Organizational impression management is a key task for organizations in every industry (Elsbach, 2003), including those in the sport industry. For sport service organizations, however, this task is more complex, as they must account for images projected to consumers at multiple organizational levels. For example, an attendee at a sport event will likely encounter images projected at the organizational level (e.g., marketing communications) as well as those projected by consumer-facing staff (employee level). The majority of scholars have focused on the impression management of individuals (e.g., Leary & Kowlaski, 1991) or organizations (e.g., Elsbach, 2003); however, it is important to examine cross-level and multi-level effects in order to understand how different organizational actors contribute to image projection to external audiences (e.g., consumers) (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008).

As such, Brandon-Lai, Armstrong, and Ferris (in press) proposed a conceptual model of organizational impression congruence (OrgIC), in which they suggested that congruence between images projected at multiple organizational levels would likely result in the formation of desired positive impressions among external audiences, and ultimately favorable consumer behaviors. Conversely, incongruence in multi-level image projection would lead audiences to experience cognitive dissonance, potentially resulting in the termination of service (see Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957).

While every organization would presumably like to project a coherent image to consumers, and achieve their desired impressions, achieving congruence across organizational levels is by no means an easy feat. In order to gain insights into the ways in which sport service organizations try to attain OrgIC, we have embarked on an investigation of the practices and procedures of one of the world’s most prominent professional golf tournaments. Due to our agreement with the tournament organizers, we are not at liberty to divulge its name. Through our investigation, we will provide insights into a number of antecedents of image projection at different organizational levels, including (a) the strategic formulation of desired organizational images; (b) the design and implementation of event-related marketing communications; (c) the creation of training materials for consumer-facing event staff; and (d) the delivery of training to consumer-facing event staff. This will enable us to assess how and where in congruence occurs within a sport service organization, and discuss the implications of managerial actions at or between organizational levels.

Methods
In order to examine these antecedents of image projection, and address the various components of Brandon-Lai et al.’s (in press) model of OrgIC, we are conducting an ethnographic study of the aforementioned golf tournament. This involves a number of components, including interviews with consumer-facing staff during their formal training and after the event; analysis of written reflections of consumer-facing staff regarding their experience working the event; interviews with managers and directors involved in the organization and execution of the event; and observations made during our attendance at the event.

*It should be noted that some components of this research are yet to be conducted at the time of abstract submission; however, we conducted a complete set of pilot data during last year’s tournament. As such, we are familiar with the necessary timeline. Furthermore, arrangements have already been made with all relevant parties to ensure data will be collected and analyzed in advance of the prospective presentation at NASSM.*

Interview transcripts and written reflections will be analyzed using content analysis. This type of analysis was selected as categories “are often derived from theoretical models: categories are brought to the empirical material and not necessarily developed from it” (Flick, 2009, p. 323). This lends itself well to this particular study, given that our investigation is framed using the OrgIC model. Interview guides were developed based on the theories of self-presentation (Baumesiter, 1982; Goffman, 1959), organizational impression management (Elsbach, 2003; see also
Jones & Pittman, 1982), and conceptualizations of reputation (Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2010; Rindova, 1997; Whetten & Mackey, 2002) that underpin the model. Member checking will be used to verify the accuracy of our interpretations.

Observations of consumer-facing staff at the event will be recorded in field notes, with particular emphasis on their impression management actions/tactics (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). This will enable comparisons to be drawn between un/intended image projection at the employee level, organizational images projected to staff during training, and image projection to external audiences at the organizational level.

**Results & Discussion**

Although analysis will be subject to the collection of all empirical material, some insights are offered here based on our pilot data from the previous year’s tournament. In their discussion of the conceptual model of OrgIC, Brandon-Lai et al. (in press) refer to the temporary nature of employment for event staff in the sport industry; thus, it was assumed that training in impression management tactics would be more feasible than attempting to instill organizational values. However, given the extended training period (67 hours) available in the present context, attempting to promote desired image projection through authenticity (Golant, 2012) becomes more feasible.

To this end, training materials were created by the organization’s top management teams in line with the strategic direction (and thus desired image) of the tournament. This was then provided to the middle-managers responsible for training consumer-facing event staff. The clear “top-down” communication of the brand identity of the event was integral to setting internal expectations for image projection through event-day interactions with consumers (see Gummesson, 2008; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). The content of the training materials themselves focused on the event’s brand identity as a high-end, international professional golf tournament, which was seen as being congruent with the content of marketing communications available to external audiences. The congruence between the different organizational levels appeared to produce coherent images that would result in cognitive consonance (Festinger, 1957), increasing the likelihood of favorable attitude formation among consumers.

The primary contributions of this research are (a) providing empirical material to support the importance of establishing OrgIC in communications and interactions with consumers; (b) understanding how multi-level managerial practice facilitates in/congruence; and (c) providing examples of managerial practice that contribute to in/congruence. Further results from the main study, and detailed implications, will be discussed in the prospective presentation.