Sport Scandal and Sponsorship Decisions: Team Identification Matters

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We conducted an experiment to investigate the impact of sport scandal on consumer attitudes toward a range of sport stakeholders. We examined the effects of fans' social identity (fan of scandalized team vs. fan of rival team), scandal severity (single perpetrator vs. multiple perpetrators), and the sponsor brand's response to the scandal (sponsorship retention vs. termination) on consumers' attitudes toward the implicated team, the scandal perpetrators, the sport, and sponsor brand. We find evidence of differential reactions to scandal reflecting social identity, such that fans support their own team despite increased scandal severity but negatively judge a rival team's transgressions. Results suggest that where fans are concerned, sponsors may be better served to continue with a sponsorship following scandal than to terminate, even for some forms of severe scandal. However, termination may receive more positive evaluation from rival team fans; hence continuation of sponsorship needs to accompany a tempered approach.

Keywords: social identity, sport fans, negative information, risk management, sponsorship

In recent years, the media has reported on a multitude of scandals involving off-field misbehavior by professional athletes, feeding the public's seemingly insatiable appetite for this type of news. Some of these scandals have clear and direct implications for sporting outcomes (e.g., doping by cyclist Lance Armstrong or match fixing by South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje) while others in reality have little connection with sporting outcomes (e.g., the extramarital affairs of golfer Tiger Woods or the elevator assault case of the National Football League's [NFL's] Ray Rice). Public opinion about such incidents is often strong and in some cases quite divided, owing to the high profiles of these athletes and the controversy of their behavior. In addition to attention from traditional mass media, the growing use of social media and the rising number of commercial activities connected to popular sports also lead to speedy dissemination of these incidents and the spread of negative publicity. Consequences can be devastating for the careers of those directly involved, but also potentially for linked stakeholders including associated athletes and sports teams, sporting bodies, and sponsoring brands (Wilson, Stavros, & Westberg, 2008). Our research aims to investigate the impact of transgressions by athletes on consumers' attitudes toward a range of sport stakeholders and, in particular, sponsor brands.

While sport scandals can be limited to a single individual, in team sports these can often involve multiple parties such as teammates, coaches, administrators, or other authorities and may include several instances of misbehavior (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Koch, 2013; Lee, Bang, & Lee, 2013). In the case of match fixing, for example, usually collusion among a number of individuals is required. Hughes and Shank (2005) highlighted the scale of impact this type of scandal can have, where transgressions by a few team members of a college football team were shown to ripple through the entire university network to influence not only the team's credibility but also faculty reputation, alumni support, and even student enrollment numbers.

Importantly, from a marketing perspective such scandals can also have negative repercussions for sponsors, given their affiliation with the team (Wilson et al., 2008). Brands may often view sponsorship of teams as a safer option than sponsorship of individual athletes (Hughes & Shank, 2005); however, when scandals in team sports do

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erupt, the decisions faced by sponsors can be complex, particularly where there are multiple parties involved. Some choose to terminate sponsorship agreements while others choose to stick with the team in question. For example, when allegations of child abuse aired against the NFL's Adrian Peterson in 2014, team sponsor Radisson Hotels terminated its sponsorship of his team, the Minnesota Vikings, while telecommunications brand Verizon decided to keep its contract with the Vikings in place (Roberts & Snyder, 2014). In team sports, the sponsor must decide whether "punishing" an entire team for the behavior of a few by severing the sponsorship might result in backlash from fans, or alternatively, whether continuing with a sponsorship might be perceived as condoning reprehensible behavior and, consequently, pose reputational risk. When an athlete in an individual sport becomes embroiled in a scandal (e.g., Tiger Woods in golf, Lance Armstrong in cycling), the entire basis for the sponsorship relationship is diminished because that individual is the sole focus. In contrast, decisions are less clear for sponsors of *teams* faced with scandal, since not all parties may be guilty, and since much of the basis for the sponsorship can often remain intact. Despite the considerable commercial and reputational risk faced by sponsors who indirectly become associated with sport scandal, academic research in this area remains limited. Much existing scandal research either has considered transgressions by athletes in individual sports (e.g., Doyle, Pentecost, & Funk, 2014; Knittel & Stango, 2014) or has examined the impacts of scandal on only a single stakeholder (e.g., Hughes & Shank, 2005; Wilson et al., 2008). Furthermore, only a few studies have employed the controlled experimental designs necessary to infer causal relationships (e.g., Carrillat & d'Astous, 2014; Fink et al., 2009).

In the current research, we investigate off-field scandals arising within team sports, where the potential exists for misbehavior by one or more persons. Because sport represents a setting in which people often hold very different allegiances (Lock, Funk, Doyle, & McDonald, 2014), we consider how consumer attitudes might differ based on whether they are fans of the scandalized team or fans of a rival team. We examine impacts in terms of consumer attitudes toward perpetrator(s) of the scandal, but also for other important stakeholders such as the associated team, the sport more generally, and the linked sponsor brand. We place an emphasis on attitudes toward the linked sponsor brand since sponsorship is contractual in nature and therefore open to termination. Our research makes three substantive contributions to this growing literature. First, we use social identity theory within the setting of sport scandal to show that consumer response to scandal is not uniform but instead depends on whether consumers identify with the sports team involved. Second, we demonstrate that consumer response is not consistent toward all stakeholders, and we explain the nature of response each stakeholder might expect. Third, we add to the literature by examining sponsor termination decisions and how consumers react to these decisions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptualizing Sport Scandal

Hughes and Shank (2005) conceptualize sport scandal as actions that are "either illegal or unethical, involve multiple parties over a sustained period of time, and whose impact affects the integrity of the sport with which they are associated" (p. 214). Thus, scandals involve clear breaches of codes of conduct or law. They can exist on a continuum of severity depending on the extent of illegality/immorality, number of persons involved, duration, and impact on the integrity of the sport, or a combination of these components. Importantly, a scandal differs from a simple transgression that might otherwise be commonplace in sport, such as violation of game rules. Consequently, fans' reactions toward a scandal can be expected to differ from their reactions toward negativity generated by natural consequences of competition (Fink et al., 2009).

A parallel for sport scandal is found in the field of celebrity endorsement. The impacts of negative endorser publicity on consumer evaluations of affiliated brands have been an important area of inquiry for advertising researchers (Um, 2013). Celebrity endorsers can become embroiled in scandals that can have adverse effects on the endorsed brand. Till and Shimp's (1998) study was one of the first to examine the conditions under which negative publicity about a celebrity affected the endorsed brand. Using an associative network memory framework, they found that a lowered evaluation of star athletes could reduce favorability of evaluations of the brand they endorsed. However, this effect was observed only when the celebrity endorser was fictitious and when consumers had scant knowledge structures for both brand and endorser. This implies that factors relating to consumers' relationships with the celebrity endorsers can mitigate their evaluations of the scandal and hence judgment of the endorsed brand. Subsequent research on scandal in celebrity endorsement has considered consumer response based on level of identification with the celebrity (Um, 2013). Specifically, consumers who were highly identified with the celebrities were found more likely to believe in their innocence and less likely to react unfavorably to the negative publicity than were consumers who were more weakly identified. Highly identified consumers were reported to feel proud of being a fan whereas weakly identified consumers felt guilty and ashamed of being connected to the celebrity. Naturally, highly identified consumers were more willing to purchase and recommend products endorsed by the celebrities.

