Corporate Renaming of Stadiums, Team Identification, and Threat to Distinctiveness

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We examined the effect of corporate renaming of a stadium on fans’ felt anger and perceived harm to the team’s distinctiveness by asking participants to imagine that their historic local sport venue was renamed (or not) after a large corporation or a wealthy individual. Participants reported more perceived harm to the team’s distinctiveness when a corporation (vs. individual) donated money to the team. Furthermore, participants who thought that the venue name had been changed (compared with no name change) expressed more anger and perceived the name change to be a threat to the team’s distinctiveness. A mediated moderation analysis showed that, compared with when the stadium name remained the same, highly identified fans believed the name change would harm the distinctiveness of the team, which resulted in greater felt anger. In line with social identity theory, the results show that anger is an emotional outcome of recently experienced distinctiveness threat.

Corporations are increasingly purchasing the naming rights to stadiums and other types of sport venues. Although corporate naming agreements began in the 1970s (Crompton & Howard, 2003), they did not become widespread in the U.S. until the late 1990s (Boyd, 2000). During this period, the number of sport venues that have been renamed has risen, as well as the amount paid by corporations to do so (Hollis, 2008). For example, Reliant Energy currently pays $10 million a year for the exclusive naming rights of Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas (Crompton & Howard, 2003).

One benefit that corporations derive from acquiring the rights to name a stadium is that the corporation’s name appears each time the venue is mentioned in the press. Armstrong (2004) found that newspapers use the corporate name 70% of the time a venue is referenced instead of the once-historical name and, consequently, awareness of the corporate name among the general public is high. Indeed, when local residents are surveyed regarding the name of their local venue, 90% give the corporate name (Fatsis, 1997). Research reveals that corporate sponsorship of sport teams, in general, leads to greater recall of the corporate sponsor (Stotlar & Johnson, 1989), greater intention to buy their products (Pope & Voges, 2000), and actual increases in purchasing behavior (Shannon & Turley, 1997). Not only does corporate sponsorship influence fans, it also affects employees. Corporate sponsorship is positively related to employee commitment to the corporation and willingness to satisfy customers (Hickman, Lawrence, & Ward, 2005). A survey of corporations revealed two main motivations for corporate sponsorship of sport teams and venues: achieving public awareness of the corporate name and improvement of the company’s image (Shanklin & Kuzma, 1992).

Nevertheless, fans do not always react positively to corporate renaming of sport venues (Greenberg & Gray, 1996; Hollis, 2008). For example, in 2004, residents of San Francisco passed a proposition to replace the corporate name of the city’s stadium with its historical title (Buchanan, 2008). Boyd (2000) suggests that corporate naming of sport venues negatively affects city pride, as well as fan identification with the team. Wann (1997) defines team identification as “the extent that a fan feels psychologically connected to a team” (p. 331). Team identification is analogous to the broader term, “fanship,” which is an individual’s degree of identification with or connection to a fan object (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Degree of team identification, which is relatively stable despite team losses, is positively related to loyalty to the team and game attendance (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Team identification is also related to sponsor recognition, attitudes toward sponsors, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Because of the strong link between team identification and sport consumption, researchers suggest that engendering team identification is one of the most important goals for sport teams (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002a).
Boyd (2000) argues that corporate naming causes a loss of distinctiveness for the city and the fans who identify with the team. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that group members seek to establish and strive to maintain a positive and distinct group identity. Individuals can feel psychologically connected with various groups (i.e., ingroup identification), and make social comparisons between the ingroup and relevant outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Since the theory’s conception, management and businesses relied heavily on social identity theory to explain intra- and intergroup phenomena (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010). If a comparison made between an ingroup and a relevant outgroup results in greater perceived similarity, the distinctiveness of the ingroup may be threatened. Because degree of identification with a group reflects the extent to which group events affect the individual (e.g., Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), highly identified group members who perceive ingroup similarity are more likely to be threatened by the loss of group distinctiveness than are low identifiers.

