A Study of NHL Fan
Identification in Red Deer, Alberta

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Dedication

To my family and friends,
for always believing in me,
and being my constant
sources of love and support
during this journey.

“Life is unpredictable,
Not everything is in our control.
But as long as we’re with the right people.
We can handle anything.”
Abstract

While there are many reasons sport fans choose to follow one team over another, geography is typically a major one, as people often follow their hometown team, or the team that is the closest (Rooney, 1974; 1975; Wann, 2006). However, limited academic attention has been given to situations where geographic proximity is likely to have little to no influence in the development of sport fan identification, and how individuals choose teams instead. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how hockey fans chose their favourite team when two teams in two different cities are an equal distance away, and how they would maintain that fandom in the presence of the other team’s fans. Participants were recruited in Red Deer, Alberta, a city that is 84 miles or 135.2 km from both Edmonton and Calgary. Using Rooney’s (1974; 1975) spheres of influence for sport teams, Red Deer falls equally within the sphere for both teams. As a result of the equi-distance, however, it was assumed geographic proximity likely has little influence on fandom formation in Red Deer. Further, the constant threat of the rival group being in close proximity raises questions for how fans in Red Deer maintain their team fandom. A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with highly identified fans of the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames that were also lifelong residents of Red Deer. Geographic proximity proved to play no role, while family influence, team success, rebellious nature, and place attachment proved major factors in how fans in Red Deer choose between these two teams. Further, because the Oilers and Flames are traditional rivals dating back to the 1980s (Spector, 2015), and with Red Deer being caught in the middle, an assumption was made that rivalry would play a large role in fandom maintenance. However, that was not the case. Not only did rivalry not factor in
fandom maintenance, but the rivalry was also seen as dead or dying by participants.

Directions for future research and recommendations are presented and discussed.
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Chapter One – Introduction

Introduction

Showing support for a sport team can take a number of different forms. This could include purchasing merchandise, attending live games as a spectator, watching games on television or online, consuming concession items at games, keeping up to date with the team through the news or online, and/or discussing the team with family, friends, and even complete strangers (O’Shea & Alonso, 2012; Trail, 2016). These actions are considered “sport consumer behaviour” and have inspired an academic field to examine the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that sport fans experience. Funk and James (2001) created a distinction between fans and spectators. Spectators will watch, but quickly forget, their sporting events, while fans “continue [their] interest until the intensity of feeling toward the team becomes so great that parts of everyday are devoted to [their] team” (Funk & James, 2001, p. 120).

Even though research has been done on sport participation, the academic field of sport consumer behaviour mostly focuses on sport spectators. Studies have looked at how individuals first become attracted to a specific team (Heere & James, 2007; James, 2001; O’Shea & Alonso, 2012; Rooney, 1975), how fans develop identification or fandom with that team (Foster & Hyatt, 2008; Heere, 2016; James, 2016; Melnick, 1993; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010), and how and why they have maintained their fandom for that team (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Researchers have looked at different antecedents to fandom, or what causes individuals to choose one team over another, and their studies have shown that there are
several possible reasons for these choices. The predominant ones include the influence of others (parents, siblings, friends, etc.) (Funk & James, 2016; James, 2001; Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014; Smith, Patterson, Williams, & Hogg, 1981; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996); a desire to fulfill an individual’s sense of belonging or community (Foster & Hyatt, 2008; Gibson et al., 2002; Heere, 2016; Heere & James, 2007; Wann, 1995); the history or tradition of a team (Delia & James, 2018; James et al., 2009; Kolbe & James, 2000; Lock, Taylor, & Darcy, 2011); success (Delia & James, 2018; Lock et al., 2011; Wann et al., 1996); players (Delia & James, 2018; Hyatt & Foster, 2015; James, 2016; Wann et al., 1996); and geography (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Havard, 2014; James et al., 2009; Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann et al., 1996). While the antecedents that have an influence are unique to each case, geographic proximity is widely considered one of the biggest antecedents to fandom. Specifically, individuals will commonly cheer for the closest team to them when they develop their fan identification, whether it happens in childhood, the teenage years, or adulthood (Wann et al., 1996). However, a gap in the literature exists for situations where two teams are equi-distant, and geographic proximity could have little to no impact on fan identification development.

The City of Red Deer, Alberta is one location where it can be assumed that geographic proximity could have little to no influence on fandom formation. Red Deer is equi-distant from Edmonton and Calgary (Appendix A), exactly 84 miles or 135.2 km (Rand McNally Road Atlas, 1996), and both cities have a professional National Hockey League (NHL) franchise. Rooney (1974; 1975) wrote that Red Deer would be considered within the sphere of influence for both teams, and with neither city being closer than the
other, a fan choosing one team over the other because it is “the closer team” is highly unlikely.

Further, Social Identity Theory is based on the idea that people will join groups with the specific intention of positively reinforcing their self-esteem and well-being. This positive self-esteem is achieved through active positive comparison between the in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tyler and Cobbs (2015) wrote how Social Identity Theory ties into rivalry and rival fan groups within the context of sport. Rival fan groups are out-groups that are perceived as a threat because they could potentially impede the ability of the in-group to carry out a positive comparison. This threatens the self-esteem of the in-group. Previous research has looked at how in-groups maintain their positive self-esteem from the threat of rival groups (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016; Havard, 2014; Havard et al., 2018). However, a gap in the literature exists to explain how sport fans that are located just as close to the rival fan group as they are to their own fan group maintain their fandom and positive group comparison. This situation comes into effect in Red Deer since the city is caught in the spheres of influence (Rooney, 1974; 1975) of both Edmonton and Calgary. As an example, for an Oilers fan in Red Deer, Flames fans are just as close as their own team’s fans, which could threaten their fan identification if it is not specially maintained.

This research study examined hockey fans in Red Deer that identify as Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames fans. Semi-structured interpretive interviews were conducted with a sample of these fans to identify how they initially became either Oilers or Flames fans, and how they have maintained their fandom over time. After being completed, the
interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify which influences had an effect on the fan identification of the research participants.

**Edmonton Oilers**

Major professional hockey originally came to Edmonton in November of 1971, when the World Hockey Association (WHA) awarded owner Bill Hunter a charter franchise in the new league. The WHA was created to rival the NHL beginning in the fall of 1972 (Sandor, 2005). First named the Edmonton Oilers, the team name was eventually changed to the Alberta Oilers. This was done after the WHA franchise set to play in Calgary, the Calgary Broncos, folded before ever playing a game (Sandor, 2005). The name change occurred with the intention of the Oilers splitting their home games between Edmonton and Calgary in their first season. However, when Oilers’ owner Bill Hunter could not complete an arena deal in Calgary and news came of a new state-of-the-art arena coming to the Northlands Fairgrounds in Edmonton, the decision was made to commit the team to Edmonton and return the team name to the Edmonton Oilers (Sandor, 2005).

Although their on-ice performance was far from superior in their first few seasons, the Oilers managed to generate a high amount of fan support through fan favourite players, including Al Hamilton (Sandor, 2005). The team managed to stay relatively stable by WHA standards, and was eventually purchased by Peter Pocklington in 1976 (Willes, 2004). At the beginning of the 1978-79 season, Pocklington changed the future of his franchise when he acquired Wayne Gretzky from the Indianapolis Racers. Even though the Oilers were a stable member of the WHA, the league itself was in trouble. With the future of the WHA in question, at the conclusion of the 1978-79 season,
the Oilers, along with the Winnipeg Jets, New England/Hartford Whalers, and Quebec Nordiques, joined the NHL through a merger agreement between the two leagues (Sandor, 2005).

Although one of the younger teams in the league, the Oilers found quick success in the NHL making the playoffs their first season (1979-80). Their early success in the league continued as they advanced to their first Stanley Cup Final during the 1982-83 season (Edmonton Oilers, 2018). The team was led by Wayne Gretzky, who managed to set a number of NHL records during the team’s first four seasons in the NHL, including most assists in a season (109) and points (164) during the 1980-81 season (NHL.com staff, 2004). The Oilers’ roster was full of talent playing alongside Gretzky, consisting of future members of the Hockey Hall of Fame including Glenn Anderson, Paul Coffey, Grant Fuhr, Jarri Kurri, Mark Messier, and head coach Glen Sather (McCurdy, 2010). This young, talented core led the Oilers to form one of the most feared dynasties in NHL history in the 1980s (Steinkamp, 2010). The Oilers would win their first of five Stanley Cups the following season in 1983-84, followed by Cup wins in 1984-85, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1989-90. The 1984-85 Stanley Cup Champion Oilers team has since been voted to be the greatest NHL team in history by NHL fans (Hackel, 2017).

After the 1987-88 season, the Oilers dynasty began to collapse as players slowly began departing the franchise. Through this dismantling, the Oilers shocked the hockey world by trading the face of their franchise, Wayne Gretzky, to the Los Angeles Kings for a package of cash, players, and draft picks. The loss of Gretzky was immediately felt, as the Oilers were only able to finish third in their division, and suffered a first round playoff loss for the first time in seven years (Spector, 2017). The disassembling of the
Oilers’ talented core continued over the next few seasons, culminating in Mark Messier being traded in 1991. This exodus of talent caused a significant drop in performance for the franchise in the 1990s, compared to the dynasty days of the 1980s, as the Oilers tried, but ultimately failed, to re-establish themselves as an elite franchise (Edmonton Oilers, 2018).

The Oilers’ mediocrity continued until the NHL’s 2004-05 lockout cancelled season, either making the playoffs and losing in the first round or failing to make the playoffs all together. After the NHL lockout, however, the Oilers were able to take advantage of new league rules and restructure their roster with more talented players (Steinkamp, 2010). Although they just snuck into the 2006 playoffs as the lowest seed in the conference, the reformed roster of the Oilers managed to carry-out a series of upsets that ultimately carried the team back to the Stanley Cup Final for the first time in 16 years. However, their luck ran short, losing in the Final that year to the Carolina Hurricanes in seven games (Edmonton Oilers, 2018). Unfortunately, this quickly found success did not last long, as a number of the key players requested trades or left in free agency during the following summer.

Following the surprising championship run in 2006, the Oilers once again entered a prolonged period of futility. They finished last, or second last, in their division and ultimately set a club record for most years out of the playoffs following the conclusion of the 2010-11 season (Edmonton Oilers, 2018). This unsuccessful run allowed the Oilers to have a number of high draft picks, and a subsequent influx of highly talented young players throughout these years. This included three consecutive first overall picks in the NHL Entry Draft between 2010 and 2012. However, this infusion of young talent had
little to no impact on the fortune of the team, as the playoff drought stretched out to tie a league record of 10 consecutive years following the 2015-16 season (Edmonton Oilers, 2018).

Following what Oilers fans have named the “decade of darkness” that began in 2006, the Edmonton Oilers began to show signs of turning a corner during their 2016-17 season, as they won 47 games, the most the team has won since the dynasty years in the 1980s (Aldrich, 2017; Edmonton Oilers, 2018). The team was led by strong play from 2015 first overall pick Connor McDavid, who emerged as the team’s captain at only the age of 19, and quickly became a fan favourite in Edmonton with his electric and dominating play (Edmonton Oilers, 2018). The Oilers’ playoff drought ended in 2017, making the playoffs for the first time since 2006. Their season eventually ended with a second round loss to the Anaheim Ducks (Edmonton Oilers, 2018). However, the Oilers have since signed McDavid to a long-term contract, and with other important, young pieces, including 2014 third overall pick Leon Draisaitl, the Oilers and their fans are hoping for a return to the dynasty days of the 1980s.

**Calgary Flames**

The roots of major professional hockey in Calgary can be traced to 1972, when the Calgary Broncos were scheduled to begin play in the WHA. However, without playing a game, the Broncos folded when their ownership group could not pay the required WHA expansion fee (Sandor, 2005). For the 1972-73 WHA season, the Edmonton Oilers renamed themselves the Alberta Oilers, and intended to split their home games between Edmonton and Calgary (Sandor, 2005). However, this never materialized, and Calgary was left with a pro hockey void. This hockey void paved the way for Calgary
to get its own WHA franchise and in 1975, Jim Pattison relocated his WHA franchise from Vancouver to Calgary, renamed them the Cowboys and had the team play out of the Stampede Corral arena (Sandor, 2005). The team enjoyed some on-ice success early, but failed to garner much fan support from Calgarians, ultimately struggling for attendance (Sandor, 2005). Ownership attempted to keep the team afloat long enough for the WHA-NHL merger to materialize in hopes of the Cowboys joining the NHL. However, when the terms were set for the first attempted merger between the NHL and WHA in 1977, the Cowboys’ home arena was not big enough by NHL standards. This prompted the owners of the Cowboys to cease operations in August 1977 even though the NHL and WHA did not officially merge until 1979 (Sandor, 2005).

Calgary would get its next major professional hockey franchise in 1980, when the NHL’s Atlanta Flames relocated to the city. Originally joining the NHL in 1972, the Atlanta Flames were one of the most successful expansion franchises, making the playoffs in six of their first eight seasons. However, the owners of the Flames were caught in financial issues, prompting the sale of the team to Nelson Scalbania and a group of Calgary-based investors, who relocated the team to Calgary (Augustyn, 2017; Calgary Flames, n.d.).

After the relocation, the Flames continued their on-ice success in their new home, making the playoffs for their first 11 years in Calgary, including every year in the 1980s. This prompted the Flames to be considered one of the NHL’s most dominant teams of that time. However, even though the Flames were successful enough to be considered a dynasty, they were stuck in the same division as their provincial rivals, the Edmonton Oilers, limiting their ability to advance in the playoffs and win championships (Augustyn,
Having no choice but to load up on talent to compete with the dynasty in Edmonton, the Flames added two future members of the Hockey Hall of Fame in Lanny McDonald and Al MacInnis, as well as Mike Vernon and other key pieces in the early 1980s (Augustyn, 2017; Calgary Flames, n.d.). Having consistently lost to the Oilers in the playoffs in previous years, the Flames finally managed to get past the Oilers for the first time in the 1985-86 season. They made it to the Stanley Cup Final, but eventually lost to the Montreal Canadiens. The Flames were not able to get past the Oilers in the playoffs again until 1988-89, once again getting to the Stanley Cup Final, again meeting the Montreal Canadiens. This time, however, the Flames defeated the Canadiens in six games to win their one and only Stanley Cup (Augustyn, 2017).

Although a dominating team in the 1980s, the Flames followed a similar path as their provincial rivals in Edmonton and began to regress in the 1990s. Even though they continued to find regular season success and finish high in the standings, the Flames were unable to get out of the first round of the playoffs from the 1989-90 season through to the 1994-95 season. The Flames would go on to experience a playoff drought beginning in 1996-97 right through until the 2002-03 season (Augustyn, 2017). The Flames returned to the playoffs in 2003-04, and as the lowest seed in the Western Conference upset teams ranked higher than them on their way to the Stanley Cup Final. In the Final, the Flames continued their hot play against the Tampa Bay Lightning. However, they ultimately fell short and lost in game seven to the Lightning (Augustyn, 2017; Calgary Flames, n.d.).

Calgary continued to make the playoffs in subsequent years, but still continued to suffer opening round loses. The Flames once again began to regress, failing to make the playoffs from 2009-10 until 2014-15, 11 years since the Flames’ 2004 Stanley Cup run.
The 2014-15 Flames managed to make it out of the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 2004, but failed to advance past the second round. The Flames once again showed signs of regression, failing to make the playoffs until the 2016-17 season, but this return to the playoffs was short lived as they once again lost in the first round (Augustyn, 2017).

**Battle of Alberta**

The provincial rivalry in hockey between Edmonton and Calgary has been described as one of the most intense and passionate rivalries in the sport (Spector, 2015). Ever since hockey has been played in the Province of Alberta, there has been a rivalry between the two cities. When one city’s hockey team was playing for a championship, regardless of the level, the city that was not competing would often be jealously cheering for the opposition of their provincial rival (Sandor, 2005). The Battle of Alberta for hockey can be traced back to the 19th century, before the Province of Alberta even existed, as hockey gained popularity west of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1895, an all-star team from Calgary’s municipal hockey league came to Edmonton to play the Edmonton Thistles and a local police hockey team, two of the most popular teams in Edmonton at the time. These are the first recorded hockey games between teams from the two cities. Although both Edmonton teams were favoured and expected to win, the Calgary all-star team won both games in what was considered an upset. This is credited by some hockey historians as the earliest Battle of Alberta (Sandor, 2005).

The hockey rivalry between these two cities continued to grow as organized hockey grew, extending into junior, senior, and amateur hockey through the 1900s (Sandor, 2005). However, the major professional version of the competition did not
emerge until both cities had an NHL franchise. Even though both cities had WHA franchises in the 1970s, the rivalry did not grow between the Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Cowboys. Although a rivalry was anticipated, it never materialized with the fans, as Battle of Alberta games between the Oilers and Cowboys were often played in front of half empty arenas (Sandor, 2005). The major pro hockey rivalry did not form until 1980, when the Flames arrived in Calgary from Atlanta. Once the Flames were established in Calgary and plans were in place for a new arena for the Flames, securing their long-term future in the city, the stage was set for the modern NHL version of the Battle of Alberta and for Alberta to be the world’s hotspot for hockey for the upcoming decade (Sandor, 2005).

Part of the reason that this rivalry has since flourished has been the similar paths that both cities and franchises have had throughout their existence. The Oilers joined the NHL from the WHA in 1979, while the following year the Flames relocated to Calgary from Atlanta. For much of the 1980s, the Oilers and Flames were the two best teams in their conference, and often the entire league (Spector, 2015). From the 1982-83 season to the 1989-90 season, both teams finished in the top two of their division, with neither team being lower than third from 1981-82 to 1990-91. Additionally, either the Oilers or the Flames represented their respective conference in the Stanley Cup Final for eight straight years from 1983 to 1990, with the Cup coming to Alberta in six of those eight years.

With both teams being considered a dynasty in the 1980s, Alberta was considered “Death Valley” (Spector, 2015, p. 3) for visiting NHL teams coming to the province. This term was given to the Alberta trip that would see American NHL teams play both the Oilers and the Flames in one weekend. Due to the strength of both teams in the 1980s,
this trip would often result in two loses for the visiting team in hard played games against two teams now considered dynasties (Spector, 2015). As Eric Duhatschek described it: “teams left Alberta with wind burn thanks to the speed-of-sound Oilers and bumps and bruises thanks to the physical Flames” (2010, para. 1). Due to the difficulty of those games, the talent of Alberta’s teams, and the ability for the Oilers and Flames to push the scores out of control, the “Death Valley” name was given to the trip (Duhatchek, 2010; Spector, 2015).

Alberta’s NHL teams did not just prove to be tough competition for the other NHL teams, but caused severe competition within the borders of Alberta (Spector, 2015). The Oilers and Flames were in the same division, meaning they played against each other eight times every season. Further, due to the NHL playoff format of the 1980s, the provincial rivals would always meet in one of the first two rounds of the playoffs. This meant that during the 1980s, either the Oilers or the Flames would eliminate their provincial rival early in the playoffs. However, as both teams began to regress in the 1990s, the last time these two teams met in the playoffs was in 1991. Both teams experienced drop-offs in performance through the 1990s into the early 2000s, causing a somewhat cool down of the rivalry. In the 2004 playoffs, the Flames advanced to the Stanley Cup Final, eventually losing in seven games. In the 2006 playoffs, the Oilers pulled off the same feat, also losing in seven games in the Final (Spector, 2015). The Battle of Alberta, for the most part, has been fairly competitive; the first season sweep was not accomplished until the Flames went 6-0 against the Oilers in 2009-10 and again in 2014-15. The Oilers’ first sweep of the season series was in 2016-17.
Red Deer, Alberta

The City of Red Deer is located in central Alberta (Appendix A), and is the fourth-most populous city in the province with a population of 101,002 people according to the 2019 municipal census (Lulla, 2019). Red Deer is the halfway point between Edmonton and Calgary, located exactly 84 miles, or 135.2 km, between both cities (Rand McNally Road Atlas, 1996). The history of Red Deer can be traced back to 1882, when a trading post and stopping house was established on the trail between Edmonton and Calgary. Permanent settlements soon began to develop along the Red Deer River, eventually establishing what became the City of Red Deer (W. Dawe, 1979). The settlement continued to grow, eventually being incorporated as a city in March 1913. From a trading post, Red Deer transitioned into an agriculture hub and a major center for three railways operating in Western Canada. Through the 1900s, Red Deer continued to be a major agricultural hub for farms in Central Alberta. Today, the agricultural industry still has a major effect on Red Deer, as well as the natural gas and oil industries (City of Red Deer, n.d.).