Sport provides a context where star athletes or celebrity endorsers are given prominence either through direct participation or by serving as ambassadors, thereby creating linkages to the sport in the minds of consumers (Kelly, Ireland, Alpert, & Mangan, 2014). Prior studies have demonstrated that negativity engendered by these

sports figures can spill over to affiliated entities. Pope, Voges, and Brown (2009), for example, conducted a longitudinal study measuring attitude change following negative publicity surrounding team performance. Their research suggests that team performance did not damage the sponsor's image but did damage the perceived quality of the sponsor's product. Doyle et al. (2014) examined change in consumer attitudes toward a motorsport event and its sponsor after consumers were exposed to information about a linked celebrity committing a driving offense. Their findings suggest that negative perceptions are transferrable to affiliated entities even where there is not a direct contractual relationship (i.e., between the celebrity endorser and sponsor of the event). In addition, the impact of negative publicity was shown to be mitigated by familiarity with the event and sponsor brand, with increased familiarity leading to reduced likelihood of attitude change (Doyle et al., 2014). Taken together, the body of evidence for negative publicity spillover shows that negative publicity associated with an entity (e.g., a sports team) can influence consumers' evaluations of related stakeholders, and that this effect can vary with consumer characteristics such as level of identification.

Team Identification, Scandal Severity, and Response to Scandal

Social identity theory posits that individuals' identities are derived partly from their memberships in a variety of social groups, together with associated value and emotional significance (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Accordingly, we draw on social identity theory as an overarching framework to argue that consumer response to sport scandal, and consumer evaluation of affiliated stakeholders, are largely influenced by the identification they have with the sports team implicated (i.e., the extent to which the person is a fan). Sports teams can provide important building blocks for social identity development, as people can often achieve a sense of who they are through sports team identification (Lock et al., 2014; Madrigal, 2000).

In situations where group membership is salient, individuals are thought to have a basic motivation to maintain a positive identity by preserving the group to which they belong (the in-group) and its distinctiveness from other groups (out-groups; Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000). In intergroup settings, individuals are said to adopt comparison strategies that allow them to view their group as superior to other groups (Reid & Hogg, 2005). In a sports context, for example, fans of a sports team might pay greater attention to some dimension on which their own team rates more highly than other teams (e.g., having a strong record of wins historically even if currently performing poorly). Alternatively, fans might alter the way they assign value to salient group qualities, to reject a potentially negative comparison (e.g., downplaying on-field player aggression or misbehavior, instead viewing this as competitiveness or passion; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The tendency to bolster evaluations of one's own group in relation to others is termed *in-group bias* (Aberson et al., 2000). This can take a number of forms but in general relates to when overly positive appraisals are attributed to the in-group or when unjustly negative appraisals are attributed to an out-group (Wann & Grieve, 2005). It may be particularly apparent in situations where an out-group exists with which the in-group member is highly motivated to avoid being associated. Such groups are termed *dissociative out-groups* (Englis & Solomon, 1995; White & Dahl, 2007) and are relevant to social identities in sporting contexts where strong group rivalries often exist (e.g., in the English Premier League, an Arsenal fan might view nonfans as part of a general out-group, but fans of the rival team Tottenham as part of a dissociative out-group). The mere perception of belonging to a specific group can be sufficient to generate in-group bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), but this can be exacerbated by the presence of an out-group, and especially a dissociative out-group, and it is likely to manifest in the context of sport scandal.

From a social identity perspective, a sport scandal represents a rule-breaking instance where one or more in-group members engage in acts destructive to the group. Although some teams possess "rogue" or "outlaw" images (e.g., Oakland Raiders, Millwall FC), and transgressions by members may in fact reinforce the team's identity, issues arise when the scandal and salience of the information encountered does not match the team's identity. While this may be viewed negatively by other in-group members (e.g., fans), it may not be sufficient for them to abandon the team, or to switch loyalties to another team (i.e., an out-group), given that the team remains a source of social identity. An in-group bias may even result in sustained positive evaluations of the team by in-group fans in the face of a scandal, and conversely, particularly negative evaluations from out-group fans (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). Dietz-Uhler and colleagues (2002) found an in-group bias where fans sought to excuse transgressions made by an individual member of their favorite team but did not measure fan identification. Lee et al. (2013) examined the fit between the nature of transgression and the type of perpetrator response on in-group fans' willingness to forgive although responses from out-group fans were not considered. Extending individual athlete transgressions to a team sport context, Fink et al. (2009) demonstrated that identity strength could influence the extent of fans' support behaviors. They reported that in-group bias was reduced when an explanatory response from team leaders such as the coach and athletic director was weak (Fink et al., 2009). Although Fink et al. (2009) distinguished the responses from high-identifying and low-identifying fans, it remains unclear how rival fans would respond to such scandal. In the current research we examine responses from both fans of the scandalized team (i.e., in-group fans) and fans of a competitive rival team (i.e., out-group fans).

A potentially important variable in this type of situation, and one that remains unaddressed in the literature, is fans' tolerance threshold of scandals based on level of perceived severity. We propose here that fans' responses will be moderated by severity of the scandal. Support for this idea comes from several studies showing that the severity of the consequence as well as the nature of the action that caused it influence evaluations of the perpetrator (e.g., Kahneman, Schkade, & Sunstein, 1998; Umphress, Simmons, Folger, Ren, & Bobocel 2013) and the strength of punishment deemed appropriate for the perpetrator (e.g., Kahneman et al., 1998; Karelaia & Keck, 2013). In general, deviant acts or transgressions that inflict more harm on the in-group are considered more severe and unethical (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Despite calls for studies to assess the impact of scandal severity associated with sport scandal types (Doyle et al., 2014; Fink et al., 2009), this has not been a focus of past research. We begin to address this issue in the current work by varying scandal severity as part of our experimental manipulation.

Hypothesis Development

Attitudes Toward the Team

Based on the social identity theory idea that sport fans essentially fall into in-groups and out-groups (i.e., dissociative out-groups), we argue that fans will be more tolerant of their own group's transgressions than they will be of similar out-group transgressions. According to the *ultimate attribution error*, when an in-group member engages in negative behavior, unless it is ongoing and representative of a group norm, fellow in-group members will tend to attribute this to nonnormative temporary situational factors, or specific individuals, rather than to the in-group itself (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). In contrast, when an out-group member engages in negative behavior, it is attributed to stable characteristics and considered typical of the out-group (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). In the context of sport scandal, we propose that in-group members may discount some level of misbehavior by group members when evaluating the group because of the ultimate attribution error.

However, as scandal becomes more severe (e.g., involvement by a greater number of in-group members), the behavior may start to impact group evaluations negatively in that it is taken to be more indicative of group norms. Research investigating sports spectator behavior has shown that fans resort to certain mechanisms for coping with an esteem threat. Specifically, *cutting off reflected failure* (CORFing) may be used by fans as a way to increase the distance between themselves and the unsuccessful others, such as a poorly performing team (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). The team implicated in a severe scandal can be viewed as a notable group failure that activates self-protective motives. In other words, CORFing is driven by the desire to maintain a positive social identity. Wann and Branscombe (1990) further highlighted that people highly identified with the team would demonstrate a reduced tendency to CORF compared with people who are low in allegiance, given the team is central to their identity. Thus, in-group fans may show disapproval but not necessarily want to cut off the association. While attitudes toward the team may not become negative per se, we would anticipate some decline with higher levels of scandal severity. We expect that out-group fans will display relatively stable negative attitudes toward the scandalized team across levels of scandal severity. This is because the out-group likely holds a negative view of the team more generally and attributes negative behavior to stable group characteristics.