A wealth of research supports this theoretical claim and illustrates the threat experienced by group members facing a potential loss of group distinctiveness (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Indeed, the need for intergroup distinctiveness is sufficiently important that some groups are willing to stress negative ingroup traits as a means of ensuring their group is perceived as distinct from another group (Milicki & Ellemers, 1996). Consistent with social identity theory, research reliably shows that threats to a group’s distinctiveness results in members judging (e.g., evaluation of group traits) and behaving (e.g., allocation of resources) in ways that are aimed at regaining differentiation between the ingroup and outgroup, particularly for highly identified group members (for a meta-analysis of this effect see Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Thus, the claim that highly identified group members are affected by threats to their group’s distinctiveness has received considerable support. However, researchers have not thoroughly examined the emotional response elicited when group members perceive a threat to their group’s distinctiveness.

Jetten and Spears (2003) speculate that either fear or anger could be aroused when a distinctiveness threat is present. Recent findings illustrate how threatening the future distinctiveness of a group can lead to the experience of collective angst, especially for highly identified group members (Wohl, Giguère, Branscombe, & McVicar, 2010). Angst is elicited when there is a potential for future harm to the self or group (Lazarus, 1991; Wohl et al., 2010). In contrast, anger is elicited when an event that threatens one’s goals has already occurred and another person or group is to blame (Lazarus, 1991). In other words, the possibility of a threat to distinctiveness occurring in the future may elicit angst, while anger is more likely when the threat is in the present or immediate past. Therefore, if the name of a sports venue is perceived as having been changed from its historical name to a corporate name, the perceived distinctiveness of the team may be threatened, which could elicit anger in fans.

Highly identified fans should view the renaming as more harmful to the team’s distinctiveness, and express greater anger, compared with less identified fans.

A mediated moderation model is ideal for testing the dynamic interaction between person variables and environmental (or contextual variables) on an outcome through a potential mediator (see Bucy & Tao, 2007; Lyons, Reysen, & Pierce, 2012; Morgan-Lopez & MacKinnon, 2006; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). In other words, a mediated moderation model should reveal the intermediary process by which the interaction between person and environment variables affect an outcome. For example, Wohl and colleagues (2010, Study 2) randomly assigned Canadian participants to read about a situation where the United States and Canada might someday share an intelligence agency (future threat to distinctiveness of Canada), or a control condition. Participants’ degree of Canadian identification (moderator) interacted with the manipulation of context (independent variable) to predict curtailment of Canada-U.S. relations (outcome) through felt angst (mediator).

Using similar logic as the above study, where identification with the nation interacted with the threat of loss of distinctiveness manipulation, in our research, team identification should interact with whether renaming of the fans’ stadium has occurred or not. Highly identified fans should feel greater anger and perceive a greater degree of loss of distinctiveness when they believe the name of their team’s stadium has changed compared with those who believe it has not changed. In the current study, the moderator variable (team identification) should interact with the manipulated independent variable (renaming of venue vs. control) to affect the mediator (perception of loss of team distinctiveness) and the outcome (anger), and the mediator should predict the degree of felt anger. Including the mediator (perceived loss of team distinctiveness) in the model should significantly reduce the relationship between the interaction (renaming manipulation by team identification) and the outcome (anger). This would provide support for a significant mediated moderation model.

**Overview of Current Research**

In the current study, we examine the effect of corporate (or individual) renaming of a sport venue for fans’ emotions and perceptions of threat to the group’s distinctiveness. The sport venue chosen, Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kansas, is home to the University of Kansas Jayhawks men’s basketball team. The fieldhouse was named for Dr. Forrest “Phog” Allen, the coach of the Jayhawks for almost 40 years. The court inside the fieldhouse is named in honor of James Naismith, the inventor of basketball and former coach of Dr. Allen. The building is rich in history containing the national championship banners from 1922, 1923, 1952, 1988, and 2008.

