Branscombe, 1990).

Drama. Drama is defined as “the need to experience pleasurable stress or stimulation” (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002, p.198). Sport has periods of tension that moderate between high intensity stages and low intensity stages, which causes emotional production for individuals (Trail & James, 2011). Milne & McDonald (1999) associated drama to risk-taking in that “individuals engage in [behaviors] that [cause] some type of arousal because the event causes a thrill within the individual” (Trail & James, 2011, p. 182). Drama applies to consumers of fantasy football because it creates a stimulation for players, as they typically watch large amount of games, and must monitor various players they rely on to acquire points to beat there opponent each week. Drama has been significantly related to interest in a certain level of sport rather than fans that identified with a certain team (Robinson & Trail, 2005). A spectator of a favored sport watches all games for the excitement it provides, while a fan of a specific player or team may not be as interested because their favorite is not playing (Trail & James, 2011). In this vein, NFL fans that derive excitement from watching their favorite team may be less motivated to participate in fantasy football. However, those who are more attached to the excitement of watching the NFL may be more motivated to play fantasy football as it encourages participants to watch all games.

Attachment to players. Attachment to players is the interest in an athlete because of physical attractiveness, personality, career achievements, or celebrity status (Mahony & Moorman, 2000). In reference to fantasy football, individuals may be motivated to play to be able to draft there favorite players on there fantasy teams or to keep up with there favorite NFL athletes. Female spectators have been noted to watch football because of the

appealing physical features from athletes (Trail & James, 2011). While others have indicated that personality, celebrity status, and extroverted behavior from athletes attract and draw spectators to watch sporting events (Higgs & Weiller, 1994; Madrigal, 2006; Whannel, 1992).

Control. In many respects, fantasy football supplies the stimulation of control through the actions fantasy football players engage in during the season. Participants take on executive roles to their fantasy football team through “business like ventures” that include drafting players, trading players, picking up free agents, and submitting a starting lineup (Davis & Duncan, 2006, p. 252). Some research contends a desire to control outcomes or individuals motivates people, particularly White males, to play fantasy football (Davis & Duncan, 2006). Further, fantasy sport literature has suggested fantasy football as a space for males to facilitate their masculinity (Davis & Duncan, 2006; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Ruihley & Billings, 2012). Given the emphasis on displaying masculinity, or the desire to be “manly”, women may perceive the fantasy football environment as unwelcoming.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is the engagement in an activity for the purpose of obtaining a material reward, social reward, or to evade a punishment (Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Extrinsic motivations can vary in different degrees because some motivations are “internalized and integrated” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.71). According to Ryan & Deci (2000), “internalization refers to people ‘taking in’ a value or regulation, and integration refers to the further transformation of that regulation

into their own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self” (p. 71). In other words, some actions are more self-governing and can share qualities of intrinsic motivations, but are still considered extrinsic because they carry out the action to obtain a more independent outcome rather than for enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

There are four subcategories of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand, & Losier, 1999). *External regulation* is considered the least autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, and embodies behavior from a person in order to gain a reward or to avoid penalization from others (e.g., receiving a cash prize for winning a fantasy football league) (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). *Introjected regulation* involves apprehending a regulation, but not fully internalizing it (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Because the internalization is not completely integrated into oneself it is a “controlled form of regulation in which behaviors are performed to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego enhancements such as pride,” (e.g., showcasing sport knowledge to establish as a dominant player) and is usually carried out because of pressure rather than voluntarily (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.72; Vallerand & Losier, 1999).

Identified regulation is a more autonomous motivation, and exists when an individual willingly decides to involve themselves in behaviors that are not necessarily of interest, but are performed to help the individual achieve a personal objective (e.g., playing fantasy football to beat a significant other) (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Lastly, *integrated regulation* can be identified as the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation because it shares qualities of intrinsic motivation. Integrated regulation occurs

when identified regulations are “evaluated and brought into congruence with the individuals values and needs” (e.g., playing fantasy football to bond with others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). Although integrated motivation produces more autonomous actions, these acts are still considered extrinsic because they are performed with the motive to attain a reward. Within the extrinsic category, I have identified five motivations that may influence female participation in fantasy football: sport knowledge, social integration, competition, economics, family, and escape. In the following section, I will discuss each motivation in detail.

Sport Knowledge. In addition to sport knowledge acting as an intrinsic motivation, it can also be classified as an extrinsic motivation due to the fact that sport knowledge can help fantasy football players beat opponents. As a result, fantasy football player’s show off their knowledge through there successful moves (drafting, trading, and starting players), and can institute them as dominant players. As such, showcasing sport knowledge was found to be a motivating factor in males that played fantasy football because they felt empowered through there success of emasculating other players (Davis & Duncan, 2006).

Social Integration. The need to socially interact can be divided into two sub-categories: social facilitation and social affiliation (Milne & McDonald, 1999; Trail & James, 2011). Social facilitation refers to the “social gratification of being with others who enjoy the same activity, and affiliation [is] defined as having the need to interact to feel a sense of belonging with a group” (Milne & McDonald, 1990; Trail & James, 2011, p.179). . Fantasy football reinforces social facilitation by creating a space where players

can share opinions, exchange sport knowledge, and provide topics of interest with players alike. Because fantasy football is considered a group activity, it is reasonable to assume the social environment it provides can also create a sense of belonging by association for individuals. This can relate to Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Riecher, & Wetherells (1987) social identity theory that explains how individuals establish themselves in terms of in-group and out-group status. People associate themselves with social groups, such as a fantasy football league, that affiliate with their own interests. Those whose characteristics do not resemble those of the in-group are devalued or identified as an out-group member (Turner, 1982). Therefore, individuals may be motivated to join a fantasy football league for the enjoyment of camaraderie or to feel involved with a group.

Competition. One of the most influential motivations fantasy football furnishes is competition. Competition allows participants to measure their skills against others (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Some have categorized the motivation of competition as intrinsic, but theorists suggest “that intrinsic motivation is undermined when there is a change of focus away from the activity (task involvement), and toward a more self-pride focus (ego involving)” (Ames, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Duda, 1989; Dweck, 1986; Vallerand & Losier, 1999, p. 148).

Considering how the nature of fantasy football calls for one-on-one battles every week with the opportunity to dominate opponents, winning can act as an incentive toward participation. Consequently, asserting dominance can increase pride and self-esteem for fantasy football participants (Davis & Duncan, 2006). The competition fantasy football supplies has been found to be a significant motivation in males in that they utilize their

dominance over opponents to emphasize their superior status by vocally putting league members down (Davis & Duncan, 2006).

Economics. Betting a monetary prize on an activity or event defines the motivation of economics (Trail & James, 2011). Past research has associated the economics motivation in fantasy football with real life sport gambling because they carry similar characteristics, such as competing for a monetary reward, and the results are contingent (Ballouli et al., 2013; Kassinove, 1998; Lee et al., 2010; Potenza et al., 2001). Evidence also suggests gender differences exist in terms of how men and women engage in gambling activities. Women, for instance, tend to prefer games of chance, such as the lottery or slot machines (Lee et al., 2010). In contrast, men who are motivated by economics typically engage in skill-based gambling that involves strategic planning such as poker, backgammon, or athletic competitions (Kassinove, 1998; Potenza et al., 2001). Ballouli et al. (2013) reaffirmed this when they found that males were highly motivated by the possible cash reward attained for participating in fantasy football. Because fantasy football is considered more strategic and social, it is practical to assume it is a reason why males prefer fantasy football more than women.