Other than the college athletic teams at Red Deer College, there is only one team in Red Deer that attracts significant crowds of spectators. The Red Deer Rebels are a major junior hockey team, playing in the Western Hockey League (WHL). The WHL is one of three member leagues of the Canadian Hockey League, providing the highest level of junior hockey in Canada. The WHL is considered one of the top player development leagues in the world, consistently supplying talent to the NHL, Canada’s national teams, and Canadian university hockey programs (WHL, 2018). The expansion Rebels began playing in 1992 in the newly built Centrium arena in Red Deer. Fan support has always
been strong, with games beginning to consistently sellout by January of their first season (M. Dawe, 2017).

In 1999, the Rebels were purchased by Brent Sutter. Sutter, along with his five brothers, played junior hockey in Red Deer in the 1970s with the old Red Deer Rustlers of the Alberta Junior “A” Hockey League. All six of the Sutter brothers went on to long and successful NHL careers (M. Dawe, 2017). Since purchasing the team, Brent Sutter has been more hands-on than simply an owner, holding the positions of president, general manager, and head coach at different times during his tenure. Further, his brothers have also returned to Red Deer to fill important roles with the Rebels. This continued involvement between the Sutter brothers and junior hockey in the area has led to a strong link between the Sutter family and the City of Red Deer (M. Dawe, 2017).

**Overview of Current Research Project**

The objective of this research project was to examine how fan identification is developed and maintained when geographic proximity is likely to have little to no impact, and when the threat of a strong rivalry has a significant presence. Specifically, the purpose of this interpretive study was to understand fan identification development and maintenance for Alberta’s NHL teams among hockey fans in Red Deer, Alberta. The fandom for Alberta’s NHL teams was defined as hockey fans showing well-established identification to either the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames. This data was collected to try and answer the following research questions:

1. How did fans of Alberta’s NHL teams, either the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames, living in Red Deer, Alberta, develop their fan identification?
2. How have fans of Alberta’s NHL teams maintained their fan identification with the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames while living in Red Deer?

These questions were explored through interpretive in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants for this study were recruited through posters, online postings, as well as a newspaper article and radio interview outlining the study. Individuals who were Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames fans that are also life-long residents of Red Deer, Alberta were encouraged to contact the researcher to discuss their fandom.

**Value**

The value of this research is focused on contributing to literature on how fan identification is both developed and maintained. This study explored fandom in a context where geographic proximity was likely to have little, if any, influence on fandom development and the maintenance of fandom when a strong rival group is so close in proximity – two topics that have yet to be looked at in the literature. Further, the researcher hopes that this study will encourage more research into the development and maintenance of fan identification in unique situations where different influences cannot be as strong as others.

**Breakdown**

This paper includes a thorough summary and review of literature that is relevant to this research. The review of literature, chapter two, begins with a general examination of literature related to motivations for individuals to be a fan of sport. From there, research and studies on the motivations to be a fan of a specific team are discussed. Following this, literature that covers the different levels of fan identification will be examined and discussed. Finally, literature that outlines motives and antecedents that fans
have for choosing one team over another is reviewed. Within this review of literature, Social Identity Theory will be discussed as the framework for this study.

Chapter three of this document consists of the methodological choices for this study. First, the interpretive paradigm is discussed, including why it is the best approach for a study of this nature. From there, data collection strategies are examined. Since interviews were used in this study to generate the data, the strategy and methods employed to collect this data are discussed. This includes the preparation, tools and materials needed for a successful and rich interview. A rundown of the interview process and sampling strategies are also presented. From there, data analysis and trustworthiness strategies for this study are discussed. Chapter four consists of the results and findings that came from the 12 interviews that were completed as part of this study. An analysis and description of the themes that aided in answering the research questions, as well as a discussion on these themes, are also presented in this portion of the paper. Finally, chapter five includes an overview of this research project, as well as directions for future research similar to this study. This section concludes with an evaluation of implications, limitations, and a conclusion for the study.
Chapter Two – Review of Literature

Sport can catch the interest and devotion of “both the young and old, the wise and foolish, [and] the educated and uneducated” (Rooney, 1974, p. 7). Understanding fans, consumer behaviour, and the processes behind developing and maintaining fan identification is a topic that has been widely studied and researched. This literature review will provide an analysis of previous studies related to fandom and the development and maintenance of fan identification within individuals. Topics within the literature that are reviewed include motivations to become a fan of sport, the psychological and social benefits of being a fan, the different levels of fan identification, and motives for choosing one team over another. Specifically, fan identification literature is reviewed that has a connection to the current study.

Motives to be a Fan of Sport

Spectating at sport events has a long tradition that dates back to the first Olympics in 776 BC (Trail & James, 2001). Sport spectating has been recorded as a predominant form of leisure in Western society that is growing in popularity. Hundreds of millions of individuals attend live sporting events in the United States annually, and the already large revenues for the top four North American sport leagues continue to grow – increasing from $17.7 billion in 2006 to $30.5 billion in 2015 (Bradbury, 2019; Trail & James, 2001). This is an annual growth rate of 5.62%, which is three times higher than the annual growth rate of the United States economy (1.93%) over that same period (Bradbury, 2019). These numbers indicate the popularity of professional sports in North America, and how that popularity is continuously growing.
Someone that is just observing a sporting event for entertainment might not be very connected to the game, and will likely quickly forget the event once it is over. Highly identified fans, however, will continue their interest after the event is over, to a point where parts of every day are devoted to the sport, and sport becomes an important part of their life (Trail & James, 2001). Wann (1995) developed the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), a tool that uses eight items to measure different motivators of sport fandom. The results of this study indicated that being a sport fan in general offers self-esteem benefits to the individual. Other motives to be a sport fan from this study include “eustress, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family needs” (Wann, 1995, p. 377). Sport fandom has benefits that are independent of team success. When an individual is a fan of a sport, as opposed to simply a team, that individual feels benefits from feelings of identification and belongingness at that sporting event (Wann, 1995).

Trail and James (2001) took a marketing perspective, and advanced the literature on motives for sport fans by developing the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC). This scale advanced the literature on sport spectators by accounting for psychological motivations that influence sport consumption. These psychological motivations include a need for achievement and a desire for socialization (Trail & James, 2001). The MSSC was created for scholars to better understand the psychological influence on attendance, purchasing habits and other consumption behaviour and advance the academic understanding of why people will make a commitment to a specific sport or team.
In 2004, James and Ross carried out a study to extend the academic understanding of sport fans’ interests in “non-revenue” college sports (baseball, softball, wrestling, etc.; every sport but men’s basketball and football). Their results found that fans of men’s baseball, women’s softball, and men’s wrestling were more motivated by entertainment, skill, drama and team effort as opposed to achievement, empathy, team affiliation, social interaction, or family (James & Ross, 2004). They concluded that there are some aspects of sport that appeal to spectators across all sport, including the entertainment of the sport that is derived from the drama and the physical skills associated with the sport. At the same time, however, they found that each sport has different elements that appeal uniquely to whichever sport is in question. So, while there are certain aspects that cut across all of sport that attract individuals to attending sporting events, there are also motivators that are unique to specific sports (James & Ross, 2004).

Often, once individuals become a fan of a team sport, and expose themselves to a certain amount of it, they develop a loyalty to a specific team within that sport. Once this happens, there are motivations to maintain this fan loyalty that are beyond the motivations of being a fan of the sport in general.

**Motives to be a Fan of a Team**

While there are numerous reasons that individuals are a fan of sport in general – there are also different reasons that an individual will be a fan of a specific team. Lots of literature has looked at the motivations that individuals have when maintaining team specific loyalty or identification. For the most part, the literature can be divided into two categories: studies that found that there are psychological motives and benefits to identifying with a team, and studies that found that there are social, or sociological,
motives and benefits to identifying with a team. However, there is significantly more literature that deals with the psychological motives.

**Psychology.** The psychological connection between a fan and their favourite sport team(s) has emerged as one the most important parts of understanding fan identification. This is because fans form psychological connections with their favourite teams that are “persistent and resistant to change” (James, 2001, p. 233). Psychological connections between a fan and their favourite team can be so strong that parts of every day involve, or revolve around, the team (James, Walker, & Kuminka, 2009).

Initially, one of two areas academics focused on was trying to measure team identity (Lock & Heere, 2017). This was influenced by Cialdini et al. (1976) and their study on the idea of Basking In Reflected Glory (BIRG). This study found that individuals relate themselves to successful others (in their study this was sport teams at the participants’ university) to help their own self-esteem. As Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell (2006) wrote “one of the least contested claims in social psychology is that people are generally motivated to protect and enhance their self-esteem” (p. 308). Their own self-identity is enhanced based on the success of others, or through vicarious achievement: “people desire to make others aware of what seem to be casually meaningless associations with positive sources” (Cialdini et al., 1976, p. 369). Even though their study was done without interest in sport fandom, and sport was only used in their study because it was assumed abundant with the concept they were interested in, Cialdini et al. (1976) found that the need to boost self-esteem through BIRGing resulted in fan behaviour. This included participants wearing team-related apparel and referring to the team as “we” more often after a win than a loss.
Funk and James (2001) also found that a specific influence for fans to follow certain teams can be the team’s performance. This can also be explained through the concept of BIRGing, and individuals searching for boosts of self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976). Wann (2006) also indicated that self-esteem can play an important role to a highly identified fan. Part of being a highly identified and/or connected fan is that the fan associates so closely to the team that it is central to their identity (Funk & James, 2001). As Wann (2006) describes, highly identified or connected fans cannot disassociate from the team because the role of being a fan of that team is too large of a part of that fan’s personal identity. These highly committed fans “experience euphoria when [their] team wins, and depression when [their] team loses” (Smith, Patterson, Williams, & Hogg, 1981, p. 32).

Studies have further built on this by showing that vicarious achievement, which also boosts the self-esteem of the sport fan, can be a primary factor in the maintenance of team identification (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). As such, fans will cheer for and associate with successful teams, which allows them to feel success vicariously, which in turn boosts their self-esteem (Cialdini et al., 1976; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). The team is an extension of that individuals’ ego (Smith et al., 1981; Wann, 2006). Because of this close connection to the organization, self-esteem cannot be separated from team performance for fans with higher identification (Wann, 2006). Therefore, fans are attracted to teams with higher performance levels simply because it will help their self-esteem.

This close tie to self-esteem can be positive, resulting in Cialdini et al.’s (1976) concept of BIRGing, but can also potentially have negative effects in the event of poor team performance. Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986) examined the opposite effect of
what Cialdini et al. (1976) found, and developed the concept of CORFing, or Cutting Off Reflected Failure. This is where individuals dissociate themselves from the failure of others in order to maintain, or protect, their self-esteem and image (Snyder et al., 1986).

When a team is not experiencing success, highly identified fans, have a number of different strategies to cope with loses, or to CORF (Snyder et al., 1986), saving their self-esteem while still maintaining their connection to the team (Wann, 2006). These strategies include a self-serving bias where victories are credited to team success and failures are a result of external forces; biased predictions and recollections, where highly identified fans will forget recent failures in favour of recalling past success or looking forward to future success; and a belief that although the team may not have success, the fans of that team are superior to other fans (Wann, 2006). While Cialdini et al. (1976) and Snyder et al. (1986) did not originally intend to contribute to the sport management field, these studies have emerged as central literature for research on fan identification and fan consumer behaviour. These studies also helped establish that individual’s connections to their favourite teams could be related to psychological reasons.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, research began to focus on the academic understanding of team identity, and was dominated by sport psychology and marketing scholars (Lock & Heere, 2017). As part of this increased focus on marketing, and as a connection to the early works that went on to influence present day sport management research (Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder et al., 1986), there became a demand to increase the understanding of the psychology behind fan behaviour. This was done in order to help fulfill and further the marketing demand. Research into sport fans and their identification focused on understanding the psychological aspects of fan identification, including
understanding the thoughts, behaviour, and feelings of highly identified and deeply committed fans (Wann, 1995; Wann, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This has proven to be difficult, however, as there are many different possible influences and motivators to fan identification, and often those influences and motivators can work or mix together (Wann, 2006). Nonetheless, one psychological motivator that has been found to be common is the self-esteem benefits that come from fan identification (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Smith et al., 1981; Snyder et al., 1986; Wann, 2006).

**Social Identity Theory.** Having parallels with the concept of BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976), Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that people will actively search for ways to positively help their self-esteem. To do this, individuals will join informal groups that help to positively reinforce their self-esteem and well-being (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT also offers an explanation for the emotional connection that individuals have with their social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) established three central themes of SIT. First, individuals will join social groups they see as being equal or better than themselves to maintain or improve their self-esteem and self-image. Second, individuals seek positive comparisons between the group they belong to, the in-group, and relevant and comparable out-groups. Third, in situations where the social group reflects negatively on an individual’s self-esteem, the individual will seek to leave the group, or to change the group so that it reflects positively on themselves (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In the context of sport, SIT can help explain the psychological connection fans feel towards their teams, and why fans develop identification for the teams they cheer for. Fans will join fan groups or begin to cheer for teams that help them achieve positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Further, part of SIT is a positive comparison between the
in-group the fan belongs to and out-groups. In sport, individuals will establish or maintain a positive identity if they perceive their in-group as being more positive than their rivals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The self-esteem benefits that being a fan can offer sometimes are separate from team performance, and instead comes from feelings of identification and belongingness with the group (Wann, 1995).

**Team Success.** Sport teams that have enjoyed a large amount of success in the past, or are currently enjoying a period of high competitiveness, will also often have a loyal fan base. The strongest explanation for this is the concept of BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976), and the self-esteem benefits that individuals can enjoy from associating with a successful other. Delia and James (2018) identified that a team’s past is one of three macro-level components that sport fans see in their teams. Within the “past” component, “past success” is identified as the most important micro-level component. This is because past success is stable and can never be changed. History is one thing that cannot be taken away from a team or organization. This means that past success and championships cannot be changed or removed. This solidified level of success and tradition that will never change can be an important element for vicarious achievement, and the concept of BIRGing (Delia & James, 2018). Fans seeking to help their self-esteem, and looking to BIRG (Cialdini et al., 1976), can be drawn to teams with past success because they can “bask” in that glory, and it will last forever.

**Rivalries.** SIT, and the idea of comparison with out-groups is central to sport rivalry. At the heart of rivalries between two teams or fan groups are rival groups, which Tyler and Cobbs (2015) define as a “highly salient out-group that poses a threat to the identity of the in-group and its members” (p. 227). Specifically, the threat that is
identified by Tyler and Cobbs (2015) is the ability for the in-group to make a positive comparison with out-groups. By posing this threat, tension and animosity grows between the two groups (as explained by SIT) and rivalries are formed. Havard (2014) writes: “SIT along with in-group bias help explain why fans treat supporters of the rival team different than supporters of the same team” (p. 244).

One study has shown that rivalries in sport can form between fan groups for as many as 11 different reasons that threaten the self-esteem of the in-group. These include “frequency of competition, defining moments, recent parity, historical parity, star factors, relative dominance, competition for personnel, cultural similarity, cultural difference, unfairness, and geography” (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015, p. 227). Specifically to geography, the closer in proximity that teams are, the more that contributes to the rivalry (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). A second Tyler and Cobbs (2017) study critically examined different concepts that are typically related to sport rivalries and worked to better understand different properties within these rivalries. Their results showed three main concepts of sport rivalries: fans see their team as having multiple rivals, the intensity of the rivalry varies among rivals, and that opposing fans rarely share equivalent perceptions of the sport rivalry (Tyler & Cobbs, 2017).

Rivalries have been found to be able to form between teams before they even play a game. Havard et al. (2018) examined fans of two university sport teams that switched athletic conferences. New rivalries were anticipated to form for these schools with opponents in their new conference. Students attending the schools switching conferences were shown titles and logos for games between their school’s team and new rival teams in the new conference. This was done to see how the fan rival perceptions of the students
can be influenced. Their results showed that students exposed to a title for a game that had rivalry in it were less willing to support another team than students exposed to a negative title that had the word “hate” in it. The researchers used this finding to suggest that the actual word “rivalry” creates more feelings of a rivalry than a negative word like “hate” (Havard et al., 2018).

Another finding from the Havard et al. (2018) study was that students exposed to the negative title believed that the fans of their rival team behaved more poorly in comparison (Havard et al., 2018). This belief was formed before the teams even played a game and shows elements of SIT. A “highly salient” out-group is posing a threat to the in-group that the students were a part of, so to continue to make positive comparisons, the students of the study labelled the rival fans as behaving more poorly. This is an example of how the threat, tension, and animosity of rivalry that Tyler and Cobbs (2015) spoke of can form between two rival groups.

Mahoney and Moorman (1999) found that fans will watch their team’s rival if they see that team as a threat to their favourite team, especially when it is likely that their rival team is going to lose. Havard (2014) discovered that in indirect competition, fans will cheer when their rival is defeated. Although fans often expect their rival to win most games that are not against their team, they enjoy when their rival team loses (Havard, 2014). When it comes to a post-season, playoff, or championship game, some fans will want their rival to actually win because that will reflect positively on their favourite team, other fans simply wanted to see their rival lose, and some participants indicated that they would not watch that playoff or championship game because they do not want their rival to be in that game to begin with (Havard, 2014).
While research into the psychological reasons for fan identification has proven important, sociological reasons have also been discovered to influence fan identification. Since sport is a social event (Gibson et al., 2002), there are a number of social reasons that individuals will cheer for a team that gives them benefits.

**Sociology.** Sport is seen as being socially important, as it is an opportunity to join a collective identity (Gibson et al., 2002). Even though other spectators at games are often strangers, individuals share an unspoken, but widely accepted, commitment to the game and the team that they are cheering for when in attendance at a game (Melnick, 1993). Not only is the commitment shared, but also the strangers at sporting events often will also have similar appearances, or clothing, as they are supporting the same team, and share the same goal of having an enjoyable time. These factors not only allow for interaction between strangers, but also encourage it (Melnick, 1993). The stranger sitting next to a fan likely becomes a target to easily strike up conversation with due to these similarities. This creates a bond, even if short in duration, since so much is shared in common (Melnick, 1993). Thus, individuals looking to belong to a group or community, or looking for socialization with others, can look at sporting events to fulfill those needs. This, in turn, can lead to identifying with specific teams, depending on how well their desires to socialize are fulfilled. Further, sport fans will chose teams that fit within their social sphere (Foster & Hyatt, 2008).

Another social reason found in the literature to cheer for one team over another is the search for community or to fulfill a sense of belonging (Foster & Hyatt, 2008; Gibson, Willming, Holdnak, 2002; Heere, 2016; Heere & James, 2007; McPherson, 1976; Melnick, 1993; Wann, 1995). In the past, community was experienced through
traditional venues like churches, family, and volunteering. In today’s society, however, community is most likely to be experienced through friends and informal organizations (Heere & James, 2007). In the major urban centers that most of today’s population live within, sporting events serve as a community gathering and as somewhere to alleviate feelings of emptiness (Foster & Hyatt, 2008). Sport fans get together in large numbers not only seeking entertainment, but also looking to improve themselves socially by the social atmosphere that occurs at sporting events (Melnick, 1993). Being in the stands, and attending these games, can give individuals a sense of belonging that is unique to attending these sporting events and help with a sense of meaning (Foster & Hyatt, 2008).

Since cheering for a team is perceived to present opportunities to form relationships with groups other than just the team and players, team identification can fulfill an individual’s need to belong to a larger social community (Heere, 2016; Heere & James, 2007). Membership in the larger community can, in some cases, be connected to loyalty to the sport team because it represents a certain area or community. Many teams have been found to have some kind of “geographic identity” (Heere & James, 2007, p. 326) to a city, region, state/province, nation or country. Heere and James (2007) found that fans of the United States Women’s National Soccer Team (USWNT) do not necessarily display loyalty for gender-based identity reasons, or even in some cases because of the sport of soccer. Instead, they identify with the USWNT for the external group identity that the team represents: the national identity of the United States (Heere & James, 2007).

Highly committed fans often prove to be members of what Foster and Hyatt (2008) refer to as “fan nations” for their team (p. 269). Their dedication to this nation is
so strong that it effects their cognition and thought process, and represents their in-group for social comparisons (Foster & Hyatt, 2008). Fan nations are only imaginary, as the members will often never meet in person, meaning these nations are not limited to a specific location. The members of these nations share the desire to cheer for their team and share a common image of what it means to be a fan of the team in question (Foster & Hyatt, 2008). The imagined nation, and created connection and cohesiveness that is shared with other members can help fulfill the fans’ sense of belonging.