Following social identity theory, we hypothesize that if fans imagine that the name of the stadium has been changed from the historic “Allen Fieldhouse” to a
nonhistoric name, they will react with anger to the extent that they perceive the change as harming the team’s distinctiveness. Furthermore, we hypothesize that highly identified fans will perceive the name change to be more damaging to the team and express greater anger than fans low in identification with the team. Lastly, we predict that participants’ perception of harm to the team will mediate the relationship between the interaction (manipulation of name change by team identification) and the outcome (anger). Highly identified fans should react more strongly to the renaming due to the greater psychological connection to the team. In other words, we hypothesize that team identification (moderator) will interact with the renaming manipulation (independent variable) to affect participants’ perceptions of harm to the team’s distinctiveness (mediator) and felt anger (outcome), perception of harm (mediator) will predict degree of anger (outcome), and including perceived loss of distinctiveness (mediator) in the model will significantly reduce the relationship between the interaction and outcome.

To test the generalizability of the hypothesized process, we manipulate who the stadium is named after (a corporation or an individual). Various theorists (Boyd, 2000; Hollis, 2008) suggest that fans may react more negatively to a corporate name, than an individual name, due to anticorporate sentiment. This “anti-corporate” renaming idea would predict that the negative reactions would occur in the corporate renaming condition only, and not in the individual renaming of the sport venue condition. In contrast, we hypothesize that if the name change is a threat to the distinctiveness of the team, either form of name change should result in the hypothesized negative emotional reactions on the part of highly identified fans.

The influence of team identification on sport spectator attitudes, perception, motivations, and emotions has been extensively examined (Wann et al., 2001). One area of contention in the sport fan literature is whether there are differences in sport fans’ degree of team identification by gender (e.g., Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002b) and ethnicity (Armstrong, 2008). With respect to fan gender, research sometimes finds that men are more identified with their team compared with women (Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994), while others show no differences (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Fink and colleagues (2002b) examined, in addition to participant gender differences, the differences between spectators of men’s and women’s basketball teams. These researchers, who took their sample from two men’s and two women’s college home basketball games, found greater self-reported future loyalty to the team (an outcome of team identification) among female participants, regardless of the gender of the team. With respect to differences in team identification among various ethnic groups, Armstrong (2008) found no significant differences in self-reported team identification. These studies point to the notion that fans’ demographic characteristics may differ from study to study (presumably dependent on the specific team and sport under investigation), which could potentially account for differing degrees of team identification. For example, Fink and colleagues (2002a) suggested that cultural socialization (e.g., by gender) may influence one’s degree of team identification. Therefore, to ensure the process we examine holds despite sample variations in age, gender, and ethnicity, we include these variables as covariates in all of the analyses conducted.

To summarize, we test three hypotheses and predict (1) that imagining the renaming of the team’s stadium will result in greater perceived loss of team distinctiveness and anger (regardless of whether the new name represents an individual or corporation), (2) team identification will interact with the renaming manipulation to predict felt anger and perceived loss to distinctiveness, and (3) a significant moderated mediation model in which perceived loss to team distinctiveness mediates the relationship between the interaction (renaming manipulation by identification) and outcome (anger).

Method

Participants

Undergraduates (N = 122, 56.6% men) at the University of Kansas participated in exchange for partial course credit toward their introductory psychology requirement. Their mean age was 19.25 years (SD = 1.16).

Design and Procedure

Upon entering the laboratory, participants read and signed an informed consent after which they were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The design of the study was a 2 (Sponsor: corporation vs. individual) x 2 (Name of fieldhouse: changed vs. not changed) between-subjects design. After completing the measures described below, participants were debriefed and thanked. All measures were responded to on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Materials