H1: In-group fans will have more favorable attitudes toward their team compared to out-group fans, and this will extend to when a sport scandal has occurred.

H2: In-group fans' attitudes toward the team will become less favorable for higher levels of scandal severity, but out-group fans' attitudes will be stable regardless of severity.

Attitudes Toward the Perpetrator

While it is expected that sport fans will maintain relatively positive attitudes toward their favored team when a scandal occurs, this is unlikely to generalize to those specifically responsible for perpetrating the scandal, regardless of their being in-group members. Work conducted in social identity theory explains that in some situations in-group members will derogate and punish a deviant member who engages in rule-breaking behavior (Hutchison, Abrams, Gutierrez, & Viki, 2008). The in-group perpetrator, or the "black sheep" (Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988), is seen as an atypical in-group member and evaluated negatively—in some cases even more negatively than an out-group member who engages in identical behavior (Hutchison & Abrams, 2003; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988). The effect may in part be due to a form of vicarious shame, in that shared group membership can increase one's embarrassment by association (Lewis & Sherman, 2010; Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005). Evaluating an in-group perpetrator harshly can also serve to protect the social identity of in-group members and reinforce important group norms (Castano, Paladino, Coull, & Yzerbyt, 2002; Hutchison et al., 2008).

In a similar vein, CORFing may be used by fans as a way of distancing themselves and the group from undesirable in-group members such as those who perform poorly or behave badly (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Because fans derive part of their self-esteem from their affiliation with the team, CORFing provides a strategy to cope with identity threat. Out-group fans, however, can seize on opportunities to denigrate rivals by engaging in *blasting* (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). This refers to emphasizing the failings or misbehavior of the rival members and perhaps attributing these qualities to the

rival group as a whole. Accordingly, our expectation in the context of sport scandal is that fans will seek to distance themselves from perpetrators, evaluating specific perpetrators negatively while maintaining favorable evaluations of the team as a whole. Out-group fans, on the other hand, will evaluate both perpetrators and the associated team similarly negatively.

> *H3:* Following exposure to sport scandal information, in-group fans will simultaneously display favorable attitudes toward the team and unfavorable attitudes toward scandal perpetrators while out-group fans will display unfavorable attitudes both toward the team and toward perpetrators.

We further expect that any deviant member will be evaluated unfavorably regardless of whether they are acting alone or with others. Hence, when scandal severity is measured in terms of the number of persons involved, fans' attitudes toward perpetrators will be similarly unfavorable regardless of severity. Out-group fans' attitudes toward perpetrators from the in-group will also be negative irrespective of severity for the same reasons, because out-group fans already hold negative attitudes toward in-group members.

> *H4*: Both in-group fans and out-group fans will show unfavorable attitudes toward perpetrators, regardless of levels of scandal severity (i.e., number of perpetrators involved).

Attitudes Toward the Sport

Across most sports, the governing body plays a crucial role in building credibility and trust and in ensuring the sustainability of the sport (Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2014). Thus, understanding the impact of scandal on the sport itself is important since negative behavior of athletes is often assumed to reflect badly on the sports they represent. A series of wrongdoings by the players and teams of Australia's National Rugby League highlights the problem. Many in the sport have conceded that a string of scandals involving salary cap breaches, match fixing, violence, and drugs have tarnished the sport's reputation (The Daily Telegraph, 2010). Similarly, doping by athletes in sports such as the NFL in the United States has led to questions about the very integrity of the sport and highlighted the proliferation of scandal in sport (Bailes & McCloskey, 2005).

We expect that attitudes toward the sport will be impacted similarly for both in-group and out-group members. This is because, when considering responses based on superordinate group affiliation (e.g., being a fan of the sport in general), responses across the subgroups may become similar because of the overarching shared affiliation (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Kunkel et al., 2014). We additionally expect that attitudes toward the sport for both groups will decline with scandal severity, as the misbehavior begins to appear more normative of the sport in general, as outlined previously in discussing the ultimate attribution error.

> *H5*: Following exposure to sport scandal information, attitudes toward the sport will become less favorable for higher levels of scandal severity for both in-group and out-group fans.

Sponsor Decisions and Attitudes Toward the Sponsor

Marketers cultivate sports sponsorship arrangements to facilitate outcomes such as brand awareness, brand image, and favorable brand attitudes (Chien, Cornwell, & Pappu, 2011; Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005). Sponsors can form positive associations in a variety of ways including through naming rights, venue signage, player or team endorsements, and athletes' very visible use and consumption of supplied products (Kelly et al., 2014). Consequently, there may be considerable commercial implications for sponsor brands linked to sport scandal because of these numerous marketing activities built around the connection with the sport (Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008).

Much of the existing literature might recommend that sponsors distance themselves from those athletes or teams involved when a scandal erupts, to avoid making linkages salient in the minds of consumers (Roehm & Tybout, 2006) and to avoid the appearance of condoning negative behavior (Messner & Reinhard, 2012). In these situations sponsors must weigh the consequences of maintaining the arrangement against outcomes associated with terminating the contract, including sacrificing past financial investments and forgoing potential future commercial return. Where sponsors choose to continue with a sponsorship they presumably envisage that the impacts of the scandal will eventually wane or that fans will be able to sufficiently discriminate where to lay blame (Robertson, 2015). Many of these sponsors issue statements condemning the behavior. For example, in response to a spate of violence and assault scandals involving NFL athletes in 2014, sponsors such as Campbell Soup and Anheuser-Busch issued statements distancing themselves from the behavior while keeping contracts in place (Boudway, 2014).

Brands linked to a sports fan's in-group through sponsorship of a team can be thought to evoke a self–brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) that will differ across in-group and out-group members (Weeks & Mahar, 2014). For example, while fans of Manchester United might identify with Adidas due to its sponsorship of the club, fans of rival team Liverpool might view Adidas less favorably because of this relationship. Madrigal (2000) argued that high-identifying fans would not only support the source of identification (i.e., the team) directly but also offer indirect support to brands sponsoring the team as a form of reciprocation. In the face of scandal when a sponsor terminates its contract, we expect that the in-group fans are likely to feel negatively about the termination decision since they may view this as abandoning the in-group in a time of need and damaging the group identity. We expect in-group fans to show more favorable attitudes toward the sponsor following a decision to retain the sponsorship.

We propose a reverse pattern of responses from out-group fans. Specifically, out-group fans are likely to feel positively about a sponsorship termination decision because this reinforces their negative view of the rival team and because it may represent a public form of *blasting* (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980).

H6: Following exposure to sport scandal information, in-group fans' attitudes toward the sponsor will be more favorable for a sponsorship retention decision than a termination decision while out-group fans' attitudes toward the sponsor will be more favorable with a sponsorship termination decision than a retention decision.

Response to sponsor decisions may also vary with the severity of scandal, particularly if it is the case that in-group members evaluate the group less favorably when scandal appears more normative, as discussed previously. Literature on deviant behavior suggests that deviant acts with more serious negative consequences tend to be punished more harshly compared with mild acts of deviance (Kahneman et al., 1998; Karelaia & Keck, 2013). As such, sponsorship termination might be deemed as more justifiable for higher levels of scandal severity, and this should be reflected in more positive attitudes toward the sponsor for termination decisions at higher levels of severity. We expect this to be similar for both in-group and out-group fans since both groups should view the higher levels of scandal severity as a more justifiable reason for punishment.