Family. Family defines an individual's needs to take part in an activity for the purpose to bond or spend quality time with family members or a significant other (Trail & James, 2011). Women and the motivation of family have been found to be an influential factor toward participating in sport because they want a bonding experience with family members or share a common activity with a significant other (Armstrong, 2001; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000; Farrell et al., 2010; Wann, 1995).

Escape. Sports viewing may be seen as a means to alleviate boredom or to escape stress experienced in daily life (Sloan, 1989; Trail & James, 2011; Wann, 1995). Fantasy football may encourage escape by supplying individuals with an outlet where they can concentrate on weekly NFL games or their own fantasy football game(s) and shy away from personal problems that may be causing stress (Trail & James, 2011). Past research has associated females and escape “with family obligations and relationship-building” rather than sports programming or fantasy sport, while others have found no significance of escape in women (Ruihley & Billings, 2012; Whiteside & Hardin, 2011, p.136).

Possible Moderators

It is also important to discuss factors that may influence the relationship between motivations and fantasy football participation, as specification of moderators and boundary conditions are key elements of theory building (Bacharach, 1989; Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Furthermore, from an applied perspective, it is necessary to understand what factors are associated with fantasy football participation and how these factors might vary based on context, as doing so allows for sport marketers to form more effective ways to promote the sport product.

Gender

I have identified two potential moderators, the first of which is the gender of participants. By and large, the majority of existing sport and fantasy sport literature has focused on the male demographic. For men and women, motivational forces within both have differed (Wann, 1995). For example, in three separate studies over sport motivations, women rated the motive to spend time with family higher than males

(Armstrong, 2001; Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, 1995;). However, James & Ridinger (2002) found men to score higher in this sport motivation. Results also indicated contrasting findings in the motivation of social interaction when Wann (1995) found that men scored higher in group recognition, while Armstrong (2001) and Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) found women were more motivated to play sports than men by social traits. Past research has also suggested gender differences in the motivation of sport knowledge. Robinson & Trail (2005) detected male spectators scored lower in the sports knowledge motive, Lee et al. (2010) observed the sports knowledge motivation higher in male fantasy sport users than female fantasy sport users, and Rauhley & Billings (2012) found no significant difference between fantasy sport users for both genders.

In addition, the motivation of escape has also seen dissimilarities between genders in research. Rauhley & Billings (2012) found no difference in regards to the motivation of escape in male and female fantasy sport users, but Wann (1995) found men scored higher in the motivation of escape toward playing sport. Lastly, gender differences have been observed in the environment of fantasy football because of its large male demographic. Hartmann (2003) explains spectator sports as a means in which “most participants generally play real sports.” Because football is a sport that women do not play, they may be less likely to play fantasy football due to the fact that they have never experienced playing football. Therefore, because real sports are typically associated with males we might anticipate that this is a reason why there is such a large male demographic in fantasy football.

Second, as these studies show, there is little consensus on if gender difference

exists or how the relationships may manifest. Further, most of the research has examined motivations to play real life sport and fantasy sport in general, and not specifically fantasy football. Such contrasting findings could partially be contributed to the fact that women are rarely the focus of these studies. Oftentimes, the research samples were largely composed of male participants—making it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about sport motivations for women. As such, more scholarly work examining the motives of women’s fantasy sport behavior is warranted.

A review of the aforementioned literature points to two trends. First, self-determination theory is an appropriate framework to examine motivations to participate in fantasy football; however, within the sport management field, self-determination theory has typically only been applied when examining the motivations of athletic participation (Ryan, Vallerand, & Deci, 1984; Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 1987; Vallerand & Losier, 1994; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). This study offers a unique contribution to the existing motivation literature, by using a self-determination theory lens to understand motivations that influence participation in fantasy football. Second, the majority of work examining motivations to play fantasy football is based on responses from female samples. The current research seeks to extend this line of inquiry by using qualitative methods to examine the motivations of female participants.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As stated before, this research was guided by self-determination theory in order to understand motivational behaviors in fantasy sport, and particularly assist in comprehending the motivations female spectators in fantasy football may possess. Previous research over motivations in spectators have commonly used quantitative research methods (Armstrong, 2001; Dietz-Uhler, 2000; Dwyer & Kim, 2011; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Indian University, 2000; Lee et al., 2010; Pelletier et al. 1995; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Ruihley & Billings, 2012; Wann, 1995). However, there has been no research proposed over female spectator motivations through self-determination theory using a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods were used in this study in order to attain in-depth interaction with participants to gain access to multiple perspectives about female fantasy football participation (Glesne, 2005).

Participants

Three focus group interviews were used for this study, and three individual interviews were performed with key informants from each focus group in order to gain additional insight. Participants were purposely selected to participate in the study based on certain criteria. Specifically, selection for Focus Group 1 and 2 were based on two criteria: the participants had to be women and self-identify as an avid NFL fan. The criteria for Focus Group 3 required participants to be women and participate in fantasy football on a regular basis. Key informants were selected upon their strong involvement and opinions expressed during the focus group interviews.

In sum, ten women were selected for the three focus groups. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years, and had diverse ethnic backgrounds. See Table 1 for participant demographics. Focus Group 1 consisted of four females and Focus Group 2 was comprised of three females. All participants in Focus Group 1 and 2 were avid NFL fans that did not play fantasy football. Finally, Focus Group 3 included three women who identified as fantasy football users. The three person focus groups were conducted to increase in-depth and complex responses from participants, which encouraged participants to elaborate their thoughts because of the intimate setting (Beall, 2010; Pentland, 2013).

All of the participants were students or faculty members of an Exercise, Sport, & Sciences (ESS) department from a large state university in the Southwest portion of the United States. Further, Focus Group 1 and 2 members were recruited from two undergraduate classes. Public announcements were made in the classes to bring awareness about the study, and to help solicit participants. In addition, because this was a hard sample to identify, the non-probability technique of snowball sampling was an appropriate sampling method to utilize in order to acquire the participants for Focus Group 3. Kolsaker & Drakatos (2009) argued that snowball sampling is “appropriate to an exploratory study in a new field,” which can greatly relate to this study (p.271). Therefore, ESS department students and faculty members were emailed or personally asked to help solicit participants through the women they knew who played fantasy football. Finally, all participants were informed that their participation in this study was completely voluntary, their identities would remain anonymous, and there were no

incentives for participation in this study.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Student/Faculty	Ethnicity	NFL fan/ FU	People they know who play
Amy	Undergraduate	Hispanic	NFL fan	Male friends
Brandy	Undergraduate	African American	NFL fan	Male co-workers
Debra	Undergraduate	Hispanic	NFL fan	Female friend
Jamie	Faculty	Caucasian	Fantasy User	Niece husband
Jessica	Graduate	Caucasian	NFL fan	Significant other
Katie	Graduate	Caucasian	Fantasy User	Significant other, Dad, & Brother
Laura	Undergraduate	Caucasian	NFL fan	Significant other
Mary	Graduate	Caucasian	Fantasy User	Husband, Female friend
Samantha	Undergraduate	Hispanic	NFL fan	Uncle, Brother
Susan	Undergraduate	Caucasian	NFL fan	Male friends