We asked participants to imagine that a large corporation (Bank of America) or an individual (Larry Ellison) had donated money to the University of Kansas men’s basketball team (e.g., “An extremely large donation ($170 Million) was made to the KU Men’s Basketball team from Bank of America [or Larry Ellison]”). Half of the participants read that the name of Allen Fieldhouse had been changed to reflect the sponsor’s name (i.e., “In a recently leaked meeting, the University has agreed to change the name of Allen Fieldhouse to the Bank of America [or Larry Ellison] Fieldhouse”), while the other half of the participants read that the university discussed the name change, but decided against renaming the fieldhouse (i.e., “In a recently leaked meeting, the University considered changing the name of the fieldhouse to Bank of America [or Larry Ellison] Fieldhouse, but decided against it”). Thus, all participants read about the donation made to the team, which was said to be from either an individual or corporation, and that the university had agreed to either change the venue name or that it had not.
Two items (angry, mad) were combined to form an anger index ($\alpha = .88$). Two items assessed the extent to which participants felt the situation would harm the distinctiveness of the basketball program ($\alpha = .95$): “This action would threaten the distinctiveness of KU basketball,” and “This action would threaten the unique basketball program at KU.” The proposed moderator, degree of team identification (psychological connection to the team) was assessed with an 11-item scale (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Items, such as “I am emotionally connected to the KU Men’s Basketball team” and “I strongly identify with KU Men’s Basketball,” were averaged to measure participants’ level of identification with the team ($\alpha = .95$). Participants also completed demographic items indicating their age, gender, and ethnicity.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

A 2 (corporate vs. individual sponsor) $\times$ 2 (name changed or not) between-subjects factorial MANOVA was conducted on the two dependent measures (anger and harm to distinctiveness), while controlling for participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity. The omnibus test revealed a significant effect of sponsor type, (Wilks’s $L = .99$, $F(2, 115) = 3.16, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .05$), and renaming condition, (Wilks’s $L = .46$, $F(2, 115) = 67.57, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .54$). However, the interaction between type of sponsor and renaming was not significant, (Wilks’s $L = .99$, $F(2, 115) = 0.51, p = .60, \eta^2_p = .01$). Examination of the univariate main effects revealed that the manipulation of type of sponsor did not significantly affect participants’ intensity of felt anger, $F(1, 116) = 0.74, p = .39, \eta^2_p = .01$. However, participants in the Bank of America condition ($M = 4.46, SD = 2.13$) did rate the perceived harm to the team’s distinctiveness significantly higher than participants who read about Larry Ellison ($M = 3.76, SD = 2.23$), $F(1, 116) = 6.36, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .05$. Because the interaction between renaming and sponsor was not significant, the remaining analyses reported collapsed over type of sponsor. As shown in Table 1, participants expressed greater anger, and felt the name change harmed the distinctiveness of the team to a greater extent in the name changed condition compared with when the name remained the same.

Regression Tests for Moderation by Team Identification

To establish that the conditions needed to test a mediated moderation model were present, we first assessed whether team identification moderated the effect of the renaming manipulation on felt anger and perceived harm to distinctiveness. In other words, participants’ degree of team identification (moderator) must interact with renaming (vs. no change) conditions (independent variable) to significantly predict perceived loss of distinctiveness (mediator) and felt anger (outcome). We first centered our team identification variable and created an interaction between team identification and the renaming condition ($0 =$ no change, $1 =$ change name). We then conducted a regression with the name change condition, team identification, and the interaction between team identification and condition to predict felt anger, while controlling for participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity, $R^2 = .47$, $F(6, 115) = 17.25, p < .001$. Condition was a significant predictor of anger, while team identification was not significant. As predicted, the interaction between condition and team identification qualified these results. Team identification moderated the effect of the renaming manipulation on participants’ experience of anger. Analysis of the simple slopes revealed that higher team identification was associated with more anger when the name of the fieldhouse changed ($B = .54, t(115) = 3.10, p = .002$), but was unrelated to anger when the name did not change, $B = -.19, t(118) = -1.02, p = .31$ (see Table 2 for estimated means, and Table 3 (Model 1) for standardized betas, $t$ values, and significance levels).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Name Changed</th>
<th>$F(1, 116)$</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>$\eta^2_p$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.15 (.139)</td>
<td>4.44 (.61)</td>
<td>71.63</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness loss</td>
<td>2.58 (.61)</td>
<td>5.60 (.59)</td>
<td>108.59</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.484</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Unchanged</th>
<th>Name Changed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Identification</td>
<td>-1SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness loss</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceived harm to distinctiveness was then regressed on the name change condition, team identification, and the interaction between team identification and renaming condition, while controlling for participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity, $R^2 = .51, F(6, 115) = 19.78, p < .001$. The main effect of renaming condition was a significant predictor of perceived harm to team distinctiveness, although team identification was not significant. As predicted, the interaction between condition and team identification qualified these results. Team identification moderated the effect of the renaming manipulation on participants’ perceptions of harm to the team’s distinctiveness (see Table 3, Model 2). Analysis of the simple slopes revealed that higher team identification was associated with a greater perception of harm to the distinctiveness of the team when the name of the fieldhouse changed ($\beta = .50, t(115) = 2.56, p = .012$), but was unrelated to harm to distinctiveness when the name did not change, $\beta = -.13, t(115) = -.61, p = .54$.