Levels of Fan Identification

Fans can, and often do, travel large distances for the “ritual” of spectating a sporting event. Sports are different from other forms of entertainment because they evoke high levels of emotions, attachment, identification, and loyalty (James, Walker & Kuminka, 2009). At this point, it is important to distinguish between a fan and a spectator. Wann (1995) describes spectators as simply watching a sporting event, while fans actively show enthusiasm. Wann (2006) defined team identification as: “a person with an acquired, cognitive connection to a team, where some attributes, motives, and characteristics of that team are part of the person’s psyche” (p. 332). Further, the individual in question may react to events that occur to the team as if they actually occurred to themselves. The relationship described is something that is relatively stable over time (Wann, 2006).

With sport management scholars shifting the focus of research to sport marketing in the 1990s, Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (1993) developed a frequency escalator. This was aimed at increasing awareness and interest in products and/or services, which would, in turn, increase consumption. Also at this time, the focus of sport management academics
was on getting fans to increase their level of spending on sports related products. For this reason, marketing emerged as an extremely influential element of sport management literature. That same year, Wann and Branscombe (1993) described what a highly identified fan might look like. This would be an individual that reports a high level of behaviour involved with the team, frames the team’s success to have an ego-enhancing effect, has highly positive expectations about the team’s future, invests large amounts of time and money to watch the team live, and believes that they belong to a special group of fans simply by cheering for this team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993).

Highly identified fans show high levels of fan loyalty, which is among the strongest of human attachments (Rooney, 1974). As research explored the formation of fan and team identification and the psychological connection involved, it became evident that there are different levels of identification. Funk and James (2001) developed the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to take a psychological approach in explaining these different levels. They concluded that there are four different levels of connection to a team: awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). Fans at the awareness stage have a knowledge that a team exists, but do not identify with the team. When someone can acknowledge a team as their favourite, they move up to the attraction stage, and begin to form fan identification with that team. Fans that have a psychological connection to a team are at least at the attachment stage, while the allegiance stage is when a fan is so loyal and committed to the team that it clouds their judgement and perception (Funk & James, 2001).

The PCM has become a frequently used model to judge levels of fan identification, and many studies have used it as a measuring tool to ensure their
participants are highly identified (Delia & James, 2018; Heere & James, 2007; James et al., 2009; Lock et al., 2011; Lock & Heere, 2017; O’Shea & Alonso, 2012; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010; Wann, 2006). Within the previously mentioned distinction between spectator and fan that Funk and James (2001) spoke of, it is implied that fans can move up the PCM until they reach the attachment and/or allegiant levels.

In much of the literature, vicarious achievement is seen as a key motive to not only attend sporting events, but also to develop fan identification with teams (Cialdini et al., 1976; Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Funk & James, 2001; Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002). For this reason, vicarious achievement can be a motivator to get people to attend sporting events, develop loyalty, and move up the PCM. As individuals move up the PCM, they have a stronger “cognition of support, interaction with the self-concept, affective significance and attitude persistence” (Lock et al., 2012, p. 284). These are all central parts of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and show how the PCM (Funk & James, 2001) and SIT work in collaboration with each other.

The previously mentioned studies, and many like them, have looked at the motives of being a fan of a specific sport or team, and the social and psychological benefits that individuals will experience by identifying with that sport or team. Other studies, however, have looked at the influences that can encourage fans to choose one team over another (Havard, 2014; James, 2001; Lock et al., 2011; 2012; Mills & Rosentraub, 2014; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010; Wann et al., 1996). Before one can be a team fan, and experience the social and psychological benefits, they must first pick a team.
Choosing A Team

Before loyalty or commitment to a team can cultivate, a psychological connection to the team must be developed. This begins with motivation or interest in a specific leisure activity, which in this case is being a fan of the team. Research has shown that individuals’ patterns and habits are relative to their social environment, and the factors that exist in these environments (James, 2001). Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) conducted an examination to identify the most common reasons to follow certain teams. Their results identified 42 possible reasons individuals will pick one team over another to be a fan of. The top five of these 42 are: family, friends, players, team success, and geography. All five of these can be considered different socializing agents. Since the time of Wann et al.’s (1996) research, repeated exposure to the team through internet and social media has also been found to be a powerful influence on fan identification. This allows for some individuals to “self-socialize” themselves to support a particular team (Wann, 2006).

Family/Friends. In the case of sport fandom and fan identity, parents have been found to influence their children to attend and/or watch games. This indicates that parents influence the environment of their children, and play a significant role in the development of fandom (James, 2001). Decisions to watch or attend games, gather information on teams, and purchase/wear sport branded apparel is the result of external forces (Funk & James, 2016). The role of the parents, specifically the father, in fan identification development has become a common theme within the literature. Multiple studies have shown the significant role that parents, particularly fathers, can play in this process (Funk & James, 2001; Havard, 2014; James, 2001; James et al., 2009; McPherson, 1976; Parry,
Jones, & Wann, 2014; Smith et al., 1981; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). The role that the parents occupy in this process can partially be explained by the role parents play in the lives of their young children. Studies have found that fan identification often develops early in life, and it is suggested that these preferences and/or commitments “tend to endure” (James, 2001, p. 236).

Parents also have a “vested interest” in socializing their young children in sport fandom. Socialization at a young age allows for children to be shaped to think and act in a way similar to the group. Therefore, parents socializing their children into sport fandom groups allows them to influence the behaviours their children will be modeling (Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). This also helps the parents reaffirm their world view, at least in sport, towards their children. For these reasons, childhood socialization has been accepted as a typically common step in the sport fan identification process (Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). James (2001) found that children as young as five are capable of developing a psychological connection to a sport team, with loyalty developing around the age of nine in the form of behavioural commitment.

Within the literature, parents are considered to be the primary influence for children during their pre-school years (0-5 years of age) (Funk & James, 2001). With children this young, the parents are the primary enabler for sport consumption. Family structures can often provide the primary route to be socialized into particular behavioural patterns (James, 2001). This concept is shown in existing sport management literature. Parents act as gatekeepers, not only influencing their children on which sports to play, but also which team(s) to support (Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). Parents influence their children’s exposure to certain teams because they make the decision on whether or not to
actually attend, purchase the tickets, act as transportation to and from the game, and offer supervision for their children while attending the game (James, 2001).

Further, in James’ (2001) study, children participants were quoted as saying they watched their favourite teams when their dad was already watching the game. This would indicate that parents can influence their children’s favorite teams simply by granting access to exposure to the team (James, 2001; Wann, 2006). This exposure can be from watching television, or simply talking about the game with the child (James, 2016). Development of team loyalty can begin by individuals developing a preference for sport teams early in life as a result of socialization with family (James, 2001).

James’ (2001) study also examined children, and the different socialization methods that played a role in the early development of team loyalty. His results showed that 50% of the participants shared a favourite team with their father, 31% with a sibling, 12% shared their favourite team with their mother, and 8% shared with a friend. These results further reinforce the notion that family, especially fathers, have the most influence among family/friend influences on a child’s selection of a favourite team (James, 2001). The significance of looking at fathers and parents, and fan identification antecedents, indicates the amount of socialization that occurs in children. Not only do these loyalties “tend to endure” (p. 236) as James (2001) writes, but loyalties developed early in one’s life that last into adulthood can also have a positive effect on the individual’s psyche. These lasting loyalties can reveal to individuals that even within the chaos of everyday life, there is some continuity and permanence (Smith et al., 1981).

While research has highlighted the role that fathers can play, some studies also indicate that the influence can change through the years (Funk & James, 2001; Kolbe &
James, 2000; Smith et al., 1981). Smith et al. (1981) conducted a study in the early days of sport fan research to try and develop a profile for what they called the deeply committed sport fan. Their results indicated that fathers were the most influential on their participants developing fan identification “followed by friends, coaches, and the mass media” (Smith et al., 1981, p. 31). Once children transition into school and join larger social networks, friends are considered to take over as the primary influence on fandom development, especially during the teenage years (Funk & James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000). The transition in socializing agents with age does not finish in the teenage years. Other socializing agents, supplementary to friends and family, that increase in influence into adulthood include spouses and co-workers (Funk & James, 2001). This indicates that different socializing agents can contribute to individual’s choices on which team to cheer for based on the different stages in an individual’s life (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000; McPherson, 1976; Smith et al., 1981).

**Players.** One point of attachment for developing fan identification that can be prevalent to individuals in the adult years is the influence of specific players and coaches that are on the team (Delia & James, 2018; Hyatt & Foster, 2015; James, 2016; Wann et al., 1996). In their choice of favourite players, sport fans will often pick ones that reinforce societal norms. For some fans, their favourite players often emerge as “heroes”. Smith et al. (1981) argue that choosing a “reinforcing-type hero” (p. 34) proves that interest in sport can be linked to a solidarity with society, and serve as a method of social integration. This indicates that the influence of specific players will not only effect the teams that fans choose to cheer for, but also help with the desire to belong to the community, or even integrate into society. Additionally, with the player reinforcing
certain aspects of society, and helping with social integration, it seems logical that the influence of a certain player on a team has an effect on adults looking for a team to identify with.

In a study by Smith et al. (1981), attributes within players that fans find most attractive include dedication, leadership ability, sportsmanship, modesty, and community involvement. Spinda, Wann, and Hardin (2016) carried out a study to look at points of attachment for sport fans, specifically in the National Football League (NFL), and found that fans will identify with players. While they acknowledge that there could be a number of different reasons that fans can identify with players, the authors point out the skill of players could be one point of attachment, and the aesthetic/athletic appreciation tied to those skills (Spinda et al., 2016). Additionally, another suggestion the authors make in this study to explain player identification is the fallout of the advancement of fantasy sports. They suggest that fans can show attachment to players that grows out of fantasy sport use, where applicable (Spinda et al., 2016). Whatever the reason for identifying with a specific player, having a connection or showing attraction to certain players on a team can lead to identification with that team.

**Team Success/History.** Successful teams will attract fans because it helps fans fulfill their desire for a positive association to reflect upon them (Sutton et al., 1997). Individuals will make associations with winning teams in order to enhance their prestige in the eyes of others, and to increase their own self-esteem. Among other things, a team’s reputation or image is established by their history of on-field success (Delia & James, 2018; Sutton et al., 1997; Wann, 2006). Sport teams with a long, storied and successful history often have an attractive reputation for fans to join, and as a result will have some
of the most loyal and passionate fans. This is due to their storied pasts leading to a history of performance, playing style, successes, failures, and/or traditions (Lock et al., 2011).

Another element of team history that is attractive to developing fan identification can be their home arena or stadium. Stadiums that are innovative or unique, or have a long and storied history, allow fans to feel a sense of nostalgia or pride in their arena or stadium, which adds another layer to the fans’ identification (Wann, 2006).

Teams with rich and successful histories can provide fans with an opportunity to develop their emotional value and satisfaction. This ties into the concept of BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976). Individuals affiliate with social groups that can reflect positively on them; this could include groups with rich and successful histories since that history is something that can never be changed (Lock et al., 2011). For these reasons, studies have found that team traditions have played an important role in the development and maintenance of fan loyalty (Delia & James, 2018; James et al., 2009; Kolbe & James, 2000; Lock et al., 2011).

**Geography.** When Heere and James (2007) conducted a study on the effects that group identity can have on team identity, they concluded that USWNT fans identify with the team more so because of their national identity with the United States compared to anything else. What this conclusion is identifying and implying is that geography has an effect on fan identification development and maintenance. Geographic proximity has historically been listed as one of the, if not the, most important antecedents to the development of fan loyalty. In Wann, Tucker, and Schrader’s (1996) list of antecedents, geography was tied for the third most important (Wann et al., 1996).
Research into the connection between geographic location and fan behaviour has shown that there is a direct correlation between distance and support. Many fans cheer for their “hometown” team (Havard, 2014; James et al., 2009). As distance increases, support and consumption of the team in question can, and often does, decrease (Doyle, Lewis, & Malmisur, 1980). Most fans live, or have lived, in the city or region their favourite team is located (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). Other research has shown that using a geographic analysis can help better understand a specific sport’s significance to a community or society (Rooney, 1975). This significance, in turn, could tie into fan loyalty not only from a geographical standpoint, but also from a community standpoint. If that sport or team is important to a community, it can serve as a social gathering place for that community.

Sticking to the theme that sport fans often cheer for the closest team, Mills and Rosentraub (2014) looked at Canadian hockey fans in Southern Ontario. They were seeking an explanation for why many of these fans cross the border to Buffalo, New York to watch the Sabres as opposed to heading to Toronto to watch the Maple Leafs. Their results indicated that the strength of the Canadian dollar, the price of tickets, and the performance of the teams all had an effect, but their results also have a geographical component. Additionally, their findings indicated that fans are looking for the shorter, more convenient drive, which resulted in their choice to go to Buffalo as opposed to Toronto. Tainsky and McEvoy (2012) examined television ratings in markets without local NFL teams to determine how consumers in these markets choose which NFL game to watch. While other factors had a statistically significant effect, one of the strongest correlations was between the television ratings and the geographical proximity of one of the teams playing. These results showed that even though these consumers did not have a
Many fans cheer for the team that is closest to them at the time, however, some fans also continue cheering for their “hometown team” after they have moved away from the region. Rather than cheering for the team currently closest to them, they cheer for the team that was closest to them when they developed their fan identification, often at a young age. Once they develop fandom for the local team, should an individual then move away, they will maintain that identification assuming they are committed enough to that team. One explanation is James’ (2001) finding that fan identification that develops early in life “tends to endure” as the individuals top preference or commitment over time (p. 236). Therefore, it seems logical that fans with a high level of identification, developed early in life to the closest geographical team, maintain that identification regardless of distance. Another possible explanation is that cheering for their “hometown team” allows individuals to continue to be connected to their home after they move away.

Further building on this second possible explanation was Aden and Titsworth (2012), who argued that fans will cheer for a non-local team as a form of “place attachment”. This term was originally coined by Altman and Low (1992) who wrote that place attachment is “the bonding of people to places” (p.2). One way place attachment occurs in a sport context is where fan loyalty to a specific team is rooted in how that team represents a certain geographic area. Their connection to the team is a way for them to feel connected to the city, area, or region that the team represents. This idea is present in Aden and Titsworth’s (2012) study, where results showed that some out-of-state
University of Nebraska Cornhuskers football fans use the team to connect with the State of Nebraska.

This concept of place attachment is also in Delia and James’ (2018) study, where their results showed that fans of the Syracuse University Orange men’s basketball team see the team as representing Central New York, and fans of the Minnesota Twins Baseball Club see that team representing the State of Minnesota and the Twin Cities (Delia & James, 2018). In fact, the geographic location of the team was described by participants in Delia and James’ (2018) study as being part of the meaning of the team. Place attachment is one explanation for why fans endure losing seasons with their team. These fans are attached to not only their team, but also the city or geographic location that that team plays out of. As such, fans will remain loyal even through less successful years because the idea of Cutting off Reflected Failure, or CORFing (Snyder et al., 1986) is not as appealing when a fans’ self-esteem is embedded with a place, and not just an attachment to a team (Aden & Titsworth, 2012).

For someone that has moved away from home, cheering for the team that represents where they are from is a way to take a piece of home with them. They were locals at one time, they love their home or the region they are from, and they use their fandom as a way to stay connected to that region. The connection fans have with their hometown team can shape their team loyalty and fan identification (Kolbe & James, 2000). Because of their love for that region, they love the team that represents that region. This notion of “place attachment” would also support Heere and James’ (2007) results that cheering for the USWNT has most to do with the fact that the team represents the United States.
The most “diehard”, or connected/committed, fans see their fandom as not just supporting the team and embracing the area the team represents, but also embracing the culture and values represented (Aden & Titsworth, 2012). The fandom of the participants in the Aden and Titsworth (2012) study was not a result of performance, proximity, or association to the school. Instead, they continued to cheer for the Cornhuskers because of what the team “stands for” – a way of life or a set of principles that the team embodies that is representative of the State of Nebraska. Fans of the Cornhuskers see the team and players as embodiments of “Nebraska” principles (Aden & Titsworth, 2012).

This idea was also in the Delia and James (2018) study, where it was found that the “city, state, or region that is connected to the team was part of the team’s psychological meaning to fans, and central to their identification with the team” (Delia & James, 2018, p. 9). Their results showed that the choice to identify with a team serves to help the fan’s self-esteem and/or satisfy their need to belong as the team represents a specific area (Delia & James, 2018). The concept of place attachment could account for non-local fans cheering for a team should they feel a connection to the city, area, or region the team represents.

Another type of “place attachment” is a connection between individuals and the stadia that their teams play in. Trujillo and Krizek (1994) examined the emotions felt towards the stadium that individuals favourite teams played in. Interviews were carried out with fans of the Chicago White Sox and employees of the Texas Rangers that were in attendance during the final series of games played at the teams’ former stadiums. In both cases, the stadiums are described by participants as being about more than baseball – including personal connections and memories with friends and families. An attachment or
connection is felt with the stadium and is a part of their fandom. Bairner (2014) interviewed soccer fans in the United Kingdom and outlines memories, moments, and emotions connected to specific football grounds or stadiums. He concluded that individuals can feel excitement from memories at certain stadiums that can sometimes exceed the excitement of current events. When considering place attachment as a “bonding of people to places” (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 2), that “place” can be a geographical location like a city, town, or state, or a physical location like a stadium.

The geographical proximity influence of teams is also an example for how fan identification can be a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It can be magnified by other antecedents to lead to fan identification of different teams. Influence from family, friends, and media, often promote the local teams while showing ignorance towards any alternatives (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). This also offers another explanation for why people will cheer for their local teams: it is what they are most strongly and frequently exposed to. In comparison, fans of non-local teams often do not experience those benefits from socializing agents. They are often limited to connecting with other fans through television, radio, or the internet. However, the advancement of the internet and new technologies in recent years has allowed for fans of non-local teams to connect with one another more easily (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Collins, Heere, Shapiro, Ridinger, & Wear, 2016). This also allows teams to recruit potential fans in non-local areas (Foster & Hyatt, 2008). Fans can spend a large amount of time on the internet discussing the team and looking up information (James et al., 2009).
Conclusion

While there are many antecedents that contribute to developing fan identity, some antecedents are stronger than others. Studies have shown that the influence of family, specifically the father (Funk & James, 2001; James, 2001; James et al., 2009; McPherson, 1976; Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014; Smith et al., 1981; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010), geography (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Collins et al., 2016; Delia & James, 2018; Doyle et al., 1980; Heere & James, 2007; James et al., 2009; Rooney, 1975) and team success (James et al., 2009; Kolbe & James, 2002; Lock et al., 2011) are some of the strongest influences for team identification, along with friends and players (Wann et al., 1996). Regardless of the strength of these antecedents, many of them tend to exist in some capacity within the development of fan identification. Since fandom is very individualistic, different antecedents affect individuals differently, thus resulting in a combination of antecedents being found in most studies looking at the development and maintenance of fan identification.

Studies have begun to focus on what happens when at least one of the key antecedents is likely to not have an effect (Lock et al., 2011; 2012). In a study of the newly formed A-League soccer league in Australia, Lock, Taylor, and Darcy (2011; 2012) looked at how fan identification developed for a brand-new team in a new league. This was unique because there was no team history or tradition to attract fans, thus removing one of the key antecedents from having an effect. Their results also found that vicarious achievement, another typical antecedent, did not have much of an effect on the fans that were studied. The researchers suggest that this was caused by a lack of understanding if the team “would be successful, how the team would play, and whether
the success/failures of the club would reflect positively/negatively on the self-concept” (Lock et al., 2011, p. 187) of fans since this was before the first season of the new league began playing. Instead, fans developed and strengthened their fan identification for three reasons: cheering for the team allowed them to connect with a sport they were already showing allegiance towards, they were able to cheer for their hometown team, and the “occasion” of home games (atmosphere, experience, and social interaction) (Lock et al., 2011).

This Study

Despite the extensive research that has already given attention to the development of fan loyalty, little attention has been paid to situations where one of the main antecedents has little to no influence. Lock, Taylor, and Darcy (2011; 2012) were some of the first to look at the antecedents of sport fan identity when one of the major antecedents has little to no effect. While studies have looked at out-of-market fandom (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Collins et al., 2016), the actual influence of geography as an antecedent is still present. Whether their fandom for an out-of-market team is their connection to home (Aden & Titsworth, 2012), or allows the individual to be in a unique in-group (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009), geography still plays a factor in their fandom.