Data Collection and Analysis

The interview guide was developed with the intent of capturing the participants’ perceptions, motivations and experiences related to fantasy football. Specifically, I sought to understand what motivated women to play fantasy football, and what demotivation’s might inhibit them from joining a fantasy football league. An interview guide was created based on tenants of self-determination theory, which informed the questions regarding motivations to participate (see Appendix A). Questions either pertained directly to the framework (e.g., how do you know about fantasy football, why

do you play fantasy football) or were framed in a more general way (e.g., what is a typical Sunday for you like during football season, tell me a little about your league). The latter approach was taken in order to elicit responses that could provide more understanding and insight regarding participant motivations (cf. Kvale, 1996). Taking this approach allowed me to extend beyond the preconceived theoretical image of fantasy sport participation, and develop a sense of how the social world appeared to those under investigation (Patton, 1989).

Each focus group met separately, where they were asked questions derived from the interview guide. The questions were used to encourage the females to express their feelings towards the questions as well as initiate conversations amongst each other. In addition, probing questions were used to solicit fuller, more thoughtful responses. Each focus group lasted 35-45 minutes in length, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Once responses were transcribed, a thematic analysis was performed through a process of coding. “Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e. observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to research purposes” (Glesne, 2005). The raw data was analyzed and broken down into emerging themes and then categorized based on self-determination theory—a process referred to as a priori content-specific coding (Schwandt, 2007).

A priori, content-specific scheme is first developed from careful study of the problem or topic under investigation and the theoretical interests [theory of

planned behavior] that drive the inquiry. The codes are derived directly by the social inquirer from the language of the problem area or theoretical framework.

Data are then examined and sorted into this scheme (Schwandt, 2007, p. 32).

That is, the formation of themes and the interpretation of the data were all informed by self-determination theory. When I began to code the raw data, I initially started with thirty general themes. Themes were narrowed down according to participants' responses that corresponded with the proposed fantasy football motivations, which included: sports knowledge, vicarious achievement, drama, attachment to players, control, social integration, competition, economics, family, and escape. Once the raw data were categorized, the themes were then classified within intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and their subcategories. The decision to include themes that did not relate to the theoretical framework was based on how frequently the theme emerged in the data, or the uniqueness of the theme. A theme was considered unique if it had not previously been identified in existing literature related to fantasy football participation. Finally, sorting participant's responses to these subcategories of motivation clumped the data in a meaningful sequence that helped reveal emerging themes. Seven themes emerged as motivations, and four themes emerged as demotivation's toward participation in fantasy football. Representative quotes were utilized to illustrate the appropriate theme, and supply evidence of the findings. See Appendix B for emerging themes.

Trustworthiness

The term most often used to describe the overall quality of results from a study in qualitative research is trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, Nelson, &

Silverman, 2011). Lincoln & Guba (1985) defined four concepts that are used in qualitative research concerning quality: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Thomas et al., 2011).

Credibility

To enhance credibility, peer debriefing was used. Thomas et al. (2011) describes peer debriefing as having a new set of eyes to help bring insight to the data set and conclusions to the study. As such, my chair acted as peer debriefer, but did not have any involvement in the data collection process nor had any direct involvement in the study. Furthermore, my chair provided an audit to the collection, categorization, and interpretation of the data.

Transferability

A major factor in qualitative research methods is reliant to the presentation of a thick description of the research data. Thick description is defined as a “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1989a,39; Glesne, 2005). In order for other researchers to apply the findings in this study, a thick description of fantasy football motivations was provided. Beyond the initial focus groups, additional one-on-one interviews were conducted to develop deeper responses from participants to thoroughly identify motivations within the women to create a thick description.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability were verified through peer debriefing. Two professors in my department, proficient in qualitative research methods, served as auditors to evaluate the research process, interpret data, and research findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taken as a whole, this study allowed for the exploration of female participation in fantasy football through the words and experiences of women who are avid NFL fans or fantasy football users. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions: (a) What motivations facilitate women participation in fantasy football, and (b) What demotivation's inhibit women participation in fantasy football. Findings concluded the intrinsic motivations of sport knowledge, drama, and attachment to players; and the extrinsic motivations of sport knowledge, social integration, competition, and family emerged as dominant themes. Findings also exposed demotivation's that discouraged participation due to the fact that fantasy football was recognized as a setting that highlighted aggressive competition from males, promoted exclusivity from males, acted as a site for male domination and women disempowerment, and was considered to be too time consuming because of a complicated format. In the following space, responses from the interviews conducted are discussed regarding emergent motivations.

Intrinsic Motivations

The intrinsic motivations of sport knowledge, drama, and attachment to players emerged as motivational influences among women participating in fantasy football. As stated previously, intrinsic motivation can be divided into three sub-categories: intrinsic motivation toward knowledge, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment, and intrinsic motivation toward experiencing stimulation (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). In regards to intrinsic motivation toward knowledge, the motivation of sport knowledge can be

classified under this sub-category due to the fact that participants were involved in fantasy football or wanted to participate to acquire or enhance their sport knowledge. Intrinsic motivation towards experiencing stimulation can be applied to the motivations of drama and attachment to players because participants enjoyed playing fantasy football for the heightened excitement it brought to watching NFL games, and affected both participation and consideration in playing because of the enjoyment they experienced from the keeping up with athletes caused by physical looks, personality, or career accomplishments. The following sections provide participants insight related to these three motivations, and their association with self-determination theory.

Sport Knowledge. Participant's responses recognized sport knowledge as a necessity in order to play fantasy football, and identified it as a benefit that derived from participation. Participants in both groups revealed that knowing sports statistics was vital in choosing which players to draft or trade, and also expressed how being unknowledgeable about NFL players could place them at a disadvantage when playing fantasy football. For instance, it was evident that the NFL fan group felt they lacked adequate player knowledge, which they deemed necessary to draft quality players and be successful in a league. One participant explained how her lack of knowledge would make it more difficult for her to draft a fantasy team:

I just think you have to know so much about a player, like how do you make a decision on somebody without knowing anything about them, and maybe for me I don't study them, the players, hardcore enough you know. I know a few especially the ones that stand out, but I don't think I would know enough to go

and start putting people in categories. (Debra)

Further, NFL fans implied their motivation toward knowledge to enhance their sport knowledge and learn more about fantasy football through participation. An NFL fan justified this reasoning:

I think it would just make me a better football fan in general [playing fantasy football]. I don't like doing something if I don't know much about it... Its really nice actually to understand it [fantasy football] because I mean since girls don't really get to play [real life football] its really hard to understand, but once you could get the hang of it you would be like ahhh I get how to do this. (Jessica).

In addition to defining how important sport knowledge was to the NFL fan group, fantasy football participants also stated that by playing it had enhanced their sport knowledge. Furthermore, responses suggested that women who are motivated toward knowledge are more involved with their NFL fanship and are more likely to participate in fantasy football.