Tests of Mediated Moderation

Mediated moderation is present when two predictor variables (in the current study this is the renaming manipulation and continuous team identification measure) interact to predict a mediator (harm to the team’s distinctiveness) and outcome variable (anger), the mediator predicts the outcome variable, and the relationship between the interaction and outcome is reduced when the mediator is included in the model (Morgan-Lopez & MacKinnon, 2006; Muller et al., 2005). As already revealed by the regression analyses, the interaction between the renaming manipulation and participants’ degree of team identification predicted perceived harm to the team’s distinctiveness (mediator) and felt anger (outcome). Therefore, a third regression model that shows the mediator (loss of team distinctiveness) significantly predicts the outcome (anger), and a reduction in the beta of the interaction predicting the outcome will complete the requirements to show mediated moderation (Muller et al., 2005). Furthermore, a test of the significance of the indirect effect of the mediator on the outcome provides support for a significant mediated moderation model.

To test our hypothesis that team identification would moderate the condition effect on felt anger, and that harm to distinctiveness would mediate it, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis with the interaction as the independent variable, harm to distinctiveness as the mediator, anger as the dependent variable, and the unique effect of both predictor variables (team identification and condition) along with the interaction between the mediator (harm to distinctiveness) and moderator (team identification) included in the equation, and with participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity as covariates. Significant mediated moderation is obtained when the influence of the interaction term on the anger outcome is reduced, while the mediator remains a significant predictor of the outcome variable. When the perception of harm to the team’s distinctiveness was added to the mediated moderation model predicting anger, $R^2 = .52, F(8, 113) = 15.30, p < .001$, the interaction coefficient was nonsignificant, and the perception of harm to distinctiveness remained significant (see Table 3, Model 3). Using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) SPSS macro (5,000 iterations), we tested our prediction that perceived harm to distinctiveness mediates the interaction effect on anger, while controlling for the main effects of condition and team identification and the participant demographic variables. As indicated by the absence of zero within the confidence interval (95% CI = .0202 to .4857), the predicted mediated moderation model was supported.4

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of corporate renaming of a sport venue and degree of team identification on fans’ anger, and to assess whether perceived threat to the distinctiveness of the team mediated this interaction. We hypothesized, (1) that imagining the renaming of the team’s stadium would result in greater perceived loss of team distinctiveness and anger (regardless of whether the new name represents an individual or corporation), (2) team identification would interact with the renaming manipulation to predict felt anger and perceived loss to distinctiveness, and (3) a significant

Table 3 Mediated Moderation Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criterion:</td>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
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<td>Renaming</td>
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<td>8.55**</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<td>-1.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rename X Identification</td>
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<td>2.84**</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness loss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness loss X Team Identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. 

To test our hypothesis that team identification would moderate the condition effect on felt anger, and that harm to distinctiveness would mediate it, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis with the interaction as the independent variable, harm to distinctiveness as the mediator, anger as the dependent variable, and the unique effect of both predictor variables (team identification and condition) along with the interaction between the mediator (harm to distinctiveness) and moderator (team identification) included in the equation, and with participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity as covariates. Significant mediated moderation is obtained when the influence of the interaction term on the anger outcome is reduced, while the mediator remains a significant predictor of the outcome variable. When the perception of harm to the team’s distinctiveness was added to the mediated moderation model predicting anger, $R^2 = .52, F(8, 113) = 15.30, p < .001$, the interaction coefficient was nonsignificant, and the perception of harm to distinctiveness remained significant (see Table 3, Model 3). Using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) SPSS macro (5,000 iterations), we tested our prediction that perceived harm to distinctiveness mediates the interaction effect on anger, while controlling for the main effects of condition and team identification and the participant demographic variables. As indicated by the absence of zero within the confidence interval (95% CI = .0202 to .4857), the predicted mediated moderation model was supported.4