H7: Attitudes toward the sponsor will be more favorable for termination decisions relating to higher levels of scandal severity for both in-group and out-group fans.

In summary, the present research expands prior work on team identification and negative publicity effects by testing whether sport fans show differential bias toward scandal and whether this is moderated by the level of scandal severity. We also make an important first step in understanding how these responses might differ for a range of sport stakeholders. Figure 1 summarizes the key constructs and our hypotheses.

Method

In this study, we consider the situation of a sports team where either one or multiple members are implicated in a scandal. We assess the impact of scandal by measuring consumer responses toward four stakeholders: (a) the team to which the perpetrator(s) belongs, (b) the perpetrator(s) of the scandal, (c) the sport, and (d) the team sponsor.

We used a scenario involving an athlete doping scandal in a team sport context. To confirm the prevalence of this type of scandal, we conducted an initial archival analysis of 509 newspaper articles drawn from a search of the Factiva database using relevant search terms such as "sport scandal," "athlete misconduct," and so forth, spanning the years 2005–2010. The analysis showed that approximately 1% of the articles related to on-field scandals that did not impact play (e.g., racial slurs, biting), approximately 5% related to on-field scandals that did impact play (e.g., ball tampering, use of illegal equipment), 31% were about off-field scandals that did not affect play (e.g., sexual assault, drunken behavior), and 63% related to off-field scandals that impacted play (e.g., doping, match-fixing). Thus, overwhelmingly, off-field incidents appear to dominate sport scandal reports in the media, in particular those that impact play. We therefore considered doping as a reasonable choice of scandal type for our study.

The context we employed was college football based around an existing rivalry between two major teams, Team A and Team B. The two teams have a strong history
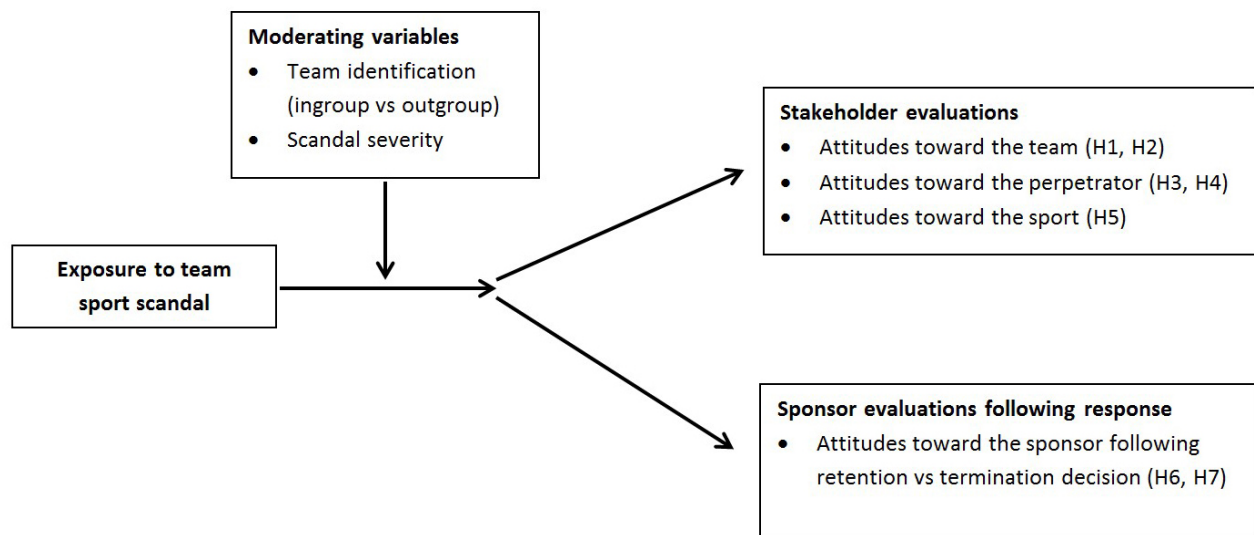

Figure 1 — Graphical summary of key constructs and hypotheses.

of rivalry with dedicated fan bases, making them suitable for testing our in-group and out-group hypotheses. We used real team names in experimental stimuli but anonymized them here for reporting purposes.

Design and Participants

We used a 2 (social identity: in-group, out-group) × 3 (scandal severity: neutral no-scandal, single-person scandal, multiple-person scandal) × 2 (sponsor decision: retain, terminate) between-subjects experimental design. Our four dependent variables were attitude ratings of the team, perpetrator(s), sport, and sponsor (Att_{team}, Att_{perp}, Att_{sport}, and $Att_{sponsor}$). Our manipulations were implemented using fictitious sports news in an online survey, where an incident was described for one team (Team A) but evaluated by fans of both teams. Fans of each team were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). We advertised the study as "understanding perceptions of news stories." Respondents first answered a series of screening questions relating to team mascots, battle songs, and a past victory to ensure they were truly fans and hence eligible to participate. The survey was attempted by 821 respondents, but only 519 passed the screening questions. Of those respondents, 97 were excluded because they indicated being a fan of both teams or showed low/high identification with both teams. Our final sample consisted of 422 highly identified fans (205 for Team A, 217 for Team B). Responses to demographic questions suggests a predominantly male sample (70.5% male) as might be expected for college football, with ages ranging between 18 and 65 (the mean age was 35). The survey took approximately 10 min to complete, and respondents received $1 for participating.

Materials and Procedure

Participants accessed the study via MTurk and were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. The news story consisted of three paragraphs (see the Appendix). The first paragraph provided a description of the issue, the person(s) involved, and a brief response from the team. The second paragraph gave a detailed description of the issue and highlighted its relative severity, with a description of either an individual or whole-team scandal. The third paragraph explained the sponsor's decision to stand by the team or terminate the sponsorship. Within each news story, Team A was mentioned six times, and the sponsor was mentioned four times to ensure respondents would have sufficient exposure. Upon completion of the study and before leaving the online survey site, participants were debriefed about the study and informed that the news stories and scandals were fictitiously created for the purpose of the study.

Fandom and social identity measures.   Participants completed one item to determine team fandom, "I am a fan of [team name]" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; adapted from Fink et al., 2009). In addition,

they completed four social identity items adapted from Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999), namely, "I have good feelings about [team name] fans," "I feel strong ties with [team name] fans," "Being a [team name] fan is an important part of who I am," and "In terms of my attitudes and beliefs, I feel that I am similar to [team name] fans" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, α = .97). Scores for these four items were averaged to create team identification scores. In this experiment, we considered fans of Team A the in-group (i.e., Team A identification score of 3 and above), and fans of Team B the out-group (i.e., Team B identification score of 3 and above), since the scandal manipulation (outlined next) related to Team A.

