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Identity is a popular topic among sport management researchers because it has been suggested that individuals can derive a sense of identity from their affiliation with a sport team (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). The study of team identity has mainly focused on individuals’ identification with college and/or professional teams. Studies dealing with team identity in relation to national teams (e.g., a national Olympic team) are lacking. In addition, marketers need to have a better understanding of the identity composition of their consumers. This knowledge can help marketers market their goods and services around international mega events (e.g., Olympics, World Cup, etc.) to an international audience. Furthermore, prior studies conducted by sport management researchers have generally regarded “identity” as unidimensional (e.g., Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Therefore, this study offers a multidimensional approach to identity with the purpose of examining national identity and team identity in relation to a nation’s Olympic team. Specifically, this research examined the factors which comprised national identity and Olympic team identity in three different countries.

The theoretical premise for the study of team identity is social identity theory (SIT). According to SIT, membership or belonging to different social groups or social categories (e.g., race, gender, nationality, sport team) provide a definition of who one is (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The use of SIT in this study is mainly linked to the sense of belonging that individuals develop toward their nation’s Olympic team.

Heere and James (2007a) suggested that identification with one’s own nation (e.g., national identity) can influence other social identities. For example, during internationally recognized sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, citizens of competing nations tend to think of their athletes as representative of their whole nation (Bouet, 1977). Hence, individual’s national identity becomes clear through their affiliation with their national Olympic team (Tuck, 2003). In other words, individuals’ national identity impacts their Olympic team identity (e.g., I am American, thus I feel connected to the American Olympic team) (Chalip, 2006; Bogdanov, 2005). Based on this literature, the authors of this study utilized a multidimensional identity scale to measure national identity and Olympic team identity.

The instrument used in this study was based on the identity scale developed by Heere and James (2007b). The original scale was composed of six factors: (a) Public Evaluation, (b) Private Evaluation, (c) Interconnection to Self, (d) Behavioral Involvement, (e) Cognitive Awareness, and (f) Sense of Interdependence. National identity was measured with all six factors, and team identity was measured with five factors (sense of interdependence was not included).

Three convenience samples were collected from the United States (n = 558), Australia (n = 203), and South Korea (n = 253). These three countries were chosen due to having unique cultural aspects such as economic systems, religion, kinship systems, institutions, and practices (Fiske, 2002). The American sample was split in half. The first half was used to assess the psychometric properties of the scales. The second half of the American sample, as well as the Australian, and South Korean samples were used to confirm the established structure of the two identities and also to examine the second order factor structure of the models.

Reliability and validity was examined in the first half of the American data. Construct reliability coefficients for most factors in both scales exceeded the .70 criterion (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The exception was the Behavioral Involvement factor (α=.61) in the national identity scale. Most of the AVE values were above the recommended level of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) except for the Behavioral Involvement factor (AVE = .34). Discriminant validity was assessed through a comparison between the AVE values for each construct in the two scales with the squared multiple correlations between the constructs. None of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values for the constructs which provides evidence of discriminant validity.

After the first assessment of the national identity measurement model, it was decided to remove the behavioral involvement factor. After removing that factor, the model fit the data better (RMSEA=.06, SRMR=.05, TLI=.94, CFI= 0.95). After the first assessment of the Olympic team identity model, one item from the behavioral involvement factor was removed. After removing that item, the model fit improved (RMSEA=.06, SRMR=.04, TLI=.95, CFI= 0.96). Decisions about the removal of factors and
items were considered both from a theoretical and data-driven standpoint.

Since the overall assessment of the measurement models indicated an acceptable fit to the data, second order models were examined. The second order models contained either national identity or Olympic team identity as the second order construct. The second order constructs were measured by the first order constructs as identified in the measurement model. The American national identity model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data (RMSEA=.07, SRMR=.06, TLI=.92, CFI= 0.93). The Australian national identity model demonstrated very good fit to the data (RMSEA=.04, SRMR=.05, TLI=.97, CFI= 0.98). The American Olympic team identity model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data (RMSEA=.08, SRMR=.06, TLI=.93, CFI= 0.94). The same model for the Australian sample showed very good fit to the data (RMSEA=.05, SRMR=.06, TLI=.97, CFI= 0.97). Neither the national identity model nor the Olympic team identity model demonstrated a good fit to the South Korean data. Therefore, it was concluded that the factors and/or items included in the scales were not able to capture the constructs of interest in the South Korean sample.

The results of this study provide evidence suggesting that: (a) identity is a multidimensional construct (Heere & James, 2007b), and (b) that the scale developed by Heere and James (2007b) can be used to measure different types of group identities. However, since the proposed model structure did not fit the South Korean data well, it is necessary to revise the scale and possibly identify other items and/or factors that can capture the concepts of national identity and Olympic Team identity in the country of South Korea. This study represents an important step in the examination of sport identities across multiple nations, but both theoretical and empirical work will have to be done in order to draw more meaningful conclusions about how these identities may be similar or different around the world.

Since little effort has been made to understand the multidimensional nature of identity in sport settings and the potential positive consumer impact that may result from a better understanding (Madrigal, 2001), this study makes a significant contribution to the literature. This is particularly true because multidimensional group identity is examined here in the context of international sport, a commercial platform involving significant financial investments such as those made by sponsoring organizations of the Olympic Games. Understanding national and Olympic team identity can help sport marketers to determine the types of elements they should emphasize when marketing goods and services to diverse international audiences. As noted previously, the establishment of multiple dimensions of each of these group identities provides sport marketers added depth to that understanding, enabling targeted marketing communications (Heere & James, 2007a).