Drama. All participants frequently expressed that they enjoyed watching football because it was exciting. They specified that the high stress moments such as tie games or overtimes made it entertaining for them to watch. Although, fantasy football users implied that football was exciting to them, they indicated that watching football was made more exciting through fantasy football. Recalling her time before fantasy football, a study participant explained how her interest in football changed once she began managing her own fantasy football team:

You watch more games [playing fantasy football], I use to watch the games, but I

never really got into them, but now knowing if I have a player on that team I'm going to root for that player just because I want points not because I want them to win. (Katie)

Fantasy football users expressed that fantasy football created tension for them because they were dependent on NFL athletes to produce points for them. Trail & James (2011) describe this created tension as an "individuals need to encounter stress" (p.182). Fantasy football relates to drama in that it satisfies fantasy football users motivation toward stimulation through the excitement they experience from watching their roster players contribute to their fantasy games. For example, expressing how production from her fantasy football players created pressure during game day, Jamie stated, "It's frustrating. The game itself is still exciting but frustration can set in. Like you're not getting me any points man, this is not going to be good". Overall, because fantasy football games are won by the total amount of production from each player in the starting lineup, it stimulates a sense of thrill for fantasy football users.

Additionally, it was noted the NFL fan group were primarily interested in their favorite team playing, and were more likely to change the channel if the game did not include these high intensity moments. One participant expressed her thoughts about the difference between fantasy football users and non-fantasy football users:

I feel like some guys watch more football for that reason instead of just enjoying the game. I think it puts a different perspective on it then watching a game for some people. There just worried about oh put this player in so he can make me points, or something like that. If I'm watching the Cowboys I'm not caring about

points, I want them to win. You know what I mean, so people just don't see it that way when there playing fantasy. (Susan)

Among the women who played, fantasy football increased the level of viewership and interest beyond if their favorite team was winning. This supports Robinson & Trail's (2011) contention that drama is an emergent factor in individuals interested in a certain level of sport (e.g., professional football, collegiate football, youth football).

Consequently, if fantasy football increases viewership and attention towards the NFL, the NFL should attempt to draw more women to play in order to increase female involvement in fantasy sport and media consumption.

Attachment to players. The attention players receive because of the team they play for physical appearance, personality, and career accomplishments appeared to influence participants in varying degrees. First, several noted how their interest in certain players would encourage them or has prompted their fantasy football participation. For instance, Jessica specified why she enjoyed watching NFL athletes, "Its fun to keep up with the players, like I've started learning there stats and stuff, like that guys going to break this record, and you want to watch to see what happens". Because athletes bring popular attention to the NFL for a variety of reasons, NFL fans are motivated toward the stimulation these athletes create for them in fulfilling their need to experience the excitement they bring to the game of football. Fans create attachment to these players and enjoy watching and keep up with them.

Second, participants expressed their attachments to players for different reasons, but all had affects toward participation. For example, fantasy football users implied an

attraction to playing fantasy football was that they get to draft their favorite players. Katie explained how she got to draft her favorite player:

Well I had to have Aaron Rodgers for mine, just because I like him in general, but I had to have him, I had my dad pick him up then I picked up for my dad and we traded, that's the only player I really wanted. (Katie)

Further, it was noted that physical attraction of NFL athletes was not a factor for fantasy football users, but was a factor for NFL fan participants. The women suggested they would like to play so they could draft the players they thought were good-looking. They also expressed that physical attraction was a feature for female NFL fans in that it made football more interesting to watch. Brandy explained how attractiveness would influence her fantasy draft, and affects watching games for women:

I would pick them just because their cute, like I won't even lie. That plays a huge role, that's also what makes it interesting for girls to watch, we will look at that persons number and be like oh my god theirs so and so. (Brandy)

Besides player attractiveness, player personality and career statistics were popular between both groups of women. Many chose Peyton Manning as a prime example, describing him as a good player on and off the field:

I go a lot by the stats, I mean, I like Peyton Manning because I think he's a good guy and he's a good player and he has good stats, but I pretty much go by the stats. (Jamie)

I've just always enjoyed watching him, he's a good player, you know it kind of helps that he's a little bit more exposed than a lot of people, doing the

commercials with his brother those were always kind of funny so you knew who he was. (Katie)

In addition, the women found Peyton Manning interesting because he has received positive attention throughout his career, which in their opinion, has made him more likable:

I like Peyton Manning not only because he's a good player, he's not a thug, he's had a really great career, but you never hear about him in the media unless its about football so its not all about his social life. (Jessica)

You get other players like Aaron Hernandez, that's his name right? Who is in jail he got a lot of attention, but he got a lot of negative attention, or the guy on the Seahawks whenever he did that post interview he got a lot of negative feedback, but I think when you have a positive attitude you will attract more people to like you. (Katie)

Participant's stances on the various appeals that motivated them to keep up with athletes can relate to sport spectators that are motivated to attend games to specifically watch their favorite player. Therefore, the stimulation participants experienced from watching these athletes displayed as a positive influence toward participation in fantasy football.

Furthermore, because the women were interested in staying informed about particular aspects of an NFL player's life, fantasy football can act as an additional outlet for spectators to keep up with these players.

Extrinsic Motivations

Findings from this study also revealed that the external motivations of sport knowledge, social integration, competition, and family were influential factors toward participation in fantasy football. Within extrinsic motivation there are four subcategories of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although sport knowledge was classified as an intrinsic motivation it also acted as an extrinsic motivation for participants. For example, introjected regulation was reinforced when participants stated they would play fantasy football to showcase their knowledge. Showcasing their sport knowledge would help them beat opponents, and as a result the women would gain self-confidence as a player in a league. As a result, sport knowledge was also fortified by external regulation for the incentive of gaining the status of being a dominant player.

Second, the motivation of social integration was categorized as an external regulation because the women considered participation in fantasy football as a social benefit that would help achieve in-group status with men. Because it was recognized as a social benefit, participants identified regulation was applied when it was noted that women may not play fantasy football for the enjoyment, but could be motivated to participate so they could interact with males and co-workers better.

Third, the motivation of competition was categorized as an introjected regulation due to the fact that the women participated or wanted to participate in fantasy football for the satisfaction they would receive from beating a man. Because fantasy football is a male dominated area, this may bolster women's drive to compete. Ultimately, defeating a

man in this area constituted as a valued accomplishment. Lastly, the motivation of family was acknowledged as an integrated regulation because participants were strongly influenced by family members to play and learn about fantasy football, but also regarded it as an activity where they could bond and spend quality time. The following sections provide participants insights related to these four motivations, and their association with self-determination theory.

Sport Knowledge. NFL fan participants stated they would feel a sense of accomplishment by showcasing their knowledge if they played fantasy football. One participant explained how she wanted to play fantasy football to utilize her sports knowledge to challenge herself:

Just because I have learned a lot from just watching last season, and I think it kind of feels like an accomplishment learning like all the plays and different teams and about different players, and just to see if I would choose players that would do really well. (Jessica)

The entitlement individuals experience from the personal challenge of using their sport knowledge in fantasy football elicits introjected regulation in that their behaviors want to be performed to attain an ego enhancement. This finding can be compared to Davis & Duncan's (2006) study as they found that men also used their knowledge to make themselves feel prideful and empowered in fantasy sport. Another response from the women in the NFL fan group was consistent with Davis & Duncan's (2006) study in that creating a good fantasy team to make successful moves was important to them.

