Working toward a Process-Based Team Identity Scale: Bridging the Gap between Social Psychology and Sport Management

Bob Heere, University of Texas at Austin
Xiaoyan Xing, Laurentian University
Luo Li, University of Texas at Austin
Dusko Bogdanov, Florida State University

Over the last three decades, the concept of social identity has been extensively examined (c.f., Ashmore et al., 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through this continued exploration of the topic, one point of consensus that has emerged is that conceptually, social identity is indeed a multi-dimensional construct (Leach et al., 2008). To date however, little work is available to advance our ability to measure a social identity in a multi-dimensional manner. The development of an instrument that would allow us to measure social identity as a multi-dimensional construct among a large pool of respondents is still in the initial stages (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy & Eidelson, 2008).

A strong understanding of social identity and how it applies to sport management is important to our discipline, as the search for community and our desire to express our identity through our affiliations is one of the main drivers of the popularity of sport (Chalip, 2006). To that end, the manifestations of social identity as team identity has been examined to a large extend (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Pierce, 2003). Yet, most of the team identity research conducted within our discipline has been relying on one dimensional models that lack the depth and rigor that characterizes social identity measurement outside the realm of sport management (Leach et al., 2008; Roccas et al., 2008). Recently, several studies have started to explore different dimensions of team identity (Dimmock & Grove, 2005, 2006; Heere & James, 2007; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, In press), allowing for a more elaborate perspective on team identity. While these articles have progressed our thinking on team identity as a multi-dimensional construct, they have yet to confirm that team identity should and can be measured as any other form of social identity. To that end, the purpose of this study is to find confirmation that team identity is indeed a manifestation of social identity that is measured by the same processes as other forms of social identity (e.g. nation, city, ethnicity, etc.). Finally, this study sought to find the first evidence of the validity and reliability of the social identity instrument in a non-western setting.

A six-dimensional model representing processes within social identity (Heere & James, 2007) is proposed and tested across three studies. These six processes are defined as Public evaluation, Private evaluation, Interconnection with group, Sense of Interdependence with group, Behavioral Involvement and Cognitive Awareness. Data were collected from the United States (n = 872), Serbia (n = 1042) and China (n = 304), and group identities examined contained team identity, university identity, city identity, state/regional identity, national identity and religious identity. The first two studies (both in a Western setting) provide evidence of reliability and validity with strong scores on internal consistency, factor loadings, AVE scores and correlations with associated constructs. Moreover, findings demonstrate the validity of testing team identity through similar processes as other social identities.

Evidence from the third study (a non-western sample) lacks evidence of reliability and validity, and presents severe challenges to the applicability of the group identity instrument within a Non-Western society. The study illustrated the challenges of assessing social identity in a highly collective society and the researchers would suggest that even though the construct themselves might be appropriate, new items need to be developed that are appropriate within the Chinese culture.

The development of a reliable and valid multi-dimensional scale measuring the processes of a social identity provides the opportunity to better understand what elements may drive the formation of a particular social identity. With a viable measurement tool the opportunity arises to examine particular social identities and ascertain what constructs may be more or less important to the formation of a particular social identity. The work reported on assessing the reliability and validity of the various dimensions. No work to date, however, has examined the relative importance of the various dimensions for a particular social identity. Being able to delve into the particular processes of social identity will enable us to better understand how social identities form.