Manipulation of scandal severity.   Participants read one of three fictitious news articles that described a scandal involving Team A. Scandal severity was manipulated within the articles by varying the number of perpetrators implicated in the scandal. Thus, the neutral no-scandal condition involved a story about facility relocation; the single person scandal condition described a player involved in doping; and the multiple person scandal condition described widespread doping implicating several players, coaching personnel, and members of the university's football governing administration. As a check on our severity manipulation, 41 university students were presented with the three news articles using the Qualtrics survey administration platform and rated each article in terms of perceived scandal severity. Three purpose-developed items were employed ("How would you rate the magnitude of the scandal depicted in the news story?" "How would you rate the severity of the scandal depicted in the news story?" and "How would you rate the scope of the scandal depicted in the news story?"). Respondents gave ratings using 9-point scales anchored at *not at all* and *very much* for each of the three articles (α = .95, .95, and .97, respectively). A repeated-measures one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a Greenhouse–Geisser correction supported our manipulation, in that there was a significant difference across ratings of the three news articles, $F(1.56, 62.45) = 89.31, p < .001$. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction showed that the multiple-person scandal was perceived as more severe than the single-person scandal ($Ms = 6.46$ and $4.99, p = .001$), and the single-person scandal was in turn rated as more severe than the control condition (neutral no-scandal article, $M = 2.77, p < .001$).

Manipulation of sponsor decisions.   Sponsor decision was manipulated in the third paragraph of the news article with a statement communicating either a termination or a retention decision. Gillette (not a current sponsor of Team A or Team B) was chosen as the fictitious sponsor after pretesting revealed it rated highest for familiarity and congruity with football, out of five well-known brands. Specifically, 24 pretest respondents produced an average familiarity score for Gillette of 5.40 using three 7-point semantic differential items (unfamiliar/

familiar, inexperienced/experienced, not knowledgeable/knowledgeable; adapted from Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; α = .81). The same participants produced an average congruity score of 5.45 for Gillette and football also using three 7-point items (not a good fit/good fit, not compatible/compatible, not congruent/congruent; Rifon et al., 2004; α = .97).

Dependent variables. After reading the news stories, participants were asked to rate their overall impression of the team (Att_{team}), the person(s) at fault (Att_{perp}), the sport (Att_{sport}), and sponsor ($Att_{sponsor}$) using three 5-point semantic differential scales for each (negative/positive, unfavorable/favorable, bad/good; Weeks et al., 2008; Cronbach's alphas =.99, .98, .99, and .98, respectively). Thus, even for the neutral no-scandal condition, all measures were still meaningful, including Att_{perp}, since this news story related to a maintenance fault.

Results

A manipulation check asking participants to indicate the perceived fit between Gillette and the implicated team on a 7-point scale revealed an adequate match (M = 4.26), providing justification for selecting the brand as a sponsor.

We conducted a $2 \times 3 \times 2$ between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test for multivariate effects before examining our hypotheses. Social identity, scandal severity, and sponsor decision were independent variables while Att_{team}, Att_{perp}, Att_{sport}, and $Att_{sponsor}$ were dependent variables. Using Pillai's trace as the multivariate test statistic, social identity related significantly to attitude ratings, $F(4, 407) = 218.23$, $p < .001$. Similarly, we found a significant association between the attitude variables and scandal severity, $F(8, 816) = 23.12$, $p < .001$, and sponsor decision, $F(4, 407) = 3.54$, $p = .007$. Moreover, we found significant interactions between social identity and scandal severity, $F(8, 816) = 2.14$, $p = .030$; social identity and sponsor decision, $F(4, 407) = 18.36$, $p < .001$; and scandal severity and sponsor decision, $F(8, 816) = 5.85$, $p < .001$. With significance at the multivariate level, univariate results were examined. We outline univariate results for each dependent variable below.

Attitudes Toward the Team

Based on in-group bias and ultimate attribution error arguments, Hypothesis 1 predicted that in-group fans would have more favorable Att_{team} than out-group fans, and that this would extend to when scandal was present. In line with this we found a main effect of social identity on Att_{team}, $F(1, 410) = 753.53$, $p < .001$, such that in-group fans gave higher ratings toward the team than did out-group fans ($M_{In-group} = 5.68$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.28$). Moreover, a series of planned comparisons showed that

this was the case for the neutral no-scandal condition, $F(1, 134) = 339.38$, $p < .001$ ($M_{In-group} = 6.10$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.37$); for the single-person scandal condition, $F(1, 142) = 263.07$, $p < .001$ ($M_{In-group} = 5.91$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.46$); and for the multiple-person scandal condition, $F(1, 134) = 176.33$, $p < .001$ ($M_{In-group} = 5.03$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.01$). This indicates that the in-group bias is present even in the face of scandal, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

There was an overall main effect of scandal severity on Att_{team}, $F(2, 410) = 13.71$, $p < .001$ ($M_{Neutral} = 4.24$, $M_{Single} = 4.18$, $M_{Multiple} = 3.52$), but we did not find an interaction between social identity and scandal severity, $F(2, 410) = 2.73$, $p = .066$. As can be noted in the means reported above, Att_{team} did trend downward across levels of scandal severity for in-group fans while remaining relatively stable and low for out-group fans, but these trends were not significant. Thus, firm support for Hypothesis 2 cannot be concluded at this point (see Figure 2).

Attitudes Toward the Perpetrator(s)