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mediated moderation model where perceived loss to team distinctiveness would mediate the relationship between the interaction (renaming manipulation by identification) and outcome (anger). As predicted, (1) fans reacted with anger and perceived the name change as harmful to the team’s distinctiveness, (2) fans’ identification with the team did moderate the effect of renaming on fans’ perception of harm to the team’s distinctiveness and felt anger, and (3) a mediated moderation analysis showed that, compared with when the stadium name remained the same, highly identified fans believed the name change would harm the distinctiveness of the team, which resulted in greater felt anger.

Supporting past theorizing and research (Boyd, 2000; Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten & Spears, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), perceived threat to the team’s distinctiveness was a significant mediator of the name change condition effect on the degree of anger experienced among participants who were highly identified fans of the team. Consistent with theoretical claims (Boyd, 2000; Hollis, 2008), participants did express greater perceived loss to distinctiveness when the sport venue was renamed after a corporation compared with an individual. However, regardless of whether the new name of the fieldhouse was to be a corporation (Bank of America) or an individual (Larry Ellison), participants reported greater anger resulting from the perceived harm to distinctiveness when the name of the fieldhouse changed compared with when the name did not change.

Based on the social identity perspective, researchers consistently show that distinctiveness threat affects group members’ judgments and behaviors (Jetten et al., 2004), yet little research focuses on their emotional responses. Jetten and Spears (2003) speculate that either fear or anger could be aroused when a distinctiveness threat is present. While previous research shows that a future distinctiveness threat can lead to angst, which is a form of fear (Wohl et al., 2010), the present results provide evidence that anger can be elicited by distinctiveness threat. Indeed, the present results are the first to show a connection between threat to the group’s distinctiveness and the emotional reaction of anger. We argue that the timing of the distinctiveness threat will determine whether anger or angst is elicited. If there is only a potential that the threat may be realized in the future, angst is the emotion likely to be experienced, but when the threatened outcome is believed to have occurred, anger is the more likely emotion. Importantly, the degree of identification with the team moderated the extent to which the renaming affected fans’ perceived harm to the group’s distinctiveness, which in turn drove the intensity of the emotions experienced. These findings are consistent with prior theorizing and research (see Jetten et al., 2004) showing that highly identified group members react more strongly than low identified group members when a threat to the group’s distinctiveness occurs.

Past research (Smith, Cronin, & Kessler, 2008; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004) has found that anger is an important precursor to collective action. The results of the current study suggest that highly identified fans do feel greater anger due to the perceived harm to the group’s distinctiveness when the name of the fieldhouse was changed (compared with when the name was not changed). Accordingly, we would expect that under these conditions highly identified fans will be primed for action against the sponsor, with the goal of reversing the name change. When coupled with leadership and efficacy to effectively bring about a name change reversal, fans can and do successfully act cohesively to create change. For example, as Buchanan (2008) reports, voters in San Francisco passed an initiative to have the name of the San Francisco Giant’s stadium revert back to its original name. The highly identified fans that acted collectively to have the name of their team’s stadium changed back to its original historic name may well have been motivated by anger stemming from a perceived loss of distinctiveness by corporate renaming.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations concerning the generalizability of the findings obtained in the current study should be considered. First, we used short two-item measures to assess our dependent variables. It is possible that such measures may not have fully captured the constructs of interest, although some investigators argue that the limitations of short scales are often overstated (see Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). Second, we did not assess participants’ behavioral intentions or their actual behaviors relevant to support for the team (e.g., game attendance, consumption of the sponsor’s products). While evidence (e.g., Buchanan, 2008) exists outside the laboratory to suggest that fans may react to the corporate naming of a stadium through protests, boycotts, and petitions, future research might profitably examine behavioral preferences following renaming of a sport venue. A number of contextual factors could moderate behavioral responses to renaming. For example, university students may react with less anger to stadium renaming if their university is under financial strain.