Expressing how drafting a good team was a significant factor in playing fantasy football,

a participant stated:

Trying to get your team set and everything looking up stats like ok how did they do the past year stuff like that. I mean that plays a huge role because obviously you want to get the good players and that will make your team clutch. (Samantha)

By creating effective moves, fantasy football players indirectly but intentionally display their sport knowledge. Through analysis of the data, external regulation was communicated by the NFL fan participant's motivation to win in order to establish themselves as assertive players.

Social Integration. Because fantasy football acts as a means where players can socially interact with league members or others who play, participation in fantasy football was considered a social benefit, particularly an advantage that would help them talk to men. One participant expanded on this, and suggested it was a reason why women played fantasy football:

When you can go up and talk with a bunch of group of guys about sports maybe it makes you feel empowered you have something to talk about. They [women] do it [play fantasy football] just because it gives them something to speak to their boyfriends about or husbands about because most of the time there communication skills are really lacking because they don't have something in common and so you find a common ground. (Debra)

Referring back to social affiliation and in and out-groups gender in sport have generally considered men being part of the in-group, and women being excluded (McDonald & Milne, 1999; Ruihley & Billings, 2012). Consequently, external regulation behavior

embodied by women may facilitate participation to gain the social reward of being part of the in-group, and avoid the punishment of being part of the out-group.

As stated previously, participants indicated a benefit from playing fantasy football was that they could enhance their sports knowledge. However, the women also felt strengthening their sport knowledge could benefit them in other ways. One woman who did not play, for instance, expressed that being knowledgeable about fantasy football could help her connect with male coworkers within the sport industry. She explained that it can sometimes be difficult for women to gain acceptance in male-dominated fields, but by sharing an affinity for fantasy football it may encourage men to interact more with their female colleagues. Expressing how lack of interest in this field can hinder communication among men and women, Debra stated “if you don’t have something that there [men] interested in talking about you wont carry on probably more than a minute conversation with them.”

Other NFL fans also agreed that playing fantasy football would be a benefit to use in the workplace or during an interview as common topic to talk about. For example, one participant recalled her time working at Nike, and the consistent fantasy football conversations that would take place:

I know it [fantasy football] through my friends, I have a lot of guy friends and they would be like my fantasy teams going to do this, and I worked at Nike last semester because I wasn’t here and so all they were talking about was fantasy, and I was like so what do you win, and they were like you win satisfaction, and if you pay to be in a league you win money, and I am like oh my god. That’s all

they would talk about, when it happened during work they talked about it at work, they talked about it over Twitter, when we went out they talked about. I was just like all you guys do is talk about fantasy, if you're going to talk about it, help me understand. (Brandy)

When I asked Brandy if her male co-workers helped her understand she responded, "kind of, like it was hard, they were like (Brandy) your never going to understand, and I was like I want to learn I want to understand". Because males value sport in their lives, women may elect these traits as well to gain association. Therefore, identified regulation may stimulate women to play fantasy football not specifically because they are interested in it, but because it can help them establish better connections with males and co-workers.

Competition. Throughout the study many of the participants affirmed their competitive drive to win in fantasy football. Although the women felt that men were more competitive in fantasy football than women, many of them stated that they wanted to play and enjoyed playing for the satisfaction of beating males. Jamie, a fantasy football user, expressed how she felt about playing in her male dominated league, "I am competitive, and I just wanted to beat all the guys, I wanted to show that I did know something". In addition, fantasy football users indicated that playing with family, friends, or significant others would create an incentive for them to play by beating someone they were close to. Expressing her desire to beat her boyfriend in her league, a fantasy football user stated:

My boyfriend, of course I want to beat him, and even though he's my boyfriend

he's not going to let me win he wants to beat me too. He wanted me to play, because you know he's competitive so he wanted to beat me he didn't care, he wasn't going to let up the week I played him, but I beat him both times, that was the only thing that mattered to me. (Katie)

An NFL fan explained why she would not mind playing in a fantasy football league with men.

When I play I like the challenge, and I like to be at the same level, whether in a men's league or in a women's league I don't like to be short changed, in other words I don't like them to think because we are women that we cant do it. (Debra)

By playing with men these women fulfilled their need to beat males in order to feel achieved. The women's external regulations motivated there need to gratify there self-pride through participation in fantasy football. Additionally, because the data confirmed that money was not an influence to play fantasy football for any of the women, I concluded that the satisfaction they receive from holding bragging rights was valued as there ultimate prize for playing.

Family. Study participants recognized family as an influential characteristic in their NFL fanship and fantasy football participation. The women stated that they became fans of their favorite teams because their families were initially fans of those teams. In addition, all fantasy football users stated that they were invited to play fantasy football by a family member that also helped them get acquainted with the rules and procedures of fantasy football. Recalling her start in fantasy football, one participant stated:

I was introduced through my niece and her husband, they just kept trying to get

me to play...it was kind of a family league that we had... I had my niece helping me to start, but then after that the last couple years I was doing it by myself after I learned how to do it. (Jamie)

Further, NFL fans stated the women they knew who played fantasy football were also involved because a family member or significant other invited them to play.

Another motivation to playing with family members versus unknown players within the fantasy football group was that it made them feel more comfortable playing. For example, participants implied that playing with family members or close friends helped avoid negative associations within their leagues. Mary explained why playing with family and close friends was preferable:

Yea, I would rather keep it that way [referring to playing with close friends and family in her league]. I know all of them, like she said if you're going to argue with anybody, make it with people you know and you know how to mend those fences. (Mary)

NFL fans indicated that if they were to play fantasy football they would also like to play with close friends and family members because they were beginners. In addition, this group felt strongly that they would be more motivated to play fantasy football if family members invited them, were in their leagues, or showed them how to play. For instance, one study participant conveyed her interest in playing fantasy football because of her family:

I mean it's something I would want to try it out, I mean I see all my family relatives do it and I want to try it out. I want to see how I can impress myself and

especially in fantasy football for the first time ever and see how far I can go with my fantasy team compared to my Uncle's team. (Samantha)

Besides playing with relatives, the women were also asked about playing with their male significant others, some participants suggested it would attract them to play because it provided quality time. Proposing her interest in playing with her significant other, an NFL fan participant suggested:

I would definitely do it to you know spend more time together [with boyfriend]. I think it would bring us closer together especially since he's like the front-runner in kind of knowing the most about what's going on and a lot of what I know is from him. (Jessica)

Apart from the women's feeling about playing with significant others, when asked about how their significant others felt about them playing many of the women said that the men would not mind. One fantasy football user conveyed how her boyfriend initially did not like her participating in fantasy football, but after the season ended he felt differently:

At first he didn't really like that I was involved with it because that was kind of his area, but by the end of it he was like you should be more involved we should try this again next year and you know you learn a little more next year. (Mary)

Another participant explained how her boyfriend would feel about her playing fantasy football with him, and how he currently willingly explains to her how the game of fantasy football works, as well as NFL games:

I don't think it would drastically hurt his feelings or anything, I think he would probably be proud afterwards. I think he finds it interesting that I like sports, and

he teaches me, we will be watching a game and I'll try to hear what's going on, and he will talk over the game to explain his knowledge, and maybe he wants to impress me with his knowledge. (Jessica)

These responses suggested that fantasy football acts as a site where both males and females can strengthen relationships through the utilization of fantasy football. Here integrated regulation occurs as the men fulfill their need to show off their sport knowledge, and value the initiative there significant other is taking to participate in an activity that they consider theirs. In return the women gain and satisfy their need to bond or spend quality time.