However, if a city or town is equi-distant from two cities with major league franchises, as in one team is not any closer than the other, it would seem that geographic proximity would not have much of an effect on fan identification, if at all. In cases such as this, what other reasons would fans give that were the main influences on the development of their fan identification? Further, in situations with two teams so close in
proximity, fans of one team must work to maintain their fandom and avoid the influence of the other team that they are not a fan of (Foster & Hyatt, 2008). On top of that, a natural geographical rivalry can, and most likely does, form between the two teams that are located so close to one another. Keeping this in mind, how do fans maintain their fan identification to their team being just as close to their rival as they are to their own team? This study seeks to answer how fan identification is developed, and then maintained, within this context.

The framework for this study was Social Identity Theory. With two rival groups located so close together, it seems logical that there is a strong threat of rival out-groups that threaten the in-groups, but also offer a point of comparison. In the next chapter, this paper will outline the methodology that guided this study.
Chapter Three – Methodology

This research study was used to seek an understanding of how and why hockey fans in Red Deer became fans of the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames, and how they have maintained that loyalty. To carry out this research, a paradigm was used that focuses on understanding the how and the why of the phenomenon being researched, as opposed to simply focusing on understanding what the phenomenon is. In order to achieve this understanding of how and why, this research was done in the interpretive paradigm.

Paradigm

Qualitative research from an interpretive paradigm is a common method to understand the experiences of sport fans (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Delia, 2015; Delia & James, 2018; Gibson et al., 2002; Havard, 2014; Lock et al., 2011). Traditionally, and still very common today, fan behaviour has been investigated using positivistic research methods, such as surveys (Collins et al., 2016; Fink et al., 2002; Funk & James, 2001; Parry et al., 2014; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In contrast to this positivistic approach, interpretive research gives greater depth to the understanding of actions and phenomenon by making them relative to the context in which they occur (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin, 1989). Qualitative research is meant to “describe, analyze, and explain” (Shaw, 2016, p. 22). Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) believe that interpretive research “places emphasis on seeking understanding of the meanings of human actions and experiences, and on generating accounts of their meaning from the viewpoints of those involved” (p. 718). This greater understanding is accomplished through using the context to explore, and subsequently interpret, the participant’s experiences relative to
their world (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin, 1989). Understanding the context of these individuals is the best way to understand the development and maintenance of loyalty, and the influence of their environment on their leisure preferences, as the environment can influence individual’s leisure behaviour (James, 2001). Keeping all of this in mind, the interpretive paradigm was the ideal choice for this research study. Additionally, in the true nature of an interpretive study, no hypotheses were necessary to begin this project (Hyatt, 2007).

**Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Previous studies from the interpretive paradigm examining fan identification have used qualitative methods, such as interviews, to allow participants to tell their stories and experiences in their own words (Delia, 2015; Delia & James, 2018; Havard, 2014; Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Lock et al., 2011; 2012). A research interview is an interpersonal conversation between two people with a mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kim (2016) highlights the value that interviews bring to studies by discussing how interviews provide a unique understanding of the complex lives of individuals. She goes on to say that the purpose of interviews are to “let stories be told” (p. 166). Further, in-depth interpretive interviewing is best used to help uncover unique behaviours that have yet to be discovered or understood (Hyatt, 2007). This study was used to attempt to learn the experiences and stories of hockey fans in Red Deer, and how they developed their fandom within their own individual contexts. Additionally, with geographic proximity expected to not likely be a significant factor for fandom, the focus was on the participants’ individual contexts. While this study is unique in that it is used to investigate fandom where geographic proximity likely plays an insignificant role, it
follows similar studies (Lock et al., 2011; 2012) that investigated fandom where a typically major influence was missing. As such, this study followed in the methodological footsteps of Lock et al. (2011; 2012), where interviews were used as the most suitable data collection method.

Kim (2016) noted that traditional structured interviews can have an uneven power balance between the participant and the researcher – one that is tilted towards the researcher. However, researchers are more likely to find the stories and experiences related to their research if the participants can “continue in their own way” (Kim, 2016, p. 165). For this reason, the interviews in this study were not fully structured; instead, the researcher opted for semi-structured interviews. The format of semi-structured interviews is the most frequently used format of interviews in qualitative studies because it is both versatile and flexible (Kallio, Pietile, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2006).

Sticking to a strict interview guide can result in cutting off the participant’s stories, or shifting the focus in accordance to the guide rather than continuing in the direction the participant chooses. This can hurt the rapport with the participant in the interview and be a signal that the researcher is not listening, potentially resulting in the researcher not being able to collect high quality stories (Kim, 2016). Additionally, not following a strict script created flexibility for the interview to flow in a direction that the participant wanted it to flow. While every question or topic on the guide was covered at some point, the flexibility existed to switch the order of the questions based on the participants’ responses. The purpose of the interview guide in this study was to simply ensure consistency and that all topics were addressed at some point during the interview, regardless of order. Giving the control to guide the interview’s direction to the participant
can encourage a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participant, improving the quality of responses (Glesne, 2006; Hanna, 2012).

Researchers can often anticipate certain stories or narratives before starting interviews, but there is no way to be completely sure about what will be said or happen (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). This further indicates that semi-structured interviews were the best choice for this study, as they are planned, but still flexible. This gave the researcher a guide to stay on topic, but allowed the participants the freedom to tell their stories and experiences in their own words (Crotty 1998; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The use of the interview guide, even if it is made up of broad questions, provided order to the interview, ensured the goals were met, and provided consistency between interviews (Delia & James, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for the participants to convey their own meanings rather than simply answering questions in a strict and structured form that was pre-determined by the researcher. This also allowed for the respondent to emphasize which aspects of their stories or experiences are most important to them, indicating specific events that may be more significant to the phenomenon that was being studied (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

**Sample.** Sampling decisions impact the quality, credibility, and trustworthiness of the data in a study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). For these reasons, careful consideration was given to the sampling strategies, criteria, and coverage for this study. This research study used purposeful sampling techniques to find participants. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research studies to identify potential participants who have the most abundant and information rich stories related to the research topic (Patton, 2002). This type of sampling involves identifying and selecting
individuals who are knowledgeable about and/or have experienced the phenomenon being studied. In addition to the knowledge and experience, purposeful sampling is used to find individuals with an availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate their knowledge and experience (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling is meant to achieve a greater depth in the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

In order to participate in the study, potential participants had to fit certain criteria. First, participants in the study were not only required to be current residents of the City of Red Deer, Alberta or the immediate area (within 20 km), but also life-long residents of the area. Since the nature of this study was to investigate fandom in the context where geographic proximity is likely to have little to no role in fan identification, having participants that have been exposed to this context for as long as possible was key to truly understanding the phenomenon. Displaced fans (individuals who currently live in Red Deer, but at one point lived in Edmonton and/or Calgary) were not allowed to participate in this study (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009).

Everyone that is interested in participating in a research study will not be a “perfect” participant (Jones et al., 2014). Therefore, as well as being Red Deer residents, potential participants had to identify either as Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames fans. By reaching out to the researcher to participate in the study, potential participants self-selected themselves as highly identified fans by answering the call of the research posters or posts. Considering this self-selection, and using a combination of researcher discretion and items that were mentioned in conversations before and during interviews, the researcher established that these participants were highly identified. This kept with the true nature of an interpretive study and let participants define their fandom in their own
words. Further, there was no set criteria on the minimum number of games watched or a minimum amount of money they had to spend on the team they identify with. Since this is an interpretive study, each participant’s experiences were considered individualistic, meaning there cannot be a required measure of consumption or materialistic criteria.

Participant recruitment took place in four different ways. First, study recruitment posters (Appendix B) were distributed throughout the City of Red Deer. These posters contained a brief explanation of the study and its aims, as well as the contact information for the researcher. The posters invited individuals that are fans of the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames, that were over the age of 18, that have been lifelong residents of Red Deer, and who wished to discuss their fan identification to contact the researcher should they be interested in participating.

Recruitment posters were put up in public locations where potential participants were able to learn about the study at their own convenience. The public locations included public bulletin boards run by the City of Red Deer in public spaces, as well as bulletin boards in laundromats, libraries, grocery stores, shopping malls, local hockey arenas, and the post-secondary institution Red Deer College. When necessary, the researcher sought permission from the appropriate authorities to post the posters. Posting in these locations increased the exposure of the posters and the study to potential participants. The posters garnering as much exposure as possible was important in ensuring the ability to conduct purposeful sampling.

A second method of participant recruitment took place online, utilizing two different options. First, a modified version of the recruitment poster (Appendix C) was posted to an online hockey fan forum that has a relevant scope to the ideal participants.
The fan forum that was used was the “Red Deer Rebels” forum on www.WHLfans.ca. Utilizing this forum meant recruiting to already identified junior hockey fans in Red Deer, with a high likelihood that these individuals were also NHL fans. The modified version of the recruitment poster (Appendix C) was also posted on Kijiji.ca under the Red Deer listings to further help increase exposure of the study. Although the post was modified to be posted online, it still encouraged interested individuals to reach out to the researcher should they wish to participate.

In addition to the forums, a second online recruiting method was used on the social media website Twitter. The researcher searched to locate tweets where the author identified themselves as a fan of the Oilers or Flames, and had a location attached to the tweet that originated from Red Deer. Once these tweets were located, the modified version of the recruitment poster (Appendix D) was sent to the author of the tweet. This was done by contacting the individual through their Twitter timeline, or sending them a private message through Twitter. The use of Twitter as a recruiting platform has been used in past sport consumer behaviour studies. Lamberti and Hyatt (2018) used Twitter to recruit participants for a similar study to this one, where the topic was on match fixing in soccer. Posting on Twitter, as well as using the other online recruiting locations, increased exposure and the number of potential participants, which in turn increased the opportunity for purposeful sampling. As previously mentioned, this type of sampling was important in the search of participants with information rich stories relative to the research topic (Patton, 2002).

Once the posters and online postings were put up, a third recruitment opportunity presented itself when a sport reporter from the Red Deer area contacted the researcher.
The researcher and reporter set up a time for a phone conversation, which then resulted in an article being published in the Red Deer Advocate, a local newspaper. The article focused on the study, including what was being researched, and why this was such a unique study. The intent was that this article would add further exposure to the study, resulting in an increase in interested participants contacting the researcher. By doing this newspaper article, the scope of exposure for this study increased to include individuals not online, or that may not have seen the recruitment posters. Once the article was published, the researcher was also contacted by a Red Deer radio station about doing a radio interview that was soon conducted and broadcast. This again increased the exposure of the study, which helped with purposeful sampling and to get the widest variety possible in responding participants.

When participants reached out in response to the posters, ads, article or radio interview, conversations occurred between the researcher and potential participants to clarify any questions or concerns they may have had about the study. From there, if the interested individual met the sample requirements of this study, they were sent an invitational email (Appendix E) to further outline the study. If the participant continued to show interest in taking part in the study, a second e-mail was sent that contained the informed consent form (Appendix F) and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix G). This questionnaire collected information about the participants’ age, gender, race, education level and occupation (Hyatt, 2007). Once these forms were completed, a date and time was agreed upon that worked best for the participant to conduct an interview that was estimated at being 30-60 minutes long. However, even though a date and time was agreed upon, this did not ensure that the participant would follow through on the
meeting. To try and safeguard against this, once the meeting had been set, the researcher sent an appointment email to the participant to confirm the time and date of the interview. Additionally, a reminder email was sent 24 hours prior to the interview time to confirm attendance.

All participants were required to be residents of the City of Red Deer. Due to this requirement, a geographic barrier existed when it came to a potential research site. With the researcher being located in Ontario, and the participants being required to live in Alberta, meeting in person was not feasible. Therefore, interviews were conducted online using either the internet software Skype, or the Apple communication tool FaceTime, based on what was more convenient for the participant. The use of this type of technology has increased as the most feasible alternative to face-to-face interaction, especially between people at a distance from one another (Hanna, 2012).

**Interview Tools & Materials.** Certain aspects of this research project are very close to the researcher, and that he is very knowledgeable in. Having grown up a hockey fan in Edmonton, the researcher is a life-long Edmonton Oilers fan. Considering the nature of the rivalry, this presented the potential for a bias to emerge within interviews that could potentially influence participants. To avoid this, the researcher did not disclose his fandom unless he was asked – in which case participants were informed that the researchers’ fandom is something to discuss at the end of the interview. Additionally, throughout interviews with Flames fans, the researcher was conscious of how he positioned himself towards the participant. This was important to ensure a high quality interview even though the researcher and participant cheer for rival teams.
The interview guide (Appendix H) also helped with interview quality and ensured consistency. Utilizing and following the guide (Appendix H) helped avoid hazardous, off the topic questions or statements, or close-ended questions that could have directed the participants away from their own answers or potentially harm the rapport within the interview (Glesne, 2006; Jones et al., 2014; Liamputtong, 2009). While many questions in the interview ended up being unscripted follow-up questions, the researcher was conscientious to position himself in a way that did not harm rapport and ultimately hurt the quality of the interview.

Informed consent from research participants prior to interviews taking place is an essential element of any study (Zahle, 2017). However, because of the interviews taking place online, informed consent posed a challenge (Mann & Stewart, 2000). To work around this challenge, and to still ensure proper informed consent took place, informed consent forms (Appendix F) were emailed to the participants in advance. Before the interviews began, the participants were asked if they had any questions about the consent form and research project, if they had read and understood the consent form, and if they still wished to participate. Both on the informed consent form (Appendix F) and before interviews commenced, the participants were informed that the interviews were recorded, and that the recording would be stored. Interviews only began once consent was received.

A requirement of the potential sample was that all participants be over the age of 18, meaning consent from a third party was not required.

As mentioned earlier, the online interviews were conducted through Skype or FaceTime. Skype is an online software that is free to download from their website. This software can be utilized for no charge to communicate with any person around the world.
that has access to both the Skype program and internet (Holtz, 2006). Additionally, FaceTime became an alternative if the participant owned an Apple device equipped with the application. Similar to Skype, FaceTime is a videoconferencing platform that is an affordable, convenient, and effective way to communicate (Brandt & Hensley, 2012). Users simply enter their Apple ID that comes standard with Apple products, and ensure their Apple product is connected to the internet or cellular data network, and they are able to communicate through FaceTime (Apple, n.d.b, para. 1).

For both Skype and FaceTime, the lack of cost, and the ease of connecting face-to-face with anyone, regardless of location, made these efficient programs for this study (Holtz, 2006). Further, the ability for the researcher and participant to have face-to-face contact promoted the feeling of a natural in-person conversation, and enhanced the data collection by allowing the researcher to catch subtle physical cues that would not be caught in an audio-only interview (Hanna, 2012; Molyneaux, O’Donnell, & Milliken, 2012). Other sport consumer behaviour researchers have successfully used this software in previous studies to conduct face-to-face interviews (Havard, 2014; Hyatt & Foster, 2015).

The audio of these interviews was recorded through QuickTime, which gave the researcher the ability to transcribe and analyze what was said during the interview at a later date. QuickTime is a computer program that comes standard on the computer that was utilized to carry out this research, and is a “next-generation media technology that powers the audio and video experience” (Apple, n.d.a, para 2).

To avoid any unforeseen technical issues, or any other potential problems that could arise with the recording of the interview, a second audio recording device was
utilized as a backup. This device was placed in a position to capture both the voice of the researcher and the participant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Liamputtong, 2009). Having multiple copies of the interview helped to protect the data from human or technological error. One copy of the audio recordings remain on the researcher’s password protected computer. A second backup copy was duplicated onto a password protected external storage device, while a third copy of the interview was on the backup audio recording device. As the third copy cannot be password protected, it was deleted once the researcher established confidence in the quality of the first and second copies of the interviews. Only the primary researcher has the passwords to the devices storing the interview recordings.

**Interview Discussion.** The intent of conducting interviews in this research project was to facilitate a conversation with participants to understand how they developed and maintained their specific fan identity with the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames. To get to the core of the participants’ development and maintenance of their fan identity, Kvale (2007) suggests that questions be fashioned with the intention of having thematic and/or dramatic components. Thematic questions get to the “what” of the experience, event, or story that is being explored, while dramatic questions look at personal and interpersonal relationships by getting to the “how” (Kvale, 2007). The researcher remained mindful of the thematic and dramatic approaches when crafting the interview questions, resulting in an interview guide (Appendix H) with a mix of thematic and dramatic components.

Even though the interviews are semi-structured, an interview guide (Appendix H) was still necessary in order to ensure the quality of the data collected and consistency
between interviews. As Kallio et al. (2006) claim, the quality of the interview guide “fundamentally influences the results of the study” (p. 2954). Proper data collection methods will be the main influence on the data quality and trustworthiness (Kallio et al., 2006). However, the interview guide (Appendix H) only contained questions that were broad and open, but still pre-established. The guide was used to ensure that all relevant interview topics were brought up during the interview, but a specific order of questions was not strictly followed (Kallio et al., 2006). The order of the questions in the interview flowed naturally within the conversation, and participants were encouraged to clarify their answers (Jones et al., 2014). The guide is made of pre-supposition questions, where the researcher was working on the assumption that the participant is coming into the interview with something to say (Glesne, 2006). An appropriate interview guide was also important to help avoid leading and close-ended questions which could hurt the rapport of the interview and/or the quality of data collected (Liamputtong, 2009).

Once the interviews began, the focus was on the stories and experiences that the participants had to share about how they became fans of the team they cheer for. Since these interviews were done in the interpretive paradigm, the participants were asked to describe the formation of their fan identification with the Oilers or Flames as they see and feel that it happened. For these reasons, the open-ended questions in the interview were general in nature, and once the interview began, the researcher followed the flow of conversation for probing and follow-up questions. Ultimately, to make sure the conversation did not get too far off topic, the researcher referred to the interview guide (Appendix H) to keep the interview on track.
The beginning of any interview is important. The participant will want to know the researcher is genuine, and cares about what they are being told before they will openly and truthfully talk about their experience and feelings with a stranger (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Rapport building between the researcher and participant earlier in the interview will promote a certain level of trust between the researcher and the participant, ideally leading the participant to be open and expansive with their answers (Glesne, 2006). Unscripted greetings and questions (i.e. How are you? How is your day going?) were used to settle the participant into the interview and assist in getting them comfortable with the interviewer and to develop rapport. These questions were common, every day, easy-to-answer questions that were intended to get the participant comfortable with speaking to the researcher, and to show the participant that the researcher was genuinely interested in them. Developing this open communication can ensure early in the interview that the respondent understands that their experiences are the purpose of the interview, which can help with fruitful responses to interview questions (Kvale, 2007).

Once ready to start the interview, the researcher moved onto the opening statement from the interview guide (para. 1 and 2 in Appendix H) to turn the focus of the meeting to the interview and to deal with any questions, comments, or concerns the participant may have had in regard to the study. Once that was dealt with, the interview began with open-ended questions pertaining to the research topic. Specifically, the interviews opened with an easy to answer experience question that gave the participant a chance to speak at length, and an opportunity to continue to get comfortable both with the researcher and the situation of being interviewed (Liamputtong, 2009). Questions based on experiences are the easiest for respondents to answer, as they do not make the
respondent feel like they are being tested (Glesne, 2006). An example of an opening question is question #1 on the interview guide (Appendix H), “Tell me about your earliest experiences with the sport of hockey.” Hyatt and Foster (2015) used this question in their interview guide to ease participants in.

The use of open-ended questions in qualitative interviews gets the participants to tell their stories in a way that has a number of advantages. These advantages include getting the contextual meanings that are within the stories and experiences being shared, avoiding leading questions, and avoiding directing the conversation in a direction that the participants may not want it to go (Crotty, 1998; Hyatt, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For these reasons, open-ended questions were crafted in a way to get the participant to speak about their stories and experiences, and to probe into the meaning that is being placed behind these events (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Since experience-based questions are the easiest for respondents to answer (Glesne, 2006), rich and thick responses were easily attainable. An example of an experience-based question in this study is question #9 on the interview guide (Appendix H), “How have you been able to maintain being a Oilers/Flames fan while living in Red Deer, surrounded by fans of the (rival team)?”.

With Social Identity Theory (SIT) being the framework for this study, this theory is present within the interview discussion. Specifically, question #7 (what is your opinion of rival team fans?), question #9 (how have you been able to maintain being a Oilers/Flames fan while living in Red Deer, surrounded by fans of the rival team), and question #10 (could you ever imagine a situation where you would ever pull for the rival team, and want them to win?) are among the questions that have SIT themes within them.
Question #7 asked for the participants’ opinion on the rival fan group, allowing for them to make a comparison with the out-group. Question #9 asked participants how they have been able to maintain their fandom with the threat of the rival group, or out-group, being so close. This examined how they have been able to continue making positive comparisons with the out-group. Finally, question #10 asked the participants to touch on the in-group vs out-group dynamics that take place in Red Deer.