Third, we assessed participants’ anger at hearing that the university had decided to change (or not change) the name of the fieldhouse. Because social psychological research suggests that humans are not always accurate at predicting their future emotional responses to events (Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), the intensity of anger reported by participants in the current study could be inaccurate. That is, compared with the emotional responses that would occur when their team’s fieldhouse name is officially changed, our participants may have overestimated the degree of anger they would feel. For this reason, replication of the findings among fans of a team that is actually undergoing renaming would be useful. However, even if participants in the current study were overestimating the intensity of their emotional reactions, we would expect the mechanism (harm to distinctiveness) that we identified would mediate the effects of renaming and team identification on anger.
Future research might also address the extent to which the present results are unique to the particular context (i.e., KU and Allen Fieldhouse) we employed. Fans of professional league teams may react differently than college students—in part because they expect corporate sponsorship to a greater extent than college sports fans do. However, there is some data that suggest fans of professional teams also respond to renaming with negative emotions like the fans in the current study (Buchanan, 2008; Greenberg & Gray, 1996; Hollis, 2008). The present results support the notion that fans’ reactions (both behavioral and emotional) to stadium renaming (from historic to corporate) will be a reaction to perceived harm to the team’s distinctiveness.

The number of stadiums being renamed after corporations is increasing (Hollis, 2008). While corporations may view stadium naming rights as beneficial (Armstrong, 2004), the fans may not always react positively (Greenberg & Gray, 1996; Hollis, 2008). The results of the present research indicate one reason why this is so. Sport venue names are valued attributes of a team that provide an important component of distinctiveness between teams. Highly identified fans perceive such renaming as a threat to their team’s distinctiveness and react with anger. As suggested by previous research (Smith et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2004), the anger felt by highly identified fans may lead them to act collectively and protest the name change. Given the amount of money involved in stadium naming rights contracts, corporations would be well advised to assess potential fan reactions before completing such changes. It might even be possible for corporations to frame renaming as a means of creating distinctiveness for the team and thereby avoid the negative emotional reactions we identified. Renaming a stadium entails risks, particularly among highly identified fans who see the change as undermining their team’s valued distinctiveness.

Notes

1. Degree of identification with the team operationalizes the extent to which students consider themselves “fans” of the team. Thus, the lowest identified students could consider themselves to be “non-fans,” while those who score higher on the identification measure would consider themselves to be highly identified “fans.” We conceptualize team identification as a continuum rather than a dichotomous category distinction. Participants in the current study rated their degree of team identification ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.58$) showing a relatively normal distribution of connection with the school’s basketball team. Our use of the term “fan” represents the degree of connection to the team, and not a statement of category membership for participants.

2. A potential limitation is that assessment of the moderator (team identification) occurred after the manipulation of stadium renaming, because the moderator is assumed to be unaffected by the treatment (Müller et al., 2005). To ensure the treatment and moderator are independent from one another we conducted a partial correlation (controlling for participant gender, age, and ethnicity) between the renaming condition and team identification. The correlation was nonsignificant ($r = -.01$, $p = .95$), thus meeting the assumption of independence between treatment and moderator.

3. Participant demographics (gender, age, and ethnicity) accounted for 8% of the variance predicting anger, and 2% of the variance predicting perceived loss to the team’s distinctiveness.

4. The results of the current study show that including the mediator in the model accounted for an additional 5% of the variance in felt anger. While this change in $R^2$ may appear small, researchers have noted that $R^2$ change should not be taken as representing the practical significance or effect size of variable additions in regression models (e.g., Trafimow, 2004). With respect to mediation models, new statistical techniques have been suggested for calculating effect sizes (e.g., Fairchild, MacKinnon, Taborga, & Taylor, 2009; Preacher & Kelley, 2011), but more research is needed before they can be recommended as best practice (Hayes, 2009; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Therefore, caution is warranted when interpreting the practical significance of the increase in $R^2$ accounted for by including the mediator in the current study.

References