Demotivations

When study participants were asked why more women do not play fantasy football many suggested a number of barriers women might encounter. First, the women indicated the perceived competitive nature of fantasy football was off-putting. While the women believed they were competitive, they felt men were more competitive, and such competitiveness sometimes manifested in negative ways. Dilorio (1989) explained competition as "inherently masculine," and Jessica's comments seemed to support this contention:

Guys are way more competitive I think, I mean of course girls can be competitive but not as competitive. Yea, I mean especially when it comes to football, I mean I honestly personally haven't met a girl that's super competitive about football, just because its always the guys I guess I grew up knowing that guys are competitive about football, its just the culture. (Jessica)

Another participant explained how fantasy football was just fun for her and the other female in her league, but the men took it more seriously:

It was fun for the other girlfriend and myself and for the guys it was very competitive, and it did get a little ugly between them sometimes. They had a separate league that was for money, and then this one they said it was just for fun, but we could tell for them it was really competitive. (Mary)

Findings also revealed that the women were bothered by how the men in their leagues took their competitiveness to another level. Katie expressed how the competition among the men in her league bothered her, “I just wanted to play for fun, and some of my boyfriends friends got a little intense, and that made me upset. That’s the only reason I didn’t want to play with them anymore”. Another participant pointed to aggressive competition between men in fantasy football leagues as a reason she does not play:

Honestly, I hear how some of my brother in-law and them talk about it and it becomes overwhelming like for someone else it’s going to be overwhelming. I like competition I do, but I don’t like the fight that occurs within it like their real aggressive with one another. (Debra)

These perceptions provided a connection between previous studies that have described fantasy sport as an opportunity for men “to exercise dominance over each other, emphasizing winning as a means of bolstering one’s masculinity and pride” (Davis & Duncan, 2006, p.254). Because of the aggressive environment fantasy football proposes it may not be a receptive area for women, which could inhibit women from playing (Ruihley & Billings 2012).

Consequently, the women were interested in playing in an all-female or even split fantasy football league because the male mentality would not be there. Jamie explained how the competitive atmosphere in a female fantasy football league would be different, “I know there’s a lot of females that get pretty serious about it. I just don’t think it would be quite as cutthroat type situation”. In addition, the women expressed that playing in a female league would not necessarily decrease competitiveness, but would make the women feel more equal, as one participant specified:

We wouldn’t get judged, because you know with the guys they know you know nothing or we don’t get taken advantage of because they know you nothing so, I think it would be pretty equal. (Katie)

Similarly, another participant expressed how she would like to involve herself in an even split league to relieve the overwhelming male presence:

I’d do a more co-ed type league, like girls and guys on the same, just so its not so like I feel like guys have it, when there on it they don’t really want to hear what you have to say anyway, so its like they know the sport you don’t know the sport, and you can see it in a women’s perspective as well so its like I think I’d like it better that way on a co-ed. (Debra)

Because men are thought to be more assertive in fantasy football, it may not be as appealing to women. If women feel more comfortable participating in female or even split leagues, the NFL should propose or advertise more leagues like these to increase the female demographic in fantasy sport.

Second, study participants stated that women do not play fantasy football because

it promotes male exclusivity, specifically that men did not invite women to play. One participant explained why this might be:

I think, one maybe the fear of a women being better than men, I think also two is they don't think women are as educated in sports so there not going to be able to talk to them like most men, you know like they can talk to men about sports and have an hour 2 hour conversation about sports. (Debra)

The women's thoughts toward the absent invitation's from males can be compared to Ruihley & Billings (2012) explanation of men as "market mavens". Market mavens are labeled as highly involved consumers in a market place willing to publicize to others about their involvement in activities. Ruihley & Billings (2012) study discovered it was likely that men were advertising fantasy sport more than women, and as a result can create a gender impact where more men join and participate. Although the participants were outspoken about the lack of invitation from males, ironically most participants and the women they knew who played fantasy football said they were introduced to fantasy football through a male friend, male significant others, or male family members.

Third, the participants attributed lack of women participation in fantasy football due to traditional gender norms. Participants expressed that women do not play fantasy football because they are not as engaged in football as much as men. Women considered fantasy football to be a "man thing", thus decreasing its attraction when introduced to women. Katie explained why:

Girls like they just would not have the interest, I mean there are some girls who do like football like me but I just never got into it you know. I always thought it

was a guy's thing, but once I tried it I thought it was fun. (Katie)

The women also mentioned how most major sports included both genders, but football was one of the few where males only play. Two participants stated how not being able to play football might impact fantasy football participation:

When it comes to sports I don't think women have the respect that they deserve. I think that it would make a lot more women get into it [fantasy football] if they actually played football or even like thought about going out and playing flag football, or something like that. (Jessica)

I think to like something to its fullest extent you want to be able to have experienced it or played it in some sort. I think if women did play more football of course I think there would be more women that actually played fantasy football. (Debra)

Therefore, because females have never experienced actually playing the sport of football, they may be less likely to participate in fantasy football.

Moreover, participants felt because fantasy football was considered a male domain, men tend to put women down for participating in the activity. A few participants expressed their frustration:

The one thing that did bother me, and I'm not crazy about sports and everything was when one of the guys said we have our league you have shopping go do that on Sundays, and I thought that would be nice but that's kind of rude. (Mary)

Well I have heard this from my boyfriend, not like he is sexist or anything, but he's like why is that women reporting on football they don't even play. Like they

don't think of women as being athletic, its really annoying, just football culture I guess since women don't really play they just make it seem like we are along for the ride, but for those of us who do understand are like you know I know sports and I know players and I don't' know they try to make women look down sometimes. (Jessica)

I think the stereo-type, if a women plays a certain sport or does a certain thing she might be looked at as maybe not so of a women. More so if she is gay, straight and not girly, so men I think they might be intimidate by something like that like they want there women to be a certain way and maybe that's what women want to portray themselves to be, and so maybe that's why women don't play. Of course I could be wrong in that sense but I think a lot of women if they do something out the ordinary and maybe 9 times out of 10 maybe its true for some and maybe its not true for some, there judged based off of not being what a women is. (Debra)

These statements support past research that suggest gender roles carry over to fantasy sport (Davis & Duncan, 2006; Ruihley & Billings, 2012). Fantasy sports have generally been deemed a masculine area where women are considered inferior and vulnerable (Duncan & Davis, 2006). For example, a fantasy football participant expressed the only reason she was invited into her fantasy football league was just to fill a roster spot. This implicated that women play a secondary role even when they do get invited. They are not generally thought of as good candidates for the fantasy football league, but are chosen because there was no other choice.