Hypothesis 3 proposed that in-group fans would maintain positive Att_{team} while simultaneously displaying unfavorable Att_{perp}, and that out-group fans would show unfavorable ratings on both Att_{team} and Att_{perp}. To test this, we conducted a 2×2 mixed ANOVA. Social identity was a two-level between-subjects variable (in-group, out-group), and attitudinal target was a two-level within-subjects variable (team, perpetrator). We found significant main effects for social identity, $F(1, 420) = 319.87$, $p < .001$ ($M_{In-group} = 4.23$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.31$), and attitudinal target, $F(1, 420) = 297.38$, $p < .001$ ($M_{Team} = 3.98$, $M_{Perp} = 2.56$), and a significant interaction between the two, $F(1, 420) = 323.66$, $p < .001$. When scandal was present, the in-group rated the team high and the perpetrator low ($M_{In-group\_Team} = 5.68$, $M_{In-group\_Perp} = 2.78$) while the out-group rated both the team and perpetrator similarly low ($M_{Out-group\_Team} = 2.28$, $M_{Out-group\_Perp} = 2.35$). This supports Hypothesis 3 (see Figure 3).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that both in-group and out-group fans would show negative Att_{perp} regardless of level of scandal severity when this is described in terms of number of persons implicated. We found a significant main effect of scandal severity on Att_{perp}, $F(2, 410) = 65.42$, $p < .001$ ($M_{Neutral} = 3.57$, $M_{Single} = 2.00$, $M_{Multiple} = 2.15$), and a significant main effect of social identity on Att_{perp}, $F(1, 410) = 11.28$, $p = .001$ ($M_{In-group} = 2.78$, $M_{Out-group} = 2.36$), but no significant interaction between scandal severity and social identity, $F(2, 410) = 0.38$, $p = .685$. This indicates that although in-group fans still rated in-group perpetrators slightly higher than did out-group fans, both groups rated perpetrators similarly negative across lower and higher levels of scandal severity. The significant main effect of scandal severity was due to a drop in attitude from the neutral no-scandal condition to the scandal conditions; Att_{perp} did not change across the single-person to multiple-person scandal conditions. Hypothesis 4 is therefore supported.
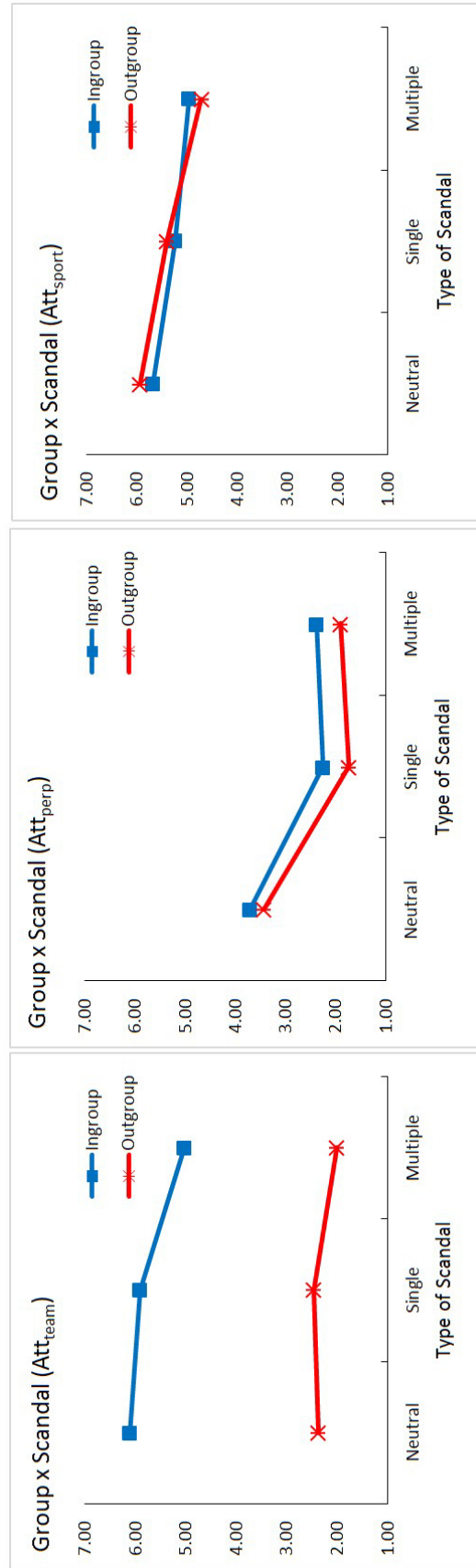
Figure 2 — In-group and out-group attitudes toward the team, perpetrator(s), and sport across levels of scandal severity.
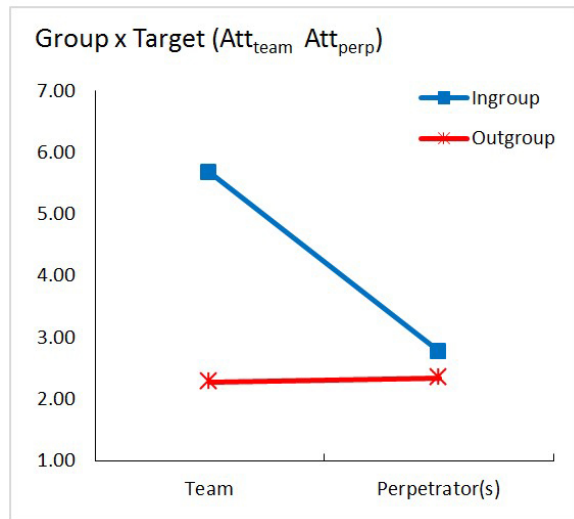
Figure 3 — In-group and out-group attitudes toward the team and perpetrator(s).

Attitudes Toward the Sport

Hypothesis 5 predicted that in-group and out-group fans should have similar Att_{sport} and that these would decline with higher levels of scandal severity. In line with predictions, there was no main effect of social identity, $F(1, 410) = 0.17$, $p = .684$ ($M_{In-group} = 5.30$, $M_{Out-group} = 5.35$), but there was a main effect of scandal severity, $F(2, 410) = 17.26$, $p < .001$, with attitudes becoming poorer with higher levels of severity ($M_{Neutral} = 5.81$, $M_{Single} = 5.32$, $M_{Multiple} = 4.84$). There was no interaction between social identity and scandal severity, $F(2, 410) = 1.31$, $p = .270$, indicating that in-group and out-group fans showed a similar decline in Att_{sport} when exposed to higher levels of scandal severity. This supports Hypothesis 5.

Attitude Toward the Sponsor

Hypothesis 6 proposed a crossover interaction, with in-group fans' $Att_{sponsor}$ being more favorable following a retention decision and out-group fans' $Att_{sponsor}$ being more favorable following a termination decision. In line with this, results showed a significant main effect for sponsor decision on $Att_{sponsor}$, $F(1, 410) = 9.12$, $p = .003$ ($M_{Terminate} = 4.73$, $M_{Retain} = 5.15$), and a significant interaction between social identity and sponsor decision, $F(1, 410) = 69.30$, $p < .001$. In-group fans rated the sponsor more favorably when the sponsorship was retained ($M_{In-group\_Terminate} = 4.34$, $M_{In-group\_Retain} = 5.90$) whereas out-group fans rated it more favorably when the sponsorship was terminated ($M_{Out-group\_Terminate} = 5.13$, $M_{Out-group\_Retain} = 4.40$). Thus, while in-group fans appear to have viewed a termination as a criticism of the team (or abandonment), out-group fans saw it as the more appropriate response, and this was reflected in the way they rated the actual sponsor brand. This supports Hypothesis 6.

Hypothesis 7 predicted that both in-group and out-group fans would view a termination decision more favorably for higher levels of scandal severity. In accordance with this, we found an interaction between scandal severity and sponsor decision, $F(2, 410) = 11.79$, $p < .001$. Follow-up analyses showed that for the sponsor retain condition, $Att_{sponsor}$ was stable across levels of severity, $F(2, 206) = 0.76$, $p = .469$ ($M_{Neutral} = 5.30$, $M_{Single} = 5.11$, $M_{Multiple} = 5.03$). For the sponsor terminate condition, $Att_{sponsor}$ was unfavorable when a terminate decision was given for a neutral situation and then became progressively more positive with higher levels of severity, $F(2, 204) = 15.00$, $p < .001$ ($M_{Neutral} = 3.99$, $M_{Single} = 4.86$, $M_{Multiple} = 5.34$). This did not interact with social identity, $F(2, 410) = 0.80$, $p = .449$, indicating no difference in this pattern of response between in-group and out-group fans. Importantly, this suggests that consumers viewed the sponsorship termination as unjustified when no real issue was apparent (neutral condition), and more just as severity increased, and that this reaction factored in to how the sponsor brand itself was evaluated. These findings support Hypothesis 7 (see Figure 4).

Discussion

Our findings provide support for the idea that consumer response to sport scandal differs based on whether people identify with the team involved. Specifically, using social identity theory we have shown that in-group fans and out-group fans respond differently to scandal, and that patterns of responses differ across stakeholders. Moreover, we have shown that reactions to sponsor termination decisions can vary depending on team identification, and that these reactions are reflected in ratings of attitude toward the sponsor brand. We outline findings for the team, perpetrator(s), sport, and sponsor in turn below, along with relevant theoretical and practical implications.