Within the interpretive paradigm, however, it is important that not all questions in an interview are scripted or pre-prepared. Questions, comments and prompts came up naturally as the conversations and interviews unfolded. This unscripted commentary was important when the participant touched on subjects that the researcher wanted to probe into further (Kvale, 2007). As Kallio et al. (2006) mention, one of the biggest advantages to semi-structured interviews is the reciprocity between the researcher and participant, which “allows for improvised follow up questions based on the conversation” (p. 2955). These questions also help with the trustworthiness of the data since most questions will be about clarifying comments or rapport building (Kvale, 2007).

This research project used probing, follow-up questions as unscripted questions within the interviews. These questions are best used to get a better understanding of the story or phenomenon being described by the participant (Liamputtong, 2009). Probing, follow-up questions come up organically based on the responses of the participant, and are intended to get the participant to go deeper into the answer they just gave (Roulston et al., 2003). It is important that these follow-up questions remain as open and unscripted as possible to allow the participant to continue taking the conversation in the direction they wish to.
Conducting an interpretive interview is more than simply asking questions and recording the participants’ responses, and being a good interviewer is more than just asking the right questions. Qualitative interpretive interviews sometimes involve holding questions back to allow the participant to tell their story in their own way, as well as active listening (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2006; Narayan & George, 2012). Active listening is hearing the “nuances of meaning” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 132) within a participant’s answer. This is hearing the emotions that are embedded in a response, and knowing when to probe further on a topic that the participant may not go too far into (Jones et al., 2014). Active listening also includes remembering what the participant said in response to previous questions, and probing further into what was meant by the respondent. This could include rephrasing previous answers that the respondent gave and repeating it back to them in order to make sure a proper understanding of the meaning was given (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2014). Active listening was important to this research project in order to ensure high quality data.

Along with listening skills in interviews, observations also play an integral part of interviews. Watching the participants’ body language allowed for the researcher to observe non-verbal cues and feedback on top of the verbal response that was given by the participant. The non-verbal cues and feedback include the respondent’s body language once questions are asked, or when stories are being told (Glesne, 2006). The body language gave the researcher some insight on the emotions attached to responses being given, as well as the “effects the questions, probes, and comments are having” (Glesne, 2006, p. 112) on the participant. Rapport and a good connection between researcher and participant was created through “attentive listening, the interviewer showing interest,
understanding, and respect for what the participant says, and with an interviewer at ease and clear about what they want to know” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 128).

Qualitative researchers often take small, unobtrusive notes during interviews, while still maintaining participation and eye contact with the participant (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). During the interviews in this project, notes of this nature were taken, when appropriate, to record non-verbal aspects of the interview. Since the only recording of these interviews is audio, these notes were used to record non-verbal communication or anything relevant in the room to the interview (Sparkes, 2014). For example, if the participant was a Calgary Flames fan, and they were in a room full of Flames memorabilia, notes would have been made to record the decorations as this is not something that would have be caught in the audio recording. These notes were important in remembering the context of interviews (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Further, these notes during the interview also made sure the researcher did not forget to further probe into certain comments the participant made. However, keeping in mind that the audio of the interview was being recorded for future analysis, notes were only taken when necessary and appropriate. This was important, as a researcher that has “their head down taking copious notes…can be distracting to the interviewee” (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 55).

Field notes were also taken throughout the entire research project from the time recruitment of participants began until data analysis was complete. Field notes are widely used in qualitative research as a way to give context to the research process (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Before interviews began, field notes were used to track the recruitment process. This included when and where posters were put up and online posts were made, and any emails sent pertinent to the research project. Further, all
communications with potential participants were tracked. Once interviews began, field notes were used to track as many contextual details of the interviews as possible. This included details about the setting, the participant, the interview guide, and anything else that is important (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Setting details included the date and time of the interview, where and what the setting is, the type of setting, and if the setting has relevance to the interview (i.e. memorabilia on the wall). Details about the participant included their body language, memorable non-verbal cues (twitches, lack of eye contact etc.), the participants’ physical features and clothing, and the participants’ behaviour during the interview (i.e. whether or not they were cooperative and talkative). Field notes were also used to note any impromptu changes to the interview guide or wording of the questions that happened during interviews, and why the changes were made. This resulted in adding questions #5, 12, and 13 to the interview guide (Appendix H). Finally, field notes were used by the researcher to be critical of his role in the interview, and to what extent he had an impact on the responses (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). This included self-evaluation on questions that could have lead participants, or better ways to ask probing questions. It was important that field notes were made as soon as possible after the interviews ended so the researcher could remember as much detail as possible (Sparkes, 2014).

**Saturation.** A researcher’s ability to collect good quality data is directly related to the number of participants in the study. However, there is no set number of interviews that any interpretive research project needs (Jones et al., 2014). Instead, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) claim that a researcher should “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what needs to be known” (p. 113). They go on to suggest that 15
interviews, plus or minus 10, is what most interview studies should involve. The range of numbers is due to a “combination of time and resources, as well as the law of diminishing returns” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). This law is what is also referred to as saturation – when there is no longer any new data or themes emerging in subsequent interviews. In interpretive research, the data collection process is not considered complete until saturation is reached (Patton, 2002). Once saturation is achieved, a researcher’s decision to stop sampling and interviewing is justified (Jones et al., 2014).

The researcher was mindful of theoretical saturation in this study, and data was collected until there were no new surprises or emergent patterns coming from the interview data (Gaskell, 2000). For the purposes of this project, the researcher followed Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) suggestion of 15 interviews, plus or minus 10. This amount of interviews is consistent with other sport fan consumer behaviour studies, which typically have between 12 and 25 participants (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009; Delia, 2015; Delia & James, 2018; Foster & Hyatt, 2007; Gibson et al., 2002; Havard, 2014; Hyatt, 2007; Hyatt & Foster, 2015; Lock et al., 2011; 2012). Each participant was only interviewed one time, meaning the necessary sample size needed to be equivalent to the number of necessary interviews. Scheduled interviews continued until the point of theoretical saturation was achieved (Gaskell, 2000).

**Data Analysis**

Once the interviewing phase of this project was completed, the data analysis phase began. The analysis of data in this study was inductive, meaning the findings in this study were not based on a priori hypotheses, but rather patterns and themes that were discovered and that emerged from the data (Andrijiw & Hyatt, 2009). This project
followed what Liamputtong (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend in analyzing in-depth semi-structured interview content. The recordings of the interviews were listened to, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically with a focus on key words and themes. Listening to the interview recordings allowed the researcher to transfer the dialogue from the interview recording to a word document. Once this was completed, the interview transcription and a thank you letter were emailed to the participants (Appendix I). The transcript was sent to the participant for their review, and to confirm that all of the data was accurately transcribed. Once confirmation was received from the participant, the coding process began.

Coding is done to look for additional insight in individual’s stories, and to look for patterns between different participants’ interviews. This process includes “categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 165). Coding is done “in order to deconstruct data, put them into codes, and find links between them” (Liamuttong, 2009, p. 285). The first step in this process was open, or initial, coding. This was done by the researcher reading through what was transcribed, and breaking down what was in the data into more manageable segments. Open coding is the first pass through the data, allowing the researcher to analyze what is in the interview data more in-depth, and to think of theoretical categorization for the data (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2014).

The second step in coding is thematic coding, which is also referred to as axial coding. This involved connecting the categories that emerged from open coding, as well as subcategories that may have appeared during thematic coding, into larger themes (Liamputtong, 2009). Thematic coding involves “putting back together the open codes in
categories, or larger concepts, that relate to one another” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 165). Thematic coding is the second pass through the interview data, and unlike open coding, involves “examining the codes at a more conceptual level” (Liampittong, 2009, p. 217). Thematic coding looks at specific themes attempting to answer the “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences?”, which gave the researcher a greater understanding of not only the interview data, but also the experiences, stories and phenomenon being studied. New themes emerged as the data analysis process takes place. As this happened, previous transcripts were re-coded with the latest codes being added (Hyatt & Foster, 2015).

This research project took the collected interview data through the data analysis stages of re-listening, transcribing, and coding the data to uncover the themes that were pertinent to the research questions. This data analysis stage, like this research project, was done through the interpretive lens. Therefore, the aforementioned coding process is a suitable option, because it reflected the lived experiences of the participants involved in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Further, this method of analysis was also appropriate because it emphasized the experiences of the participants, which is the aim and focus of this study.

**Data Representation.** Direct quotations from the transcript are used to represent data. According to Sparkes (2014), connecting direct quotations from the participants with themes in the data uncovered by the researcher is a “traditional strategy for qualitative researchers” (p. 152). These quotations constitute the “raw data” of the study, and will support the themes and findings that emerged through the analysis process (Sparkes, 2014). There are a number of different ways to present direct quotations in the
results section of research reports. Of the different options outlined by Pitney and Parker (2009), “low presentation of the researcher’s voice – high presentation of the participants’ voice” (Sparkes, 2014, p. 153) was used. This means the quotations will be used to highlight the participant’s perspective, and the focus will be on the participants’ stories and experiences while minimizing the role of the researcher. The intention is to put the emphasis on the participants’ experiences, not the researcher’s, so that the direct quotations are used in an accurate manner to present the themes and findings (Sparkes, 2014).

**Themes.** Through the previously mentioned data analysis strategies of initial and axial coding, four major categories emerged from the collected data with themes attached to each category. The first category was Becoming a Fan made up of the themes Family Influence, Success, Place Attachment, and Rebellious. Second, the category Rivalry in Red Deer was made up of the themes Showing, Interaction, No Threat/Ignore, and Current State. The third category, Opinion of the “Other” Team, consisted of the themes Players, 2004/2006 Stanley Cup Final, and Fans. Committed to Current Team is the final category and was made up of the themes Family Time, Socializing, Loyalty, and Hope. A thorough analysis and breakdown of each category and theme will come in the following chapter, including a discussion on the findings and how they connect to current literature.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of any qualitative research project. This is the typical measure for the quality of research studies. Trustworthiness is connected with how much confidence, or trust, can be put into the research findings (Jones et al., 2014). When researchers can demonstrate trustworthiness within their studies and projects, what
they are really doing is “encouraging confidence in their findings” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 36). For this study, the researcher used multiple methods for trustworthiness.

To ensure trustworthiness and accuracy, participants were emailed their interview transcript for review (Appendix I). Member checking, or informant feedback, is the process where the research participants confirm “the explanation fits the description” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 391). This process is one of the trustworthiness strategies of this study as it enhances the credibility and authenticity of the collected data (Crotty, 1998; Liamputtong, 2009). Put into simpler terms, this is where the research participant verified that what was recorded, and subsequently transcribed, was done so in a way to capture the intended meaning. This also gave the participant a chance to further elaborate on certain aspects of their responses, or to get rid of elements that they were no longer comfortable with including in the study. There is a downside to member checking, however. As Glesne (2006) points out, this verification process allows the participants to have the opportunity to say what they do not want included, and gives them a second chance to look at what was said. However, none of the member checks resulted in any parts of the transcripts being eliminated. Respondents had two weeks to return their comments to the researcher. If feedback had not been received after two weeks, the researcher assumed that the transcript was accurate. Only four of 12 participants responded with any sort of feedback, all of which was to confirm accuracy, or add further context to what was discussed.

A second method of trustworthiness came in the form of reflexivity. This is a crucial component of any study where “the human is an instrument” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 45). Reflexivity is the critical reflection on how the researcher responds to both the
individuals in the study, and the topic itself (Jones et al., 2014). As Jones et al. (2014) discuss, reflexivity is “the most elusive but important criterion of worthy research” (p. 46). In this study, the aspect of reflexivity occurred through three ways: a carefully constructed interview guide, the researcher constantly considering his own bias, and field notes taken throughout the project. The topic under investigation in this study is something that is very close to the researcher, as the researcher is an Edmonton Oilers fan. For this reason, there are strong feelings and pre-conceived notions that the researcher carried into this study. This presented risks to the interview through using the researcher’s personal experiences as a reference or comparison point for participants’ stories, or the rivalry and tension that can exist between Oilers and Flames fans.

Mindful of these issues, the researcher attempted to suspend any pre-conceived notions and pre-judgements, and avoid any elements of the Battle of Alberta rivalry during the interviewing stage. This allowed for the participant being interviewed to share their experiences and stories as they wish (Liamputtong, 2009). However, even with the researcher making every attempt to suspend his influence on the interview, there remained the potential for the previously mentioned biases, notions, and pre-judgements to come through and potentially influence the responses. To try and avoid these situations, the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix H) worked to avoid leading and close-ended questions, and keep the conversation on topic (Liamputtong, 2009). Additionally, field notes were taken and re-read to ensure the researcher suspended his biases during interviews.

Additional methods of trustworthiness included: participant screening, follow-up questions, and regular meetings and consultation with the research committee and fellow
peer researchers (Hyatt, 2007). First, participant screening took place through participants self-selecting themselves as highly identified, and then reaffirming this identification during the interview through verbal remarks and non-verbal indicators that showed an emotional and mental connection to their team (Appendix J). Second, the follow-up questions that were asked within interviews were used to clarify confusing statements, or statements that may have been misunderstood by the researcher. Finally, meeting with peers working on similar research projects allowed for ideas and feedback to be shared in regards to the project. Additionally, since this research is part of a master thesis, regular meetings took place with both the researcher’s supervisor. Similar to meeting with peers, this allowed for ideas and feedback to be shared. Since the supervisor is considered an expert in the field, their feedback ensured the researcher made decisions and acted in the best interests of trustworthiness for this project.
Chapter Four – Findings and Discussion

This research study was used to provide an in-depth understanding, through an interpretive lens, of how Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames fans living in Red Deer, Alberta developed and maintained their fandom. Further, this study was undertaken to contribute to a gap in sport management literature. The uniqueness of this study (investigating a situation where a common antecedent to fandom is believed to have minimal impact, and when sport fans live just as close to rival out-groups as they do to the in-group) contributed to an underdeveloped area of sport consumer behaviour knowledge.

To develop an understanding of the phenomenon being studied, 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The data that was collected was intended to help answer the following research questions:

1. How did fans of Alberta’s NHL teams, either the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames, living in Red Deer, Alberta, develop their fan identification?
2. How have fans of Alberta’s NHL teams maintained their fan identification with the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames while living in Red Deer?

The previous chapter gave an overview of the methodology used in this study, including how the data was collected and analyzed. This chapter will now present the results that were found within that data analysis. To ensure the collected data was of consequence to the topic, the researcher judged the level of fandom of the participant before each interview. Participants were considered self-selecting highly identified fans by reaching out with an interest to participate, and that level of fandom was re-affirmed during the interview through a demonstration of an emotional connection (Appendix J).
While no respondents that contacted the researcher were turned-away for not being identified enough with their team, seven respondents were turned away for not meeting the residency requirements. This included respondents that did not live in Red Deer long enough, currently resided outside of Red Deer at too great of a distance, or at some point lived in Edmonton or Calgary.

Guided by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) and Liamputtong (2009), data analysis took place in the form of coding. This coding came in two steps, initial coding followed by axial. Additionally, in the true spirit of interpretive and qualitative research, codes and themes were brainstormed by the researcher as patterns emerged in data collection. Through this coding and analysis, the researcher found four major categories with themes attached to each category:

1. Becoming a Fan
   a. Family Influence
   b. Success
   c. Place Attachment
   d. Rebellious
2. Rivalry in Red Deer
   a. Showing
3. Opinion of the “Other” Team
4. Committed to Current Team
b. Interaction
c. No Threat/Ignore
d. Current State

3. Opinion of the “Other” Team
   a. Players
   b. 2004/2006 Stanley Cup Final
   c. Fans

4. Committed to Current Team
   a. Family Time
   b. Socializing
   c. Loyalty
   d. Hope

The categories listed above, and the themes within them, came up naturally within the interviews that were conducted. The analysis of the collected data, as well as its relevance and significance, will be presented throughout the rest of this chapter. Before every interview, demographic data was collected from participants. This data is in Appendix K, which gives a detailed breakdown and better understanding of the 12 participants. Further, Appendix L provides a breakdown of which participants contributed to which categories and themes.

**Becoming a Fan**

The motivations that cause individuals to develop fandom and become a fan of certain teams is something that has been studied extensively in the past (Funk & James, 2001; Havard, 2014; Wann, Tucker and Schrader, 1996). Since the first research question
dealt with understanding how fans in Red Deer chose the Flames or the Oilers, numerous results were found on what caused participants to choose one team over the other. In Wann, Tucker, and Schrader’s (1996) study on fan motivations, they identified 42 possible reasons an individual has to pick the team they cheer for. Of those 42, two of the top five reasons are family influences, and the success of the team. These were two themes that were found in this study. Additionally, cheering for the underdog, or being rebellious, was also found in the data of this study. This is also a theme that Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) found – however, it only came back from 0.6% of their participants, indicating that it ended up being a considerable way down their list of 42 possible reasons. Finally, a sense of place attachment (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Altman & Low, 1992; Bairner, 2014; Delia & James, 2018; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994) was found within the participants in the context of Red Deer. Therefore, within the category of becoming a fan, four major themes were found that are present within the literature, but present a unique perspective within this individual context. These themes will be discussed more in depth in the following sections.

**Family Influence.** In this research study, 10 of 12 participants credited a family member with being the reason they chose the team they did. This stimulus can be found in the literature (Funk & James, 2001; Havard, 2014; James et al., 2009; Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010), as the role of the family has been found to have a strong influence on which team individuals choose to cheer for. More specifically, parents of the individuals will have the most influence. In line with this literature, the father was found to be of significant influence. As Dwight, a 36-year-old Oilers fan, explained:
My dad is a fan of the Oilers, and that’s how I got into being a fan. [We’d watch] on Saturday night… I remember watching with my dad and [the Oilers] winning the Stanley Cup, like the last time Gretzky won it with the Oilers. I remember that one, watching it with my dad.

Kevin, a 32-year-old Flames fan also attributed his fandom to his father:

[My dad] was a big Flames fan. We used to watch as many games on TV as we could, and he’d take me two or three times a year to Calgary to see them play live… it just became a ritual to the point where I would look up the schedule myself and then let my dad know. If we could, we’d always watch the games together. I guess watching it that much with him just made me a fan of the team.

Kevin would later add that he did not even consider being an Oilers fan, and that watching hockey with his dad, and becoming a Flames fan, allowed him to spend time with his dad:

When I was little, I just don’t think I even considered becoming an Oilers fan. My dad was a Flames fan, I watched with him. I don’t think we would’ve spent as much time together watching hockey if I was an Oilers fan.

In a third interview, Roy, a 24-year-old Flames fan explained how his dad was the reason he was a Flames fan, as he was given no choice but to cheer for them:

[My dad’s] a huge Flames fan and I didn’t really have a choice when I was growing up and looking for a team. My mom has a picture of me decked out in Flames stuff when I was only a few months old. She always says my dad gave her no choice but to dress me in that stuff.
Pam, an Oilers fan, did not specifically name any of her family members as to why she was an Oilers fan. She did, however, mention that most of her family was in Edmonton, and she did single out her ex-husband and his family as an influence. She mentioned “family and friends, [Edmonton was] where the majority of them were from. So maybe I picked it up that way, just having friends more from Edmonton… when I was married, my ex’s family had some huge Oilers fans in the family. So, it maybe just solidified it.”

Similar to what was found in the literature review, the influence of family members had a strong effect on how participants in this study became fans of the team they chose. However, while the father was a strong influence in most situations, other family members also played a role, including uncles, grandparents and extended family on the in-laws’ side. A similarity between participants is that the family member that was given credit for influencing the team choice often granted access and exposure of the team onto the individual – whether that meant watching the team live or on TV. This goes in line with studies (James, 2001; Wann, 2006) that indicated one way to influence a child’s favorite team was simply by granting access to exposure to that team. Further, many of the quotations that indicated a family influence mentioned watching hockey with their father, or a family member. In his study examining motivations for being a sport fan, Wann (1995) indicated that one of the top eight reason to watch sport is family. The fact that participants were influenced by watching hockey with family members would relate back to this finding of Wann’s (1995).

**Success.** Teams that enjoy success, winning, and championships often attract more fans. This is because the achievements these teams enjoy help individuals fulfill their desire for positive associations, which helps their own self-esteem (Sutton et al.,
The literature shows that due to BIRGing (Cialdini et al., 1976), individuals affiliate with social groups that can reflect positively on them (Lock et al., 2011). In the sport context, that means cheering for successful teams. Team success is also present in the literature as one of the reasons individuals will cheer for a team, as it is one of the top five reasons Wann et al. (1996) found when discussing their 42 possible reasons to begin cheering for a team. In this study, four of the 12 participants indicated that on-ice success and Stanley Cup excitement helped them choose, or solidify, their fandom with the team they cheer for.