Further, participants who had boyfriends playing fantasy football stated that their

boyfriends would not care or feel intimidated if they played in a league with them. The women even felt like their boyfriends would want them to play, but when they were asked if their boyfriends would care if they had a successful fantasy season or won the league, they all seemed to respond in a similar way. Mary stated that “Jeff [her husband] would not be happy.” Katie responded, “I don’t think he would be happy either, my boyfriend. Probably a little emasculated”. Two other participants expressed comparable answers:

No, like I don’t think it would intimidate him, but I think he would be like oh my god my girlfriend is like beating me in fantasy football, but I don’t think it would be like intimidating, it would probably be embarrassing. I mean I don’t think he would want me to stop playing, I think he would be like dang she’s really good, but I’m sure like deep down he would be like oh my god I can’t believe this.

(Laura)

He wouldn’t be intimidated probably because he thinks he knows more, and what I know he taught me, but I think he would just I don’t know he might just enjoy the fact that I’m playing at all. Probably unless I started to win then he would get like especially if we were playing for money I’m sure he would definitely be like what! (Jessica).

Women participation in fantasy football is portrayed as acceptable as long as the participation is not viewed threatening to men. Fantasy football users also admitted that they received help from male league members, and some males even helped run their team. Davis & Duncan (2006) considered this as a representation of the “superiority that

men have over women”, and fortifies how men contain women at a subordinate position within fantasy sport (p. 258).

Lastly, NFL fan participants recognized fantasy football as being too time consuming and considered it as negative factor that discouraged them from playing. Indicating the excessive work that goes into fantasy football, an NFL fan participant stated:

I think, I mean unless you really know your players and your able to understand their stats and so forth I think its really time consuming because you have to keep up with it. You would have to really make sure your complete stats, your always following it and that’s all you talk about. You know so its like, there are other things other than fantasy football. (Debra)

The NFL fan further explained how the amount of sports knowledge needed could be intimidating for women new to fantasy football:

The intimidation could be there not knowing the sport to its full potential, it would probably be the intimidating part because I couldn’t say something and be like a rebuttal for that because I don’t know what I’m talking about. (Debra)

Due to the perceptions that one has to know large amounts of sport information in order to manage a successful fantasy football team, participants implicated the time needed to keep up-to-date with player stats could be overwhelming. Further, the NFL fan group explained that they did not play because they initially held the perception of the fantasy football format as complicated, and as such, had not taken the time to understand the basic concepts. As one participant stated:

I think when you first hear about it you're like what [the format], because when I heard about it I was like what are you talking about it? Then someone showed me and I was like oh ok I see what your saying. (Brandy)

In sum, women may be discouraged from joining a fantasy football league because they perceive the format to be too intricate, thus making it less likely for them to take the time to understand it. As a result, participants expressed for an easier layout where they would not have to keep up with many athletes in the NFL. Susan suggested a simpler way to attain information about the players, "If there was like a weekly thing that they sent out like this is what this player did this what, that would help instead of having to watch the game or research it". The NFL fan group also suggested tutorials or leagues where they could play against themselves as a way that would help them warm up to fantasy football.

The participants' perspectives conveyed that participation in fantasy football was reinforced by a variety of benefits. For instance, the women felt actively competing in a fantasy football league allowed them to increase their knowledge of sport, experience a heightened sense of excitement and drama when watching professional football, keep up with there favorite NFL athletes, showcase their sport knowledge, socially interact with males and co-workers, win bragging rights, play with family, and bond with significant others. While the participants expressed a number of positive outcomes associated with playing, they also discussed demotivations that discouraged participation rates among female football fans. For example, the women identified fantasy football as an area that highlighted aggressive competition from males, promoted male exclusivity, encouraged traditional gender norms, and was considered to be too time consuming because of a

complicated format.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Research question one sought to find the motivations that influenced women participation in fantasy football. This study found the motivations of sport knowledge, drama, and attachment to players, social integration, competition, and family as emergent influences toward women participation in fantasy football. Sports knowledge emerged as a benefiting factor in that it would make managing the participant's fantasy football team easier, and would also enhance their sport knowledge. The women also referenced their desire to showcase their knowledge as a personal challenge in order to create successful moves and establish themselves as dominant players. As a result of exhibiting their sports knowledge, women may experience an enhanced sense of accomplishment and empowerment. Further, engaged NFL fans were more attracted to play because they wanted to showcase their sports knowledge. As such, the findings suggested that women who have a more complex understanding of football are more likely to play fantasy football.

In addition, the participants expressed that fantasy football created more drama by including high stress moments related to there fantasy football games, which made watching football more exciting. By playing fantasy football it created a sense of thrill for fantasy football users. In addition, because fantasy football relies on player production, increased NFL viewership was noted among the fantasy football user group. Participants were also enticed to play fantasy football because it allows them to draft there favorite players or players they thought were attractive. Physical attractiveness, personality, and

career accomplishments were found to attract participants to watch and keep up with the athletes. Overall, fantasy football was presumed as another outlet, in which NFL fans and fantasy football users could keep up with their favorite players.

As stated previously, sport knowledge was seen as a benefit derived from playing fantasy football, and participants suggested that being sport educated would help them socially interact with men within the sports context. A unique finding was that women thought fantasy football was a beneficial tool in the workplace to carry on conversations with co-workers or use during interviews. The participants expressed a desire to better understand the concept of fantasy football in order to achieve in-group status with co-workers. Because the women wanted to learn about fantasy football to be part of the in-group, it was concluded that women may adopt the value of sport in order to socially affiliate themselves with a group. Additionally, competition proved to be a dominant factor for female participation in fantasy football. The satisfaction of beating men was valued as the prize for playing in fantasy football, and resulted as a sense of accomplishment and empowerment for the women.

Finally, all participants' fanship with an NFL team was attributed to the influence of family members. Family members also impacted participation to play by introducing the participants to fantasy football, and assisted participants in teaching them the overall concept. Participants also specified that playing with family or close friends made them more comfortable and enjoyable to play. It was also noted that the women would be influenced to play if family members invited them, guided them on how to play, or were in their fantasy football leagues. Women also felt playing fantasy football provided the

opportunity to spend quality time with significant others, which allowed them to form closer relationships.

Research question number two sought to find demotivations that inhibited female participation in fantasy football. The women in this study considered fantasy football as an area that highlighted aggressive male competition, promoted male exclusivity, associated negative factors derived from traditional gender norms, and perceived it to be too time consuming because of a complicated format as reasons that discouraged participation. Although, the women stressed they were competitive, the findings suggested the participants considered men to be, at times, aggressively competitive, which created a unwelcoming environment for women. Women also suggested a major reason why more women do not play was because men do not invite women enough.

Responses from study participants suggested that gender role socialization from real sports is carried over into fantasy football. The fact that women do not get to actually play the sport of football implicated that women may not be as engaged as men. Fantasy football was also identified as a male domain, and a site that to put women down. For example, women participation was considered tolerable unless the women constituted as a threat because they were winning. In this sense women were placed at an inferior status behind men, which included inviting women just to fill a roster spot. Lastly, women expressed that fantasy football seemed to be too time consuming. Because of the overwhelming workload of sports information you have to attain and keep up with it created a negative perception of an intricate format.