Examining the impact of scandal on the team, our results provide evidence of in-group bias and ultimate attribution error. In-group fans' overall attitudes toward the team remain quite favorable in spite of scandal, relative to those of the out-group, suggesting asymmetrical leniency toward transgressions enacted by in-group members. Although the in-group's evaluations trend downward with scandal severity, these are not as negative as out-group fans' evaluations. The in-group appears able to discount in-group transgressions, possibly attributing them to nonnormative situational factors or specific deviant in-group members rather than to the group itself (Hewstone, 1990). Indeed, given that in-group members differentially rate the team favorably and perpetrators unfavorably, it would appear that this is the case. Attitudes toward the team remained favorable even in situations where a scandal was described as implicating multiple parties. Thus, it would appear fans are quite concerted in their discounting of these actions as a way of protecting the group identity. When the group membership is central to people's social identity such as with highly identified
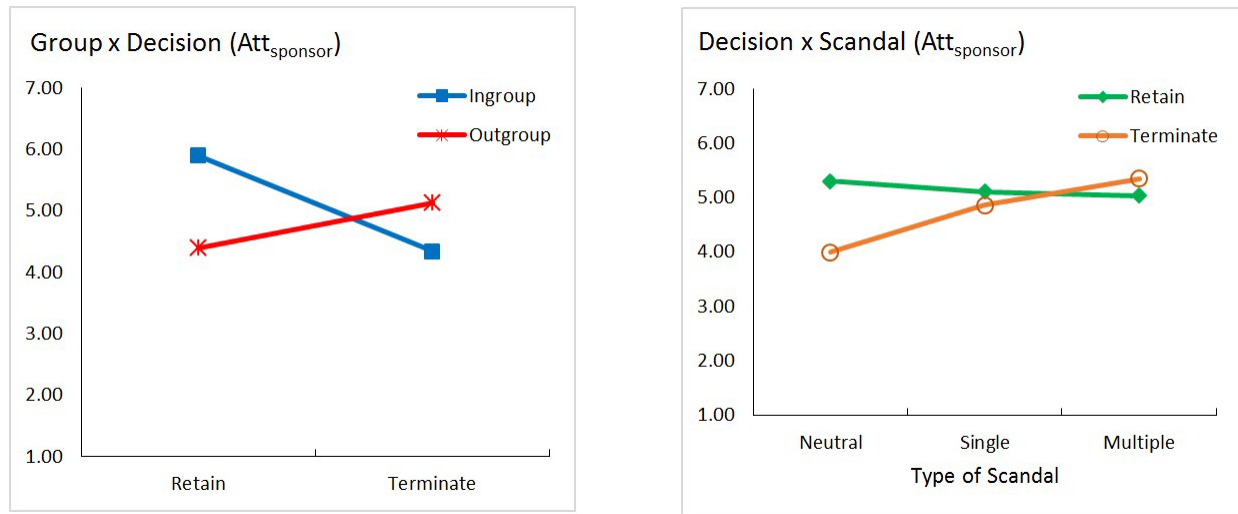
Figure 4 — Attitudes toward the sponsor following terminate and retain decisions across in-group and out-group (left panel) and across levels of scandal severity (right panel).

sport fans, they can be more resistant to threatening information about the team (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Iyer, Jetten, & Haslam, 2012), and it is clear from our data that sport scandal represents a good example of this.

For scandal perpetrators, it appears in-group fans are not particularly forgiving. Our findings demonstrate that while they stand by their team, the in-group also readily punishes the individual perpetrator(s). They additionally appear willing to punish any member implicated in a scandal, regardless of whether it is just one deviant member or multiple members (our severity manipulation). Devaluation of undesirable in-group members represents a mechanism enacted by in-group fans to protect the in-group's social identity in the face of a threat to the group. This suggests that sports teams themselves may remain in relatively good standing among fans even in the face of scandal, in that fans appear to be comfortable in isolating blame to specific individuals. Evaluations of the team and perpetrator by out-group fans however are both low, suggesting that this group attributes the negative behavior to common characteristics and group norms associated with the whole team. These findings are consistent with the ultimate attribution error arguments, whereby out-group members have a tendency to assume negative attributes for an entire social group rather than just attributing them to the individual (Hewstone, 1990).

Of particular note here in relation to evaluations of perpetrators is that, in using our severity manipulation of number of persons involved (single vs. multiple persons), we found that perpetrators were rated similarly negative regardless of severity. The same result may not be found using alternative conceptualizations of scandal severity (e.g., one-off vs. repeated misbehavior; recreational vs. performance-enhancing drug use; verbal aggression vs. physical assault), where higher levels of severity might reasonably be expected to lead to poorer attitudes toward

perpetrators. This aligns with the work suggesting that level of outrage caused by misbehavior can evoke differential responses (e.g., Kahneman et al., 1998; Umphress et al., 2013). It further reinforces the calls for more research investigating the impact of sport scandal severity, including possible differences depending on the scandal type (Doyle et al., 2014; Fink et al., 2009).

For the sport itself we predicted that both in-group and out-group fans would be similarly impacted since both belong to a superordinate "sport" in-group. We found support for this in ratings of attitude toward the sport, along with a decline across levels of scandal severity. Notably, we had predicted a similar decline for in-group members when examining attitude toward the team (Hypothesis 2) but did not find an effect strong enough to be considered significant, despite a downward trend. What this pattern of results indicates is that higher levels of scandal severity can in fact begin to impact perceptions of the group (or the sport) more generally, even if blame is largely isolated to particular perpetrators. When the deviant behavior is widespread or begins to appear representative of a group norm, it may be less easy for in-group members to discount it in the form of the ultimate attribution error (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). Thus, it may well be that sporting bodies as a whole will be impacted negatively when scandals are viewed as particularly severe or commonplace. Furthermore, while "clean" athletes and teams might consider themselves separate from the actions of other teams, they may nonetheless be indirectly impacted if the broader reputation of the sport begins to suffer. Future research that investigates the extent to which the presence of scandal within a sport indirectly impacts evaluations of other athletes and teams within the sport will be useful in gauging this type of spillover.

Our research also provides insight into whether it is prudent for the sponsor to terminate a sponsorship

contract in the face of a sport scandal. Our results showed that in-group fans appeared to oppose a termination decision even following scandal whereas out-group fans seemed to view a termination decision as more appropriate. Importantly, this was reflected in each group's attitudes toward the sponsor brand itself, suggesting fans' loyalty to the team is resilient to scandal, and that there is an expectation that sponsors will stand by the team. This is not to suggest that fans expect sponsors to remain blindly loyal. Our results show that fans do rate sponsors more favorably following a termination decision when the scandal is severe, as opposed to less severe, or unwarranted (neutral no-scandal condition).

For sponsors, these findings would suggest the need to consider carefully whether a termination decision is always necessary, particularly if the favor of the fan group is a goal. In our work, sponsor retention decisions were always contextualized as part of a statement "expressing concern." Perhaps in some instances, what might prove more fruitful is a statement condemning the misbehavior as a way of protecting the reputation of the brand while retaining the sponsorship, particularly if it is believed the scandal will be short-lived or ultimately of lesser gravity. Research is warranted that examines the nature of these types of statements and the extent to which they can mitigate any enduring negative sentiment.

Taken together, our findings suggest that it is vital for sports teams to cultivate and maintain a loyal or "die-hard" fan base (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). When a scandal erupts, statements that condemn the transgression, or efforts that put measures in place to penalize the perpetrator(s), may be effective in reinforcing the moral stance of the team, sport, and sponsor. Future research that considers the various types of condemnation or punishment deemed appropriate by in-group and out-group fans and the contexts in which they apply will help to provide further insight.