Oilers fan Stanley was asked why he chose the Oilers over the Flames: “the Oilers were fun to watch… the Oilers were just too good and too fun to watch with too many good players.” When Oilers fan Michael was asked to discuss his earliest memory as an Oilers fan, he responded: “I have vague memories of the 1990 Stanley Cup championship so that kind of helped.” Later in the interview, he was asked about another early memory as a child and responded:

Well they started to get in the playoffs around ‘95, ‘96 they were a lot of fun to watch. So I remember getting really really stoked. There was the Marchant goal against Dallas, where they got to the second round, was that 96 or 97, or 98? It was somewhere in there. Like that was a really big deal. Those early playoff runs when they were against Dallas all the time were really really intense and a lot of fun.

Flames fan Darryl indicated the Stanley Cup in 1989 was important for him to be a Flames fan:
I was six when they won the Stanley Cup, so that was kind of the big significant moment. Which was weird, because this is when Edmonton was a dynasty and won like five Cups. But, I would still always be more of a Flames fan than an Oilers fan.

30-year-old Flames fan Kelly was asked when she became a Flames fan, and what solidified her fandom. She responded with a story from her childhood: “I think it probably goes back to the 2004 Stanley Cup run… that’s probably the earliest time when I’d say that I was a fan of the Flames. So maybe the playoff run turned me into a fan just from someone who watches.” When asked what was special about that playoff run, she answered:

I just remember how excited everyone was. I remember having a huge block party with all my neighbours just to watch the game together. We had a BBQ and my neighbour brought his TV outside and we all watched it, like probably 30 of us. Everyone was just so pumped and excited, that’s probably what got me pumped and excited. I remember me and my little brother and my best friend ripped open this cardboard box and made a ‘Go Flames Go’ sign. And then we went to the side of the road wearing our jerseys that my parents got us and just waved the sign getting people to honk for us, and I thought that was so cool. So honestly, I think I just got swept in the excitement and the atmosphere and wanted more of it, and to get more of it I just became a Flames fan.

As indicated above, team success, a theme found within existing literature is also present in this study. Success has the ability to initially attract individuals to be fans, or to solidify their fandom with the team they chose. Associating with, or cheering for, a
successful team has self-esteem and self-image benefits, making it a common theme found during the literature review, including a top five result in the Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) study.

**Place Attachment.** One form of place attachment is where fan loyalty to a specific team is rooted in how that team is connected to and represents a certain geographic area (Aden & Titsworth, 2012). In essence, it is the idea of someone supporting a team because of a connection felt with the city, region, or community that team plays out of. This concept was furthered by Delia and James (2018), who found that fans of the Syracuse University men’s basketball team see the team as representing Central New York, and fans of the Minnesota Twins view the team as a representation of the State of Minnesota and the Twin Cities. Place attachment is also present in the findings of this study, as five of the participants mentioned a closeness to either Edmonton or Calgary.

Oilers fan Pam indicated in her interview that she had a preference for Edmonton compared to Calgary. When asked why she had this preference, she responded:

I like the City of Edmonton, the community of Edmonton… I think everyone’s just like super welcoming and the sense of community is huge. And I live in Red Deer, and Red Deer just feels like a big town, and I think I feel the same way when I go to Edmonton, especially for hockey related things. It’s just like a big family.

Pam clearly indicates she feels closer to Edmonton because of a comparison and similarities with Red Deer. This drew her closer to Edmonton, and as a result, the Oilers.
Ryan, a 55-year-old Flames fan, grew up in a smaller community on the outskirts of Red Deer, and similar to Pam, saw a connection between his hometown and the city of the team he cheers for. In his case, he saw similarities between the small town of Caroline, Alberta, and Calgary: “Caroline is quite a Western town. Not like oilfield, but lots of farm and ranch… it’s more associated with Calgary, like Calgary Stampede.” Ryan later added credit to his grandparents as why he felt connected to Calgary:

Well, so my family on my dad’s side is from southern Alberta… and then some of them, as they got older, moved up into Calgary, like my grandparents on that side… of course that was my start with always liking Calgary and the area, and we used to go there quite a bit. So it started as liking Calgary as a kid because of our family roots… probably my family, our roots. Liking Calgary the city. Yeah, and then my family members were all from Calgary as well, so that’s really where it started.

This quotation shows some overlap between the themes Family Influence and Place Attachment. However, Ryan indicates that the influence of his family led to a closeness to Calgary, and that closeness led him to being a Flames fan.

When Flames fan Jim was asked about his opinion of Oilers fans, his response was rooted in elements of place attachment:

Edmonton is more of a blue collar city than Calgary. And so, we would occasionally make simple jokes about Oilers fans, not that we’re so profound in Calgary, or even, well I’m in Red Deer.
Something interesting in his response is that Jim identifies with Calgary in his response, then catches himself, correcting that he is still in Red Deer. This could indicate just how connected he is to Calgary, that he identifies as a Calgarian.

Another unique and unexpected idea of place attachment that came up in more than one interview was the idea of cheering for one team already in the city, and then using that fandom as a bridge to becoming a Flames or Oilers fan. After initially mentioning a connection to Edmonton through family, Oscar, an Oilers fan, mentioned the Edmonton Eskimos Football Club from the Canadian Football League (CFL) as having an effect as well:

My dad and I used to go to Eskimos games a lot in the summer… I know I was an Eskimos fan for that reason. And I guess, as I got more into hockey and sports, and as my brother played more and more hockey and I was looking for a team to follow, I just chose the Oilers because of the connection with the Eskimos and all the time we spent in Edmonton.

This quote could also fall under the Family Influence theme, as it is Oscar’s dad that takes him to Edmonton. However, the emphasis on this quote is that being an Edmonton Eskimos fan lead to his Oilers fandom, therefore making it place attachment. Andy, a 70-year-old Oilers fan that was born in England and immigrated to Canada, echoed a similar relationship with the Eskimos:

We came [to the country] in the end of September, and the football playoffs, I think, were just starting. If I remember correctly, I think the Eskimos were sort of an underdog team at the time in the playoffs. And so I started cheering for the
Eskimos, and that then sort of carried on naturally to, you know, through to hockey.

Putting Andy’s comments more into context, he was a hockey fan and an Edmonton Eskimos fan before the Oilers even came into existence. He felt a closeness and connection to Edmonton, so when the Oilers originally came into existence in their World Hockey Association (WHA) days, it was just a natural fit to him. When asked again about being closer to Edmonton than Calgary, Andy mentioned that a local junior hockey team in Red Deer that he followed played against a team in Edmonton, the Edmonton Oil Kings:

Yeah, given, as I say, this football connection that then carried on through there. And, we had the connection with the Red Deer Rustlers, [who] played in the Central Alberta Hockey League which included the Edmonton Oil Kings… so we had an interest in that direction because they were part of the hockey league that we were watching here in Red Deer. And, they had quite the array of stars that were playing for them, so that led us towards favouring the Oil Kings. And then Calgary didn’t have a team originally, so that would also help the shift in interest towards Edmonton.

Ryan, a 55-year-old Flames fan, also mentioned developing a closeness before the NHL came to Alberta. He mentioned a connection to the City of Calgary rooted in the CFL’s Calgary Stampeders, and the original WHA franchise, the Calgary Cowboys:

The Calgary Stampeders, in the CFL, I’ve been a fan of theirs since I was about nine and then 1974 I think the WHA had a team in Calgary called the Calgary
Cowboys. So I followed them on the radio, and then they became the Calgary Flames in 1979 from Atlanta.

Place attachment in one context is the idea that people can feel close to a city, and as a result of that connection, cheer for the team that represents that city or plays out of there (Aden & Titsworth, 2012). In some cases, there was a family influence that was tied to the connection between the individual and the city, creating overlap between this theme and Family Influence. However, the quotes used to form the Place Attachment theme emphasized the connection to the city as being the reason for developing fandom, as opposed to a family influence being the main stimulus for fandom. The Place Attachment theme is present in the data collected for this research project, as participants attributed a closeness or connection to the city that their favourite team plays out of. Whether it is because the city is a reflection of their hometown, a family connection, or a connection through other sport teams, five of the participants indicated a special relationship with the city that their favourite team calls home, even though they have never lived there.

**Rebellious.** While some participants indicated that they were attracted to the success and wins of the teams, other fans indicated the opposite was true. As opposed to being attracted to success and winning, some participants indicated that they were attracted to the underdog status of the Calgary Flames. Both participants that indicated this theme called their fandom of the Flames “rebellious”. Darryl, a 35-year-old Flames fan, indicated that it seemed like everyone around him growing up was an Oilers fan, which pushed him to be attracted to the Flames:
It might just be my rebellious nature too. In that, everybody loved the Oilers, everybody cheered for them. So it was kind of just like that was what everybody was, that’s just not what I am going to do.

Jim, a 40-year-old Flames fan went on to call the Flames underdogs, and that he rebelled against how good the Oilers were:

The Oilers ended up being this dynasty type thing, and so, I kind of rebelled against that, and went, not necessarily to the full underdog, but the local underdog version, at least… they have that, sort of, historical underdog… there’s only one Gretzky, there’s only one McDavid, so you need more of a team to ever get past Edmonton out of Alberta. I sort of like that. Whether any of that is even true, but that’s just like the narrative that you can build around it. It makes it easier to like the team and easier to hate Edmonton.

Jim mentions an attraction to the Flames’ underdog status, rooted in a lack of superstar talent players. This helped him rebel against the Oilers dynasties in the 1980s. The underdog reality of the Flames was more attractive than the success the Oilers were enjoying for Jim.

To answer the first research question of how fans in Red Deer originally chose their team, themes were identified in the interview data after participants answered in their own words how they became fans of their teams. Influence from family members, success and championships, place attachment, and cheering to be rebellious were reasons that participants gave as to why and how they became fans of their teams. Geographic proximity proved to play little influence in the traditional way of cheering for the “closer team” in Red Deer. This is not surprising since the city is equi-distant between Edmonton
FAN IDENTIFICATION IN RED DEER, ALBERTA

and Calgary (Rand McNally Road Atlas, 1996). The influence of family members, especially fathers (Funk & James, 2001; Havard, 2014; James, 2001; James et al., 2009; McPherson, 1976; Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014; Smith et al., 1981; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010), and success and championships (Delia & James, 2018; Sutton et al., 1997; Wann, 2006) have been documented in literature as common reasons to choosing a team. Place attachment, feeling a connection to a city and then cheering for the teams connected to that city, falls in line with the work of Aden and Titsworth (2012). While their research showed fans would move away from a place and use sport teams to maintain a connection to that location, forming a connection to a city and then cheering for that city’s teams falls in line with their findings. What is unique with this theme in Red Deer, however, is that this connection to a city is formed with a city the person has never lived in. In Aden and Titsworth’s (2012) study, participants lived in Nebraska and moved away. In this study, no participants lived in Edmonton or Calgary, yet connections were still felt to those cities.

Rivalry in Red Deer

The first step when trying to understand the climate of the rivalry in Red Deer is to see how these fans perceive the actual rivalry between the Oilers and Flames. The strength and intensity of the rivalry would determine how easy or hard it has been for fans in Red Deer to maintain their fandom through the years. When speaking with participants about the rivalry and what it is like being a fan in Red Deer, a number of different themes emerged from the conversations. These themes created a picture into what these fans perceive the state of the rivalry to be in Red Deer, which indicates how
easy or hard it has been to maintain their fandom in Red Deer. These themes will be explored in the sections below.

**Showing.** Part of maintaining an individual’s fandom is how they show that fandom; how they express it to other people so that it is known who that person cheers for. Highly identified sports fans will go to great measures to show off and display their associations with the teams they cheer for (End, 2001). This includes spending large amounts of money on “jerseys and other team merchandise that literally enables them to show ‘their true colours’” (End, 2001, p. 163). Fans will also make a point to display their affiliation while traveling by decorating their cars with bumper stickers, window decals, and car flags (End, 2001; End et al., 2002).

When asked how they maintain their fandom, some of the participants outlined how or what they show or express to make it known who they cheer for. Jim, a Flames fan, mentioned: “I’ve got this Flames golf shirt on today” as he conducted the interview from his office at work. Kelly, a Flames fan, added: “I wear my jerseys when I can, I have a Flames car flag and a car decal, my house is full of memorabilia.” Flames fan Kevin said something similar: “I wear my Flames gear without shame, shirts, jackets, sweaters, jerseys, hats, toques, that stuff. I have a Flames logo on my truck. I actually have a Flames tattoo as well.” This theme was not just limited to Flames fans, however. Oscar, an Oilers fan, mentioned: “I have a number of Oilers hats I wear a lot, and Oilers jerseys, and jackets and hoodies I wear around town. I have an Oilers license plate on my car and a couple decals on my back window.” Dwight, also an Oilers fan mentions: “I got an Oilers tattoo when I was 18 or 19.” These quotes indicate how hockey fans expressed
their fandom while living in Red Deer – a location that, in theory, should be in the heart of the rivalry.

**Interaction.** In five of the interviews, participants spoke about what it was like interacting with other fans in Red Deer, and whether Red Deer was more of an Oilers or Flames town. Oilers fan Michael indicated that Red Deer is 50/50 between the Oilers and Flames: “I feel like it’s fairly split… Red Deer I think is pretty 50/50.” Flames fan Ryan thinks Red Deer has slightly more Oilers fans, but thinks Central Alberta is an even spread: “It depends where I go in Red Deer. At work, I would say there’s a few more Oilers fans. Maybe like a 60/40 split. I would say it is very close to 50/50 in Central Alberta.” When asked what it was like to watch hockey in person at the bar or restaurant, Oilers fan Michael would go on to explain that while you have to have a thicker skin to watch hockey in the bar, he is not really affected by it:

There’s a lot of chirping, and you kind of just have to have thicker skin. Because, you know, when your team is like the worst team for the last 15 years, you have nothing but to take a lot of shit and abuse. But, I don’t know, I just roll with it and make fun of it.

He follows this up by admitting that the trash talking is the worst part: “the chirping is the worst part you’re going to have to deal with.”

When Oilers fan Pam was asked what it was like to be an Oilers fan in Red Deer, she also indicated that some people can start trash talking, but she does not feel like it is an issue:
I can go out to an establishment and wear an Oilers jersey and you know if people want to heckle me, they can, but I think it’s pretty rare. I think for the most part, just like, the passion for the game is respected for most fans.

When asked if anything is different in Red Deer when the Flames are more successful than the Oilers, Oscar, an Oilers fan, responded following the theme of trash talking being the worst part:

The only thing that’s really different is Flames fans get a little louder but you just ignore them. Maybe the only difference [in behaviour] is not wanting to go out to watch Battle of Alberta games when the Flames are heavy favourites, just to avoid Flames fans. But, really I don’t think it’s an issue whether the Flames are doing better than the Oilers or not.

Jim, a Flames fan, says that some of his best friends are Oilers fans, and even though the trash talking can go both ways, it is not necessarily a bad thing: “Some of my best friends are Oilers fans. I like to give them a hard time, they like to give me a hard time. But, it’s not really a generally negative thing.”

The consensus among participants seems to indicate that while Red Deer could be considered very close to being 50/50, it may be more so an Oilers town. This is important in trying to understand how fandom has been maintained through the years. Fans are not overwhelmed by rival fans, as there are just as many fans of their own team as there is of their rivals. This means that there was likely no issue in maintaining fandom, or having to overcompensate in being a fan. It is just as easy to interact with fans of their own team as it is for fans of the other. In some cases, people were close friends and watched hockey
with fans of the other team. This indicates that there is likely not a strong problem in maintaining fandom while interacting with other fans in Red Deer.

Within the context of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the fact that they are not overwhelmed by the rival group in Red Deer, and can even be close friends and engage in friendly and professional banter indicates that they do not see the other fan group in Red Deer as a strong threat to a positive self-esteem.

No Threat/Ignore. Building further off the theme that fans in Red Deer do not feel threatened by the fans of the rival group, five participants explicitly indicated that they feel absolutely no threat towards their fandom from the rival fan group. Additionally, the rival fan group is something that can easily be disregarded, further highlighting a lack of a threat to self-esteem or fandom. Oilers fan Michael was asked if he has ever felt pressure to switch teams from the Oilers to the Flames, and he responded:

No, that’s not really a thing that I’ve really dealt with ever. No one has really ever tried to coax me, and I don’t feel any pressure to be a Flames fan, nor would I ever. I don’t think that’s really a thing, not that I’ve ever seen anyways.

Oscar, an Oilers fan, was asked if he sees Flames fans as a threat, and if there was a draw or a pull to support the Flames, and he responded: “it’s a non-issue to me, really.”

Kelly, a Flames fan, was asked the same question about feeling pressure in Red Deer to switch teams and she responded:

I don’t think I really need to, you know. Like there’s nothing to resist from the Oilers fans. Like there’s no pressure to switch… Honestly, like I said, it’s been a non-issue for me. You get some snide comments and some jeers at the bar
sometimes wearing Flames stuff, but it’s nothing major. I’ve never felt pressure to
switch or anything like that.

Kevin, a Flames fan, was asked how he’s been able to maintain his fandom while living
with just as many Oilers fans as Flames fans, and he responded:

Ignore them *laughs* …I usually ignore Oilers fans, or trash talk them back. I
never listen to them, like ignore the haters *laughs*

Flames fan Roy also laughed off switching teams, emphasizing how poor the Oilers
perform on the ice:

No, not really. Like, even as much as the Flames haven’t been successful, the
Oilers have been worse *laughs* so, it wouldn’t make sense to go from one
hockey team to a worse hockey team, ya know?

When asked how he deals with Oilers fans when the Oilers are more successful than the
Flames he responded:

Well, I either get along with them or I ignore them. I like to trash talk, but only in
good spirits. If I don’t like their vibe or they don’t like what I’m saying, I’m
ignoring them. You hear about violence at games in Europe and in the States, and
it’s just not worth it to me.

Flames fans, like Oilers fans, seem to believe that Oilers fans pose no threat, or can be
easily ignored.

An important element of Social Identity Theory is constant comparisons with rival
outgroups in order to help an individual’s self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If
individuals feel the out-group is a threat to that positive self-esteem they will use tactics
to diminish the other group in order to maintain the positive comparison (Tajfel &
However, that is not the case in Red Deer, as participants indicated that they do not see the other fan group as a threat to their fandom or self-esteem, and they can simply disregard the other fan group. Since there was nothing extremely negative to say about the rival fan group it is safe to assume that fans in Red Deer do not see the rival fan group as dangerous towards their self-esteem. This would make it easier for fans in Red Deer to maintain with their current team since there is no threat to their fandom.

**Current State.** To try and further understand the perception of the rivalry in Red Deer amongst participants, they were directly asked how they felt about the rivalry. The majority said the rivalry was dying or dead. Since the Oilers and Flames have not played meaningful games in recent history, many participants felt that the rivalry was not what it used to be or could be. Some Flames fans even suggested that the Flames had a bigger rivalry with other teams because they had played meaningful games in recent history. However, many participants that felt the rivalry was fading also said it could be re-ignited instantly should the Oilers and Flames play meaningful games again.

Michael, an Oilers fan, feels that the rivalry is not there like it used to be, and attributes that to the teams not being competitive:

The rivalry is not really there anymore, only once in a while... the rivalry between the Oilers and Flames is kind of, I don’t want to say it’s dead, but it doesn’t have a whole lot of fire in it since the 90s because both teams have been on and off, okay to trash through all of the 2000s. There’s just, if you ever watch the games they play, occasionally there’s some sparks there but there’s a lot of games where it’s just like a regular game which it takes a lot of the fun out of it, in terms of the rivalry.
Stanley, an Oilers fan, comments how it used to be exciting, but does not mean the same anymore: “I used to love it, because it was exciting. And now that neither team has really been doing much, it doesn’t hold quite as much water.” He went on to add: “I look for a day where both teams are doing well and expected to do well, then I think it would be rivaled again.”

Oilers fan Oscar admits Oilers-Flames games are still good, but would be better if the teams were better:

It’s more fun when the two teams are doing better. They’re still good games regardless of where the teams are in the standings, but I think they’re more fun when they mean something… when the games means something to both teams… both teams need the two points in the game, so they’re going to fight for it.