Further results included the motivations of vicarious achievement, control,

economics, and escape had no impact on the study participants. Vicarious achievement was not an emergent theme due to the fact that the women were not deemed as top runners in their leagues. Because the fantasy football users had never won their leagues or were not a top team to beat, vicarious achievement through their fantasy teams was absent. Because participants identified fantasy football as a male domain, the women did not consider it as a place where they felt in control but vulnerable. Surprisingly, most of the participants had not played fantasy football for money, and expressed that they would not play for money. Instead, they preferred to play for pure enjoyment. Escape was not a factor on account of the women not wanting to partake in fantasy football because it was too time consuming.

Theoretical Contributions

This research provided two key contributions to the existing literature. First, few scholars have used a self-determination theory lens in their qualitative studies. By using such an approach, the findings in the current study offered richer data related to the motivations for participation in fantasy sport compared to the data a quantitative study could have provided. For instance, I was able to uncover barriers or demotivation to participations, which previous quantitative studies have neglected to examine. Second, by exploring the female perspective, I was able to show how women may differ from men in terms of motivation to play fantasy sport in comparison to previous literature. As such I was able to discover a unique theme in that women see fantasy football participation as a way to connect with men in the sport industry, which can enhance personal relationship, career opportunities, and work experiences.

Practical Implications

The current study provides several practical implications that may be valuable to NFL marketers who seek to increase female involvement in the NFL product. My findings provided insight on what factors facilitate and inhibit women participation in fantasy football by analyzing the study through female perspectives. Therefore, the women's behaviors and attitudes toward fantasy football supplied practical implications for marketing efforts that include female fan involvement, advertising focus on females, and introduction suggestions for new or likely fantasy football prospects. For example, it was revealed that fantasy football users watched more games, and were interested in other players that were not on their favorite teams, while NFL fans preferred to watch their favorite teams, and were more likely to change the channel if a game was not interesting or close. If the NFL concentrates on targeting women, they can attract more spectators to watch more games than traditional NFL fans. Increasing women participation in fantasy football could also increase NFL fandom from players on their favorite teams, to other athletes in the NFL on other teams.

In addition, seeing that most fantasy football leagues are generally male constituted, new fantasy football users and NFL fans may be intimidated to play because of the high competition level. The women felt playing in female leagues and even split leagues brought them competitive safety because they were playing with other females. For that reason the NFL should cater to their female fans by increasing advertisement toward these types of leagues. Hosting special events in NFL team cities such as drafting parties, specifically for women, can also call awareness to fantasy football as well as

implement social interaction between women who may want to play and those who already do. By doing this female NFL fans may think of fantasy football in a different light, and would be more opened to the activity.

Barriers for this study also concluded that NFL fans initially conceptualized fantasy football as a complicated format, and thought it was time consuming inhibiting them to play. The NFL may want to consider providing introductory segments such as tutorials via Internet for beginners. Other suggestions to help increase involvement include leagues where participants could play against themselves or practice leagues so females could ease into playing, and providing accessible easy to read stat sheets as a way to better comprehend statistical information.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included the small sample size of ten participants, which may not have reflected the female demographic in fantasy football. Also, the sample was selected due to the fact that participants study concentrations and occupations involved themselves in the sport field. Therefore, participants were more likely to keep up with current sport news and invest their time watching sports. This strengthened the studies findings by including participants who were sport orientated, in which motivations and inhibitors could be better specifically highlighted.

Future Research Directions

While the study's sample represented a small portion of fantasy football users, quantitative research should be performed on female motivations in fantasy football to compare and contrast the findings from this research. Also, because participants in this

study were composed of a combination of NFL fans and fantasy football users, it would be interesting to sample first time female fantasy football users and high involved female fantasy football users to compare their motivations, and perceptions of fantasy football. Third, this study limited itself to fantasy football, further analysis over women in other fantasy sports would help the findings of this study gain credibility and dependability. Fourth, because participant's ages broadly ranged in this study, motivation comparisons should be looked over women in certain age groups. Lastly, qualitative and quantitative research should be performed with males and females over motivations in fantasy football to provide greater insight on gender differences.

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Figure 1. Self-determination continuum. Adapted from “Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being,” by R.M. Ryan and E.L. Deci, 2000, *American Psychologist*, 55(1), p. 72. Copyright 2000 by the American Psychologist Association.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

NFL fans

1. Talk to me about your NFL fandom
 - a. Who is your favorite team?
 - b. How much football do you watch during the NFL season?
2. Are you aware about fantasy football?
 - a. If you knew about it for awhile why do you not play?
3. What is fantasy football in your opinion?
 - a. Do you know how it works?
 - b. How do you know how it works?
4. Who do you know that plays fantasy football?
 - a. Does anyone close to you play?
 - b. Why do you think they play fantasy football?
5. How would your male family members, male friends, or significant others feel about you playing with them?
6. Is there anything you do not like about fantasy football?
 - a. Is it too time consuming?
 - b. Overrated?
 - c. Waste of money?
7. Would you ever want to participate in fantasy football?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?
 - c. What would it take to make you consider playing fantasy football?
 - d. Would you be more likely to play if
 - i. It did not take up so much time/ had more time?
 - ii. Different format?
 - iii. More of your family or friends did it?
 - iv. If someone helped you play?
8. What are some benefits that come from playing fantasy football?
9. Is fantasy football a game of chance or skill?

10. Why do you think other females who are NFL fans do not participate in fantasy football?

11. How could the NFL target women more to play fantasy football?

Fantasy football users

1. Tell me about your NFL fandom?
 - a. Who is your favorite team?
 - b. How much football do you watch during the NFL season?
2. How did you get introduced to fantasy football?
 - a. When did you start playing fantasy football?
3. Why do you play fantasy football?
 - a. What do you like about it?
 - b. Is it to enhance one's fandom, gain sports knowledge, take risks, to escape your daily life, interest in players, drama, socialize, spend time with family, receive rewards, compete, feel a sense of control?
4. How long have you been playing fantasy football?
 - a. What has been your specific involvement in fantasy football
 - i. Causal participant or a leader?
 - b. Have you ever won in your league?
 - c. How involved are you in fantasy football?
5. Tell me a little about your specific league? Such as who else is in it, is it more "for fun" or do you play for money?
 - a. What kind of league is it?
 - b. How many people play in your league?
 - c. How competitive is your league?
6. Do you ever console anyone for help?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?
7. What are some benefits that come from playing fantasy football?
8. Do you use resources on the Internet or TV to help you with your fantasy team?
 - a. Where do you get information for the draft?

9. Tell me about draft day. Is it something you just do online, or is it more of a gathering/party?
 - a. How or what do you use to draft in your league?
10. How do your male family members, male friends, or significant others feel about you playing with them?
11. Tell me what a typical Sunday for you is like during fantasy football season?
 - a. Does your league affect the way you watch games?
 - b. Do you communicate with other league members on Sundays?
12. What do you not like about fantasy football?
 - a. Is it too time consuming?
 - b. Overrated?
 - c. Waste of money?
13. Is fantasy football a game of chance or skill?
14. Are you a fan of any other of the four “major” sports? Have you ever done any other fantasy leagues besides football?
 - a. If not, why football?
15. Why do you think other females who are NFL fans do not participate in fantasy football?
16. How could the NFL target women more to play fantasy football?