Limitations and Future Research

While our results provide insight into the impact of sport scandal, it must be noted that scandal settings are very complex and multifaceted. To isolate the impact of scandals, we followed prior research (e.g., Fink et al., 2009) by using fictitious scandals as experimental stimuli. Although the stimuli mimicked reports of emerging scandals in real life, and were informed by a media content analysis, they might have generated suspicion among some fans. Future research could endeavor to measure the impact of a real scandal while including prior media exposure as a control variable as a way to address this. A related limitation is the compressed time frame in which the scandal was examined. We have only determined immediate responses to a single scandal exposure. Normally, a scandal would evolve over time, with the breaking of other new scandals, and be subject to other relevant influence like ongoing on-field performance of the team. Indeed, sport organizations may also use socially responsible initiatives to mitigate negative

public sentiment toward scandals (e.g., NFL's support of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals came after its star player Michael Vick's involvement in dog fighting; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Longitudinal research concerned with possible lagged effects of scandal, and intervening events, is therefore warranted. Examination of potential boundary effects of repeated exposure to scandal is another logical next step, as it may be the case that consumers become desensitized to the gravity of scandal with legitimization through extensive exposure.

Because we used a fictional team sponsor to prevent bias attributable to prior knowledge, it is also possible that some fans had guessed Gillette was not a real team sponsor. As consumers' relationships with brands develop over time, the self–brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) with the real team sponsor could be different for true sponsors. Future research might attempt to understand how preexisting relationships with sponsor brands influence evaluations of sponsor decisions. While our research assumed that the sponsor was perceived as part of the in-group sports community by fans, it must be acknowledged that sponsors may in some instances also be seen as overly commercialized or self-interested (Rifon et al., 2004) and that this might influence evaluations. Our results suggest that the sponsor within our study was viewed as an ally of the team; however, future research is needed to show whether this is always the case.

It should also be noted that our respondents were highly identified fans (identification score of 3 and above on a 5-point scale) and it is possible that differences will be revealed for fans who identify less strongly. Wann and Branscombe's (1990) work suggests that higher identifying in-group members, or "die-hard" fans, can behave quite differently to lower identifying "fair-weather" in-group fans. Our research focused on in-group and out-group effects more generally, and so research that consider granular testing of differences within the in-group and out-group may be valuable. Finally, it is important to note that we have only considered impact on stakeholders in terms of consumer attitudes. Additional work should be directed at measuring impacts of scandal across a range of variables known to influence brand equity and which are important to investment return, such as brand preference, sales, perceived brand credibility, word of mouth, impact upon third-party charitable partners, and sponsor share price.

Scandal in sport is endemic and its reach extensive. Our research examines sport scandals from a consumer perspective and finds that reactions differ depending on the stakeholder considered, fans' social identity with the team implicated, the severity of the scandal, and sponsor response to the scandal. We discuss implications for sports sponsorship management and sports organizations. Our key findings suggest that sponsors may do well to continue rather than terminate sponsorship and to temper the continuation with communications aimed at avoiding perceptions of condoning the behavior, so as to avoid aliening either in-group fans or out-group rival fans.

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Appendix

Examples of Fictitious News Story Stimuli

Fictitious Neutral Condition, Sponsor Retain Decision

Gillette to Continue Sponsorship of [Team A] Amid Training Relocation. The [Team A] is in the process of relocating a number of its planned training sessions due to unexpected facility maintenance issues. The details of the new training locations are still under consideration and will not be published. Sources have said the new locations will be put to the national body later this week for approval. The locations need to meet standards set by the national body and various college officials. [Team A] coach declined to comment but confirmed that the team will need to relocate some of its training sessions due to facility repairs but that overall team performance should not be impacted.

The [University] said it is sure [Team A] will continue to perform well given the level of talent of all current players. It highlighted that all training regimes and locations must be in line with the national competition's rules and [Team A] values. The maintenance issues became apparent following a routine facility-wide standards check that is run before all training clinics. In spite of recent facility upgrades, maintenance repairs are common, however, not all require that teams relocate before major events.

In related news, [Team A's] long term sponsor, Gillette, announced in a press conference that it will still be continuing with its sponsorship of the team. In a statement posted yesterday, Gillette said: "We would like to assure the [University] that Gillette's sponsorship remains unchanged. We have a long term view of our relationship with the team. Our brand image is very tightly tied up with those who we sponsor so we take our sponsorship very seriously. We respect that teams go through both good and bad seasons and the [University] team has our full support." Gillette has been a major sponsor since 2008 and says its sponsorship is set to continue into the future.

Fictitious Single-Person Scandal, Sponsor Retain Decision

Gillette Stands by Sponsorship of the [Team A] Despite Player Implicated in Doping Scandal. The [Team A] football team is under the spotlight this week after an individual star player was implicated in a doping scandal. As the case is currently under investigation, the player's name cannot be published. Sources said the player will meet with members of the national body later this week to begin investigations. The individual is expected to meet with lawyers and college officials for several days. The [Team A] coach declined to comment but confirmed that an investigation is underway and that he may seek to suspend the player if the preliminary findings prove to be justified.

The [University] has said it is shocked at the [Team A] player's involvement in this doping scandal, as the individual involved is a very talented and popular athlete. The use of performance-enhancing drugs is regarded as entirely unacceptable and completely contrary to the national competition's rules and [Team A] values. The accusations against the player emerged from a major investigation into a drug clinic that allegedly distributed the illegal substance to the player. In spite of advances in drug testing, new doping techniques designed to avoid detection keep emerging.

[Team A's] long term sponsor, Gillette, while expressing concern over the incident, has announced it will still be continuing with its sponsorship. In a statement posted yesterday, Gillette said: "We would like to assure the [University] that Gillette's sponsorship remains unchanged. We have a long term view of our relationship with the team. Our brand image is very tightly tied up with those who we sponsor so we take our sponsorship very seriously. We respect that it is a difficult time for the individual player involved and the [University] team has our full support." Gillette has been a major sponsor since 2008 and says its sponsorship is set to continue into the future.

Fictitious Multiple-Person Scandal, Sponsor Terminate Decision

Gillette Withdraws Sponsorship of the [Team A] Following Team Doping Scandal. The [Team A] football team is under the spotlight this week after several players, coaching personnel, and members of the university's football governing administration were implicated in a doping scandal. As the case is currently under investigation, the accused persons' names cannot be published. Sources said the players, coaching personnel, and university football administration will meet with members of the national body later this week to begin investigations. They are expected to meet with lawyers and college officials for several days. The [Team A] coach declined to comment but confirmed that an investigation is underway and that persons may be removed if the preliminary findings prove to be justified.

The [University] has said it is shocked at the widespread [Team A] involvement in this doping scandal, as the players, coaching personnel, and administration are all very talented and respected people. The use of performance-enhancing drugs is regarded as entirely unacceptable and completely contrary to the national competition's rules and [Team A] values. The accusations against all those involved emerged from a major investigation into a drug clinic that allegedly distributed the illegal substance to the players and coaching personnel. In spite of advances in drug testing, new doping techniques designed to avoid detection keep emerging.

[Team A's] long term sponsor, Gillette, has publicly criticized all those involved following the incident and has decided to terminate its sponsorship. In a statement posted yesterday, Gillette said: "After thorough consideration, Gillette has made the difficult decision to end its sponsorship arrangement with the [University] team. Our brand image is very tightly tied up with those who we sponsor, so if there is widespread untoward behavior in the [University] team that we do not agree with, we make our position very clear." Gillette has been a major sponsor since 2008, but says its sponsorship will no longer continue going forward.