Later in the interview, Oscar added: “I think the hatred, or the fire, hasn’t been there because the game hasn’t been important. But like I said, two years ago those games were really fun, so it has the potential to get heated again, it just depends on how good the teams are.”

The feeling of a lost rivalry is also within Flames fans. Jim, who is a Flames fan, echoes what Oilers fans felt, saying the rivalry is not the same without the teams being competitive:

It’s hard to see them as a rival, when you’re not really… like you’re both competing for 10th place. That’s not really a rival. Like if you’re competing at the top of the division, or you’re able to put them out of the playoffs, I think the rivalry will be there instantly.

Jim added that the Flames have stronger rivalries with other teams:
I would even say that I have a contempt of Vancouver more than I have of Edmonton over the last 20 years. Just because Vancouver has been a consistently better team, say, of the last few years.

Flames fan Ryan said the rivalry has not been good for a few years, and that the rivalry started off better this year, but trailed off with the Oilers not being as successful:

It is dependent on the success of the teams. It had really gotten quiet the last few years because both teams weren’t doing well. And this year it had started out, I think the first game [this year]… that was fun to watch. A lot of chirping back and forth. But with Edmonton being so weak right now and probably not going to make the playoffs, it’s taken a little bit of that momentum away that we did build up from the first two games.

As seen above, a number of participants felt that the rivalry between the Flames and Oilers has cooled. Participants attributed this to a lack of success or competitiveness between the two teams, and most agree that it would come back instantly should the two teams be competitive again.

According to Tyler and Cobbs (2015), rival fan groups are an outgroup that can threaten the self-esteem of the in-group by denying them a positive comparison. Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), seeing the rival fan group as a threat would result in animosity towards them, and this would mean that strategies would need to be undertaken to ensure a positive comparison. However, it is clear that there is not much hostility or animosity between these two fan groups, and the participants themselves admit that there is not much of a heated rivalry.
Tyler and Cobbs (2015) listed 11 different reasons or ways that a rival can threaten the self-esteem of the in-group. These reasons include: “frequency of competition, defining moments, recent parity, historical parity, star factors, relative dominance, competition for personnel, cultural similarity, cultural difference, unfairness, and geography” (p. 227). Keeping these 11 reasons in mind while considering how strong both Edmonton and Calgary were in the 1980s, how often they played, and how the Flames could only get past the Oilers twice during that time span, combined with their geographical proximity would easily explain the intense rivalry of the time.

However, with tweaks to the NHL schedule in recent years, the Oilers and Flames do not play each other as often and with neither team being as strong and not playing each other in meaningful games in recent memory, it makes sense that the rivalry has cooled off recently, especially considering the 11 different reasons for rivalry from Tyler and Cobbs (2015). Havard and Eddy (2013) studied college sports fans in the United States and found that a lack of playing a traditional rival in meaningful competition lead to a perception that the rivalry was diminishing, further emphasizing the need for rivals to play meaningful games to maintain a sense of rivalry.

Further, using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it is also possible that the lack of rivalry comes from a lack of seeing the other group as a threat, especially with the lack meaningful games in recent history. Therefore, living just as close to the rival fan group as your own fan group may not result in a different fandom maintenance strategies compared to other situations. Even though they live in such close proximity to one another, the situation may not call for different strategies because there is no added threat.
Opinion of the “Other” Team

While investigating how Oilers and Flames fans in Red Deer have maintained their fandom, it was important to understand how participants felt about the other team. Whether or not they view the other team as a strong rival, or merely another team in the league, would indicate how difficult it may have been to maintain their fandom and the strategies that may have been used. This would give context to how they have been able to maintain being a fan. If participants felt that the other team posed a great threat to their fandom and self-esteem, or if the other team was viewed as a non-issue, would help give meaning and help to understand how maintenance has been carried out. While looking into the opinion of the other team, four different themes emerged. Those themes will now be explored in the following sections.

Players. In four of the conversations about opinions of the other team, participants specifically named players on the other team. In the case of the Flames fans that mentioned Oilers players, both mentioned Oilers captain Connor McDavid and his talent. Jim, a Flames fan, responded: “I was a Gretzky fan… the players I think pretty highly of a few of them, obviously, McDavid is pretty incredible.” While Flames fan Roy added to his response: “McDavid is amazing, [Oilers forward] Draisaitl is going to score 50 goals.”

Oilers fans also singled out Flames players, but instead of only focusing on the player’s skill, they were also attracted to where that player was from. Michael commented:
I loved the way [Jarome Iginla] played. You know, a really good goal scorer, really gritty, able to play a physical game, could scrap once in a while and he was from Edmonton. I just really loved the way he played.

When asked what was different about Iginla, Michael reiterated that Iginla was from Edmonton, and when asked why that was important, he replied because of his fandom for the Oilers. While this quote also has elements of place attachment, because Michael’s attraction to Iginla is because he is from Edmonton, the main point of the quote is an opinion on a player from the rival team. Michael would go on to admit that in a perfect world Iginla would have played for the Oilers. In essence, one of the few positive things Michael, an Oilers fan, could say about the Flames player came back to his fandom with the Oilers.

Iginla came up in another interview with an Oilers fan. When talking about the 2004 Stanley Cup Final between Calgary and Tampa Bay, Oilers fan Stanley mentioned:

I liked Iginla, I always thought he was a good hockey player and I respected him. And, you know, he’s from St. Albert, which is [just outside] Edmonton… so I kind of, I felt like, I didn’t mind watching him play, and I do remember when Tampa tripped Iginla, he could’ve had a breakaway and the refs didn’t call it, and being upset.

In conversations with Michael and Stanley, both Oilers fans, there is a connection between Jarome Iginla, a Flames player, and Edmonton. Stanley’s quote again shows elements of place attachment, since his attraction to Iginla had to do with him being from the Edmonton area, but similar to Michael, the point of the quote has to do with the a
player on the rival team. In the few instances that Oilers fans had positive things to say about a Flames player, there was still a connection back to Edmonton.

When trying to understand how fans maintain their fandom while being just as close to their rival as they are to their own team, one thing to consider is how these fans view that rival team. One common theme that came up in interviews was attitudes and feelings towards players. Both Oilers and Flames fans that mentioned players did not express strong feelings of dislike, even though they play for a rival team. Further, not only was there no dislike, but there was acknowledgment, and sometimes even praise, of the skill level that players on the other team had. This gives a window into how the participants felt about their rival team, and the state of the rivalry in Red Deer, and helped put context toward the interviews.

2004/2006 Stanley Cup Final. Continuing to try to understand how the participants felt towards their rival team, participants were asked how they felt when the rival team was more successful than their own team. With both the Oilers and the Flames playing in Stanley Cup Finals two years apart from each other in 2004 and 2006, participants were asked how they dealt with their rival team being so close to a league championship. Half the participants (six) either did not directly answer the question, or gave a short, one word response. Of the six that did elaborate on how they felt, or explained how they dealt with their rival being so close to a championship, three were Oilers fans and three were Flames fans.

When it came to Oilers fans dealing with the Flames’ 2004 Stanley Cup run, Michael, Stanley, and Oscar all admitted to cheering for the Flames. Michael explained that he followed the series closely and was let down when the Flames lost: “I actually got
really sucked into it because it was a really good series… I don’t know if it was a sadness, but kind of a let-down when [the Flames] did finally lose.” Michael then went on to clarify that he was not pulling for the Flames because he wanted his rival to win, but rather for the underdog story, and to see one of his favourite players lift the Cup:

It’s nothing to do with the Flames, everything to do with the Cinderella story, and I loved Jarome Iginla, so I would’ve liked to see him win, and then after he raised the Cup I would’ve turned the TV off.

Stanley, an Oilers fan, stated a similar response at first, saying he was hoping the Flames could win the Cup. Also similar to Michael, he directly related it to Iginla:

I actually kind of jumped on board. I liked Iginla, I always thought he was a good hockey player and I respected him… I do remember when Tampa tripped Iginla, he could’ve had a breakaway and the refs didn’t call it, and being upset. Like I remember that, I remember going “that should’ve been a stupid penalty”, it might’ve cost them the game. And I think a lot of people subtly kind of jumped on board because Alberta hadn’t had a run in quite a long time. And I was one of those people. I wasn’t like loudly cheering, I wasn’t going to the red mile [a street in Calgary where Flames fans celebrate, especially in the playoffs], I wasn’t anything like that.

When Stanley talks about Alberta not having a run in “quite a long time” as a reason to subtly root for the Flames, he is talking about place attachment. The Flames, in this case, represented Alberta. However, Stanley also admitted that his experiences from 2004, and hoping the Flames could win, actually increased his dislike for Flames fans:
Well, it’s funny because when I told you earlier in the interview that I started to develop more of a hatred towards Flames fans, it was around that time… two years later, the Oilers make a run and the Flames fans, who are now feeling high and mighty because they just had their run… there was zero Alberta support of the Flames fans I knew. I remember going “ya you know what guys, this is cool, let’s go Flames, this is fun to watch” and the Oilers have their run two years later and they’re like “screw that, Oilers suck, blah blah blah” and I was like “okay, now I can never jump on the Flames.”

Even though Stanley mentioned a “hatred” for Flames fans, he never elaborated or portrayed any examples of strong feelings of that nature. Oilers fan Oscar goes on to admit that he cheered for the Flames in 2004, but felt something similar to Stanley when it came to Flames fans:

I was cheering for them. But then two years later in 2006, when the Oilers made their run, that kind of opened my eyes for disliking the Flames… in 2004, it seemed like a lot of Oilers fans were cheering for the Flames, maybe not cheering for them, but pulling for them. So it was like the whole province was getting behind the Flames and cheering for them. But then in 2006, Flames fans did not return the favour. In fact, they were actively cheering against the Oilers. So I remember thinking then like “okay, screw the Flames and their fans.”

When it came to Oilers fans dealing with the Flames being more successful in 2004, these participants clearly were hoping for the Flames to win. Whether they attributed that to the underdog theme of the Flames, or to cheering for a player on the team to win a Cup, it was obvious that there was some hope in the Flames. However, the experiences in 2004,
combined with what happened in 2006, seems to have also shaped Stanley’s and Oscar’s outlook on the Flames and their fans.

Analyzing the data that was collected from the three Flames fans who gave an in-depth response to how they felt during the Oilers’ 2006 Stanley Cup run, it would seem that Oilers fans Stanley and Oscar were not mistaken in their evaluation of the situation. Flames fans Jim, Kelly, and Kevin all admit to cheering against the Oilers, or at least hoping they would lose. Jim admitted the atmosphere was fun, but that he also wanted the Oilers to lose:

It was fun, I mean everyone was out in the pubs watching games so like the atmosphere was fun, I found it pretty entertaining when they were lighting trash cans on Whyte Ave [the street in Edmonton full of bars that Oilers fans celebrated on], and doing stupid shit like that… I was cheering against them because it wasn’t ever who I wanted to win. So, and after the Flames got outed by Tampa Bay a couple years before that, I was definitely a bit wounded, so I have no interest in them winning the Cup.

Kelly, a Flames fan, responded with something similar:

I don’t want to say I was cheering against the Oilers, I would say I followed the series as a Flames fan, but part of me was a little happy when they lost… the Flames were out of the playoffs, so I had no choice but to follow the Oilers, and I didn’t want them to have something the Flames didn’t have.

Finally, Flames fan Kevin also expressed that he hoped for the Oilers to lose:

Cheered against them *laughs* I couldn’t cheer for them. They’re the rivals, they’re the Oilers, and the wounds from 2004 were still fresh… and to answer
why, it’s like I said, I just strongly dislike the Oilers, I don’t want to cheer for them, and honestly I was jealous after what happened in 2004… worried they might get the job done that the Flames weren’t able to… so I needed them to lose because we lost.

Even though Oilers fans admittedly pulled for the Flames in 2004, two years later in 2006, Flames fans did not share the comradery, choosing to hope for the Oilers to lose. However, it is interesting to note that all three responses from Flames fans indicate that they did not want the Oilers to win so soon after the Flames lost.

This was the only element of a strong dislike and rivalry that emerged from the conversations, and only came up in three of the interviews. A possible explanation for this lays in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If the Oilers were able to win in 2006, after the Flames lost in 2004, it may have been hard for Flames fans to make a positive comparison with Oilers fans. As Flames fan Kevin says: “the wounds from 2004 were still fresh.” Even though these playoff runs were two years apart, there was no hockey during the year in between due to a work stoppage. Therefore, with the Oilers being one win away from doing what the Flames could not do immediately prior could be seen as presenting a threat to the self-esteem of Flames fans still mourning their defeat. Since there were no playoffs in between the two playoff runs, even though they were two years apart, there was no chance for Flames fans to accept another team being more successful than theirs, let alone their provincial rivals. Perhaps they would have supported the Oilers more during their Stanley Cup run if the Flames had won in 2004, and their reasons for cheering against the Oilers simply came from wanting to protect their positive comparisons with the Flames, and ultimately their self-esteem.
Fans. Another important aspect of understanding how NHL fans in Red Deer view their rivals is examining how they see the fans of that rival team. All 12 participants were asked explicitly about their opinion of the other team’s fans. Only one of the participants gave short answers with no descriptions, while the other 11 gave a longer, more in-depth response.

A moderate approach was taken by some Oilers fans to describe Flames fans. Michael responded: “as a rule, I don’t have anything against Flames fans... There was a time I will say that I hated... well not hate... but had strong [feelings towards] Flames fans, but not in a very long time.” Oilers fan Dwight also took a moderate approach:

I try not to go to games [in Calgary] because I don’t really like watching hockey with Flames fans, but they’ve always been courteous or whatever. They’re not like malicious or anything like that. I have nothing bad to say about them.

Oilers fan Stanley commented that Flames fans are probably similar to other fanbases, and has no strong feelings towards them:

I think they could be just the same, or just as ignorant as [Oilers fans] can. It’s to say, right, you look at things from your own side. So, no, I mean, friends of mine that are Flames fans, they’re still my friends.

Some Flames fans also gave a moderate response on their opinion of Oilers fans. Kelly, a Flames fan, says Oilers fans are just like any fan base, and can have some poor behaving fans:

I don’t think they’re any different than any other fan base. Any team with diehard fans has passionate fans, some are classy, some aren’t so much. I don’t interact with many in person, maybe at the bar every now and then, but mostly I just see
on Twitter how they act. But I don’t think that’s a fair sample because it’s Twitter. Anyone can say anything. I’m sure there are vile Flames fans on there too.

Flames fan Roy also has a moderate opinion:

They’re alright. They’re fun to trash talk *laughs* they’re fun to tease. Some of them can’t necessarily take what they give out in terms of trash talking, but I try to only surround myself with Oilers fans that I can handle or can handle me and my attitude.

Four of the Flames fans, however, took a harsher criticism of Oilers fans. When asked his opinion of Oilers fans, Darryl, a Flames fan, says he likes them as people but they can have bad traits:

I love them, because I have a lot of good friends that are Oilers fans, and don’t get me wrong, I love them as people. I just can’t stand watching them when the Oilers lose. When the Oilers win, it’s the best thing in the world, but sometimes they get so hard into the game that it’s… they forget it’s just a game. They get so upset about, and I mean when you watch them on their social media and they get so upset about everything… watching some of my friends choose to burn their jerseys was quite upsetting. Like it’s just a game.

Flames fan Jim’s opinion of the Oilers fanbase is that they are more-so blue collar fans, while the Flames have a more white collar fanbase:

Well, like before like I was saying the blue collar, sort of… this will sound bad, but like just like a bit of a lower brow sort of fan base. It’s sort of what we’d make fun of Oilers fans for. So, one of my best friends, who’s an Oilers fan, is a trades
person. [My coworker] is an electrician. Like, that’s good. My friends that are lawyers and engineers are Flames fans.

The overall opinion of Oilers and Flames fans in Red Deer is moderate of the other teams’ fan group.

When considering these findings within Social Identity Theory, it is a bit surprising that no overly negative comments were made about the other groups’ fans. If unsuccessful comparisons were being made that failed to put the in-group in a positive light to help self-esteem, then the out group, or rival fan group, should be put into an extremely negative light, or seen as a class below to try to re-establish that positive comparison. For fans that see the other team’s fans as simply similar to all fan groups, as seems to be the situation in Red Deer, it is likely the case that they see the out group as being fans of all the other teams in the league, rather than just the rival fan group. This could suggest that they do not see anything different or special about these fans, nor see them as any more of a threat requiring specific attention to ensure a positive comparison. This would indicate that Flames fans see nothing different or special in Oilers fans and vice versa. Understanding the opinions of the rival fan group will help understand how the participants have been able to maintain their fandom while living with rival fans.

Understanding whether they see the other team as a significant rival, or just a regular NHL team, it gives a picture of how big of a threat they see the other team. This was important in understanding how they have maintained their fandom, and the context that those actions took place within. Since only a small amount of dislike, if any, was found in regards to participants’ attitudes towards other teams, that animosity that was expected to be found was not.
Committed to Current Team

Further seeking an understanding of the state of the rivalry between Oilers and Flames fans in Red Deer, another important trend that emerged was why participants stayed committed to their current team. By understanding how commitment is shown and why it is maintained to their current team within the context of each individual fan, it is easier to understand what is unique about being a fan in Red Deer. Patterns that emerged through interview discussion to see how fans maintained their commitment are points of attachment that could be of most importance. Especially if fans feel a great threat to their fandom, these points of attachment would prove to be essential to maintaining their fandom. While looking into how commitment is shown to their current team, four different themes emerged, and will be explored throughout the next few sections.

Family Time. In three of the interviews, a theme that emerged is that being a fan helped participants interact with their family, or give an opportunity or outlet for quality family time. In developing the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), Wann (1995) found that family time can be a big motivator for consuming sports. The results of that study indicated that participants that scored high in valuing the family time that comes with sports “may be less concerned about the score” (Wann, 1995, p. 392). This would indicate that sport is used as a vessel for family time. Stanley, an Oilers fan, explained:

It’s actually become kind of a family thing. We all watch it, we all cheer them on… we go to three or four Oilers games a year as a family, whether we’re traveling or I take one kid and then another kid another night or whatever. I got two boys. So, that’s kind of where our money and our focus goes to, watching the Oilers.
Oilers fan Oscar mentioned that even though his parents are not very big Oilers fans, watching the games has allowed them to stay close and maintain a relationship:

When it comes to my parents, they’re still not BIG hockey fans, but it seems like as soon as I moved out, my dad started to watch every Oilers game, and my mom watched or followed most games, because now when we talk on the phone or I go over there for dinner, it’s something for them to talk to me about. So it’s been important helping me maintain a relationship with my parents as well.

Being a fan of their team has allowed some participants an outlet to interact with family that otherwise may not exist. In the cases of Stanley and Oscar, their responses indicate that being Oilers fans allows for an opportunity to have a closer relationship with immediate family (Stanley with his kids, and Oscar with his parents).

Another aspect of participants using their fandom as a vessel for family time is family vacation. In two of the interviews, participants indicated that their family vacations were being planned to see their team play on the road. Oilers fan Stanley spoke of spending his vacation on a family trip to see his team play:

Me and the family, we planned our last few holidays around Oiler games, so we’ve gone to Phoenix to watch them play, we went to Dallas to watch them play.

And, it’s just something we do.

Flames fan Jim also mentioned him and his family making a similar trip when asked what the Flames mean to him: “well, it’s been part of vacation planning. We’re going to Vegas in March for the Flames-Vegas game.”

A connection between being a fan of their team and spending time with family is a theme that emerged from the interview data. It would seem that in a number of cases, an
important benefit of maintaining their fandom is the quality time opportunities it presents with family. Whether it is watching the game as a family, talking about the game with family members, or using family vacations to watch the team on the road, hockey fandom seems to be used as a vessel for family time. Since the answers involving family time were mostly given when the participants were asked what the team means to them, it is safe to assume that they see the team as an extension of quality family time. Therefore, maintaining their fandom with the team may be seen as maintaining their close family ties.

**Socializing.** Within the literature review for this study, a common theme is that individuals will cheer for teams because of the social aspect it presents. Cheering for a team is seen as an opportunity to form relationships with other fans. Therefore, team identification can fulfill an individual’s need to belong to a larger social community (Heere, 2016; Heere & James, 2007). This was a theme also found in the interviews conducted in this study. Participants indicated that there was a social aspect to their fandom, and in some cases, why they maintain that fandom.

Of the 12 interviews done, five of the participants indicated some form of socialization as a reason they maintain their fandom. Oilers fan Stanley highlights how watching hockey with his friends makes it more enjoyable:

I think just being part of that tribalism is fun, and some of my best friends are Oilers fans, so it’s something we do together. You know, I think that’s one thing, you asked earlier what’s helped keep you an Oiler fan, you know, like [friends name] who you interviewed, he’s one of my best friends. And it’s something we share together, even if it’s the anger we share together it’s just something… I was
happy last night, it was fun to watch. I was at work, and yeah. Cheering along with a couple friends of mine.

Pam, an Oilers fan, mentions how important social media has become for interacting with the Oilers community, and how it has led to real life friends:

I’ve met people just from being an Oilers fan on Twitter, and I’ve met them in real life and created friendships and relationships and that’s kind of neat… I don’t know it’s like broadened my circle of friends or relationships or community I guess.

She goes on to describe how socializing with other fans online, even when she is just watching a game at home, lets her feel a part of the larger community:

I’ve just made a lot of friends and it’s just… I keep saying the same thing over and over again but the community of the Oilers, the community of being a fan in a large fan base…. the number of games in a year that I go to is pretty small… but I guess in that respect that’s how social media gets into it. Because you can still feel like you’re cheering with a bunch of people, from inside your home.

When asked how the Flames have impacted his life, Ryan mentions a social aspect to watching the games as well:

Getting together with friends to watch games, even after work going to Boston Pizza for a pizza and a beer, one of the most… still one of my favourite things is to go watch a game with a friend or a couple friends in a lounge. Good conversation, the game gets going, so it’s a big part of our social life still. When people come over to visit at your home, at lot of times it’s to watch a hockey game.
Ryan again mentions a social aspect when asked what the Flames mean to him:

Through the course of a week, especially during hockey season, a lot of conversations with friends and coworkers are based on hockey, Edmonton and Calgary. So, I guess, I never realized this but it’s a bigger part of my life than I thought, socializing.

Roy, a Flames fan, talks about using hockey as a common ground with his friends: “I also like going to the bar with my friends, or driving down to Calgary with my friends. So I like that it’s an excuse and common ground to see my friends and do things with them.”

Past studies have shown that one of the reasons fans will identify with certain teams is for the social aspect of it – to feel a part of a larger fan group and to interact with similar people (Heere, 2016; Heere & James, 2007). Jensen et al. (2016) wrote that in today’s society, participation in sporting events can “take the form of actually attending the game or collectively experiencing the game together by watching it on television, texting with each other, posting commentary on online message boards, or sharing emotions via social media” (p. 158). Further, Wann (1995) found that one of the top reasons people will be fans of sport is for group affiliation. Those findings were reinforced with the interviews done in this study, as five participants indicated that they enjoyed the social aspect of being a fan and a part of a larger group.

**Loyalty.** All participants were specifically asked how they maintain their fandom in Red Deer. Five indicated that they felt a strong sense of loyalty or commitment and that that they were simply too committed to their team to stop cheering for them. Ultimately, they indicated that has contributed to their ability to maintain their fandom. This behaviour would be considered Basking in Spite of Reflected Failure (BIRF), where
a fan will remain loyal to their team regardless of team failure (Campbell, Aiken, & Kent, 2004). These fans are not basking in or enjoying the failure of their team, but rather enjoying their team in spite of the failure (Campbell et al., 2004). Fans that BIRF are often proud of their loyalty, and see honour in choosing to stay with their team (Jensen et al., 2018).

When asked if he has ever felt pressure from Flames fans to switch allegiances, Michael, an Oilers fan, responded: “it’s just been my team for forever and I’m not just going to up and just stop being a fan just because they suck.” Dwight, an Oilers fan, was asked if he tries to watch every Oilers game he can, and he responded that he will sometimes even watch at work: “I’m pretty religious that way. I’ll watch it. Even if I’m on a call at work… I probably shouldn’t say this, but I’ll bring my phone out on the way to the call and stream the game that way.” Dwight was later asked how he has managed to maintain being an Oilers fan in Red Deer:

Well, I guess, it’s just I’m pretty die hard. From the minute I started cheering for them when I was young, I never cheered for another team my whole life. I’ve always cheered for the Oilers. I’ve never even felt the opportunity to cheer for another team, really. Like, I’ll still watch hockey at night but I won’t pay as close attention to it as when the Oilers are on, that’s for sure.

As can be seen in the above quotation, Dwight described himself as a die-hard fan.

Seeking to answer the research questions about how fans in Red Deer have managed to maintain their fandom, they were asked explicitly how they have maintained their fandom. In five of the cases, participants mentioned that they were too loyal to give up on their team and showed elements of Campbell et al.’s (2004) concept of BIRF. On
top of that, elements of ego and ritual also came through further showing a loyalty to not only the team they follow, but also a loyalty to cheering for that team. Participants themselves give credit to this loyalty as to how they maintain their fandom, and it is a pattern that came through in a number of interviews, indicating that this is a reason people can maintain their fandom.

**Hope.** In three of the interviews, a theme of having hope in their team came through in the conversation. Oilers fans Michael and Dwight, while Flames fan Roy, all mentioned that they hoped for winning, success, and/or a championship. Michael explained how the Oilers should have had no chance of success in the 1990s, but now that they have new ownership in the salary cap era, the expectations are high again:

In the 90s, and the early 2000s, that was the pre-salary cap era, so you always knew they were never going to compete with the Dallas’ and the Detroit’s and all those teams that were spending four to five times on players than Edmonton could afford… So, back then just making the playoffs was huge. But once Darryl Katz bought the team, and all of a sudden we had billions of dollars behind the team, and they started to put together a better team and spending more money… the expectations just went up.

Dwight mentioned that watching the Oilers win the Stanley Cup is high on his bucket list, right up with watching his kids grow up and start their own families:

I’ve always said that I got a bucket list and one of them is obviously to watch my kids grow up and get married, that kind of stuff. Live a long healthy life. But the other one is to watch the Oilers win the Cup one more time before I die, in my
Roy, a Flames fan, spoke about how good winning feels, and how he chases that feeling again with the Flames:

The rush of winning is just something that can’t be beat. It’s like an addictive drug. I want to be close to the Flames so when they win, I get that rush again.

Now that I’m older and can’t play too competitive of sports, I can’t get that rush other than being a fan. So, I think making it one win away from the Cup just was so cool and felt so good, you’re chasing that feeling again.

Later in the interview, he again elaborated on hoping to be a part of a winning team: “I think the hope of winning again, the hope of feeling that again, yeah that’s a reason to stay with them.” When Flames fan Roy mentions winning being like an addictive drug, he is exhibiting eustress, something that Wann (1995) mentions as a motive to be a sport fan. By chasing the good feeling of winning, he is chasing the stress that comes with it.

In three of the interviews, participants mentioned a hope for success for their teams. This theme emerged without a specific question regarding it, and presents another reason why these individuals continue to maintain with their current team while in Red Deer. This hope for success is most likely a desire to be rewarded for their fandom, and ultimately an opportunity to bask in the reflected glory of their team (Cialdini et al., 1976). All three participants mentioned earlier in their interviews that they remembered a time when their team was successful; Roy, a Flames fan, specifically mentioned the 2004 Stanley Cup Final in his quotation immediately above. This gave the participants a chance to enjoy winning and success, and to bask in the reflected glory (Cialdini et al.,
1976) of that situation. These individuals are likely maintaining their fandom hoping to once again experience and go through success, giving them another opportunity to BIRG.

Part of answering the second research question for this study is understanding how fans look at their current team, and what ways they show commitment to their current team. By identifying what elements these participants see as important, or the reasons they maintain commitment to their current team, it is easier to see how they have maintained their fandom while living in Red Deer. Participants indicated that they continue to be committed to their current team because it helps with family time, it helps in socializing and belonging to a larger community, they have been too committed for too long to just give up now, and they have hope for future success and a return to glory. By identifying these points of commitment, an understanding of how and why Oilers and Flames fans in Red Deer have maintained their fandom through the years becomes clear.

Discussion

Research Question Number One. In 1996, Wann et al. conducted a study to identify the most common reasons individuals have to follow certain teams, and they identified 42 different reasons an individual can have. Of those 42, the top five are family, friends, geography, players, and team success. An additional reason listed further down in their results is the team being an underdog (Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). The results of this study for the first research question directly relate to the study conducted by Wann et al. The identified themes, as outlined above, for why fans in Red Deer follow the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames include family, success, underdog status, and place attachment. One specific element of geography is place attachment. This can be where fan loyalty to a specific team is rooted in how that team represents a certain
geographic area (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Delia & James, 2018) or a connection is felt with the team’s stadia (Bairner, 2014; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994). An individual can feel a connection or closeness to an area, stadium, or arena, and that results in developing fandom for that team (Aden & Titsworth, 2012; Bairner, 2014; Delia & James, 2018; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994).

In the literature on family being an influence on team selection, parents were seen as the most significant element of the family that influences fan development with certain teams because they can act as a gatekeeper for exposure to the team (Funk & James, 2016; James, 2001). The role of parents was also considerable in this study, as previously outlined, reinforcing the existing literature. In terms of success, or Stanley Cups, literature suggests that people are attracted to teams that can give themselves a positive association. People connect with winning teams to enhance how others see them, and to increase their own self-esteem (Delia & James, 2018; Sutton et al., 1997; Wann, 2006). The results of this study support this literature, as a theme that emerged indicated that participants identified with their team based on the success that was experienced. Thirdly, underdog status, or a rebellious nature, was found among Flames fans as a reason for why they chose the team they did. As previously stated, cheering for a team because they are an underdog came up as one of the 42 reasons people choose teams as identified by Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996).

Finally, the theme Place Attachment was also found through the interviews. Participants felt connected to certain elements of Calgary and Edmonton, and that resulted in their fandom. Whether that was seeing Calgary’s western cowboy culture as a reflection of their hometown, Edmonton feeling like a small community similar to Red
Deer, or cheering for football teams in the city that translated to hockey fandom, participants expressed elements of attachment to the cities themselves, not just the team, and explained how that attachment lead to being committed to either the Oilers or Flames. This falls in line with Adan and Titsworth’s (2012) study on place attachment, where a closeness or connection can be felt for a city or geographical area, and when a team represents that area, fandom is formed. This result indicates that while geographic proximity is not relevant in Red Deer, geography in the form of place attachment is still present.

With all this in consideration, an answer to the first research question can be formed. The themes of this study, supported by literature, indicate that the reasons Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames fans in Red Deer choose their team are family, success or Stanley Cups, an underdog or rebellious element, or place attachment.

**Research Question Number Two.** When answering the second research question about how fans have been able to maintain their fandom in Red Deer, it was important to understand their opinion of the rival team, their commitment to their current team, and the climate of the rivalry in Red Deer. Based on previous rivalry literature, the assumption was made that there would be animosity, or harsh feelings towards fans of the rival team (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015; 2017; Havard et al., 2018). This, in turn, would likely have resulted in new, unique, and interesting methods of maintaining fandom to a specific team in the face of the rival. However, feelings of a heated rivalry and animosity were not found. In fact, participants even indicated that the rivalry has cooled off, and that they do not see the other team as a threat to them or their fandom. These findings then present a challenge in answering the second question, since it was based off the assumption that
animosity and strong feelings of dislike were present, an assumption based off literature (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015; 2017; Havard et al., 2018). The unique and interesting finding here, therefore, is not how they maintain their fandom in the face of their rivals, but why things in Red Deer go against what the rivalry literature would suggest for a situation like this, and that there exists little to no animosity between these two fan groups.

From the themes and data reviewed above, it is clear that there is no strong animosity between Flames fans and Oilers fans in Red Deer, as they describe co-existing as fans without any issues. Trash talking, or chirping, was the worst description of fan group interaction in Red Deer. Further, the rivalry was frequently described as dying, or at least cooling off, between the two teams. Some Flames fans even identified Vancouver as a more heated rival at the moment. Within the context of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this would indicate that they do not see the out group of rival fans as a threat to their own positive self-esteem. If they did, more animosity would exist between the groups as they worked to ensure their own positive comparison to protect their self-esteem.

Since they do not see the other group as a threat to self-esteem, there were not special tactics undertaken that were found to maintain their fandom in Red Deer. Participants outlined typical methods, such as wearing jerseys, shirts, displaying flags, and having decals on their car as ways they show their loyalty to their team. Themes for why they maintain their fandom include family, socialization, loyalty, and hope. It seems that even though Red Deer is located within the sphere of influence for both the Oilers and Flames (Rooney, 1974; 1975), things are not very different in this situation.
However, a result that was unique was participants feeling an attachment to a city that they have never lived in. Aden and Titsworth (2012) mention that when fans are attached to a place as opposed to the team, those fans are less likely to abandon their team and more likely to endure losing seasons. This is the case in this study, as fans of both the Oilers and Flames have endured many losing seasons to continue being fans. When considering that participants are likely attached to both the team and the city, as opposed to just the team, place attachment is an occurring phenomenon, even though none of the participants have lived in the city to which they are showing attachment.

Aden and Titsworth’s (2012) study centered on participants that lived in Nebraska before developing their place attachment and connection to the University of Nebraska football team. Likewise, in Delia and James’ (2018) study, fans of the Syracuse University men’s basketball team in the study lived in Central New York and fans of the Minnesota Twins lived within the State of Minnesota. Past studies looking at place attachment in a sport context have found it existing within fans that live in or used to live in the city or area that they feel attached to. Therefore, finding place attachment, or a connection, to a city someone has never lived in within a sport context is both unique and interesting, and something that was not expected to be found in the results.

One possible explanation for this is through brands that certain cities and destinations build around themselves. Cities will distinguish themselves from relevant competition by creating a unique brand for themselves, and by producing a “personality” which is “comprised of a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 65). A city’s brand is “a summary that captures the truthful story and uniqueness of the place” (Oui, 2010. p. 57). Cities will brand themselves by
using their attributes and symbolic values to create a sense of being able to fulfill an individual’s physical and psychological needs (Florek, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2004). Attributes cities will use include physical locations and attractions like historical sites or beaches, while the symbolic values include intangible characteristics like culture, customs and history (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Cities, or destinations, “also differentiate themselves from one another based on [the] special meaning and attachment given by visitors” (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011, p. 466).

As can be seen in the study, participants felt a special meaning and attachment to the cities they were attached to. Ryan indicated that his connection to Calgary was through his grandparents and family living there, and Pam mentioned she liked Edmonton because it was friendly and felt like a small town to her. In both cases, there is a special meaning connected to the respective cities, which lead to a specific attachment.

Kavaratzis (2004) also adds that cities can “satisfy functional, symbolic, and emotional needs” (p. 66). If Edmonton and Calgary are successful in building their own city brands, and are seen as being able to fulfill those individual’s needs, than that individual will likely be attracted by that city’s brand even if they do not live there. Hummon (1986) writes that a tendency to identify with a community involves a sense of belonging that is not necessarily linked to residential status in that community. Therefore it would be possible to identity with a place you do not live in. Further, feelings of attachment to a city are often related to that person feeling “in place” (Hummon, 1986, p. 6) in that city. It is likely that someone would certainly feel “in place” in a city that helps fulfill their needs. Once again, using Pam’s responses as an example, she feels a part of a social community when she is in Edmonton and that is why she enjoys Edmonton more –
she feels in place. If a city can create a brand that suggests the city can help fulfill an individual’s needs, and ultimately feel like they are “in place” in the city, than identification with a community outside of residential status would be possible.

As for the lack, or minimization, of hostilities between Oilers and Flames fans in Red Deer, one possible explanation could be competing identities for individuals. Tinson, Sinclair, and Kolyperas (2017) examined how sport fans balance the identities of being a parent and being a fan. What they found was that while neither were mutually exclusive and both could co-exist, one often had to take second place to the other. This often resulted in the identity of being a sports fan minimizing, so that the identity of being a parent could take a prevailing role in these individuals lives. Something similar could potentially be going on in Red Deer. These individuals have to balance the identity of being a good neighbour with being a hockey fan. While hostility towards your rival could be considered as part of the identity of being a hockey fan, that could mean hostility towards your neighbour, inhibiting those individuals with their identity of being a good neighbour. Therefore, the lack of hostility or fierce rivalry could simply be a case that individuals in Red Deer choose for their identity of being a good neighbour to prevail over their identity as a hockey fan.

The 12 highly identified hockey fans of the Oilers and Flames living in Red Deer shared their personal stories and experiences. Through data analysis strategies, four categories of results emerged from the data, along with multiple themes within these categories. These categories and the themes within them represent the findings of this research study, and they assisted in answering the two research questions.
Chapter Five – Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

The purpose of this interpretive study was to understand fan identification development and maintenance for Alberta’s National Hockey League (NHL) teams among hockey fans in Red Deer, Alberta. Further, the researcher intended to contribute to the sport consumer behaviour literature within the sport management field. A summary of the research, along with implications and recommendations, future research, and limitations will be examined in the following sections.

Summary of Research

Hockey fandom in Alberta was the inspiration for this research project. With the researcher originally being from Alberta, an interest was formed in wondering how individuals in Central Alberta, specifically Red Deer, choose between supporting Edmonton or Calgary. With the Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames essentially having the same franchise history and path since their inception, a curiosity was formed by the researcher as to how people truly choose their team. Adding to this curiosity was that no situation similar to Red Deer has previously been studied, and that one of the most common reasons individuals choose teams is to simply cheer for the closest team, something that does not exist in Red Deer.

In order to conduct this research study in an in-depth manner, semi-structured interviews were carried out with highly identified fans of the Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames in Red Deer, Alberta. Interview discussion took place with 12 of these fans, 10 males and two females. The discussion from these interviews, along with the qualitative data analysis techniques of coding and interpretation allowed for four major categories to emerge from the data.
The discussions that took place with the participants aided in answering the first research question: How did fans of Alberta’s NHL teams, either the Edmonton Oilers or Calgary Flames, living in Red Deer, Alberta, develop their fan identification? The category labelled Becoming a Fan contains four themes that contributed to answering the first research question. Since reasons for why individuals choose teams is something that has been widely researched (Funk & James, 2001; Havard, 2014; Wann, Tucker and Schrader, 1996), linking these four themes to the literature is not difficult.

The first theme was that the influence of family members persuaded fandom to the team that the individuals cheered for. This Family Influence theme came up in nine of the 12 interviews. Participants told stories of watching hockey with one of their parents or another family member, and gave credit to that being one of the reasons that they chose their team. In four of the interviews, participants stated that another reason they chose their team was that team’s success. These participants indicated through the conversation that part of the attraction to their team was the success they enjoyed in the past, even indicating specific years the team won the Stanley Cup as defining years where their fandom became stronger.

The third theme that emerged under this category was Place Attachment, something that five of the participants mentioned in their interviews. A connection to the city that their team plays in was indicated by the participant and partially given credit for their attraction to that team. Examples of this included Pam being attracted to Edmonton because it felt like one large community, similar to Red Deer, and Ryan indicating a closeness to Calgary because his hometown right outside of Red Deer is a western town similar to Calgary. The final theme under this category was cheering for the team because
of a rebellious nature. In two of the interviews, participants indicated that they became fans of the Flames because everyone around them was a fan of the Oilers, and to be different, they chose the Flames.

The second category that emerged from the conversations was Rivalry in Red Deer, creating four themes that described what the state of the rivalry is within Red Deer in the words of the participants. First, many of the participants described how they showed their fandom in Red Deer. For fans, this Showing theme put context into how they display their fandom in Red Deer. Methods included wearing jerseys and shirts, and displaying license plate covers and car decals. Second, in seven of the conversations, participants mentioned how interactions take place with other fans in Red Deer. Interaction is a theme that indicated that there is not much hostility or animosity in Red Deer, but rather a case of hockey fans respecting hockey fans. A third theme under this category that occurred in five of the interviews was No Threat. Participants outlined how they felt no strong threat to their self-esteem from the other fan group, and even admitted that they could easily ignore the other group. The final theme, coming up in 10 of the 12 interviews, was about the Current State of the rivalry and how it is dying or dead. This Current State theme described how participants felt that the rivalry was not as strong as it used to be with the Oilers and Flames not playing meaningful games in recent history. Flames fans even see the Vancouver Canucks as more significant rivals than the Oilers.

The third category, Other Team, emerged when trying to put context to the unique situation in Red Deer; fans living just as close to their own team’s fans, the in-group, as they do to the rival fan group, or the out-group. Using Rooney’s (1974; 1975) definition of the spheres of influence for pro teams, Red Deer falls within the sphere for both
Calgary and Edmonton. Therefore, it was important to get context to the situation in Red Deer, and part of that was understanding how fans feel towards the other team. This context was intended to help answer the second research question: How have fans of Alberta’s NHL teams maintained their fan identification with the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames while living in Red Deer?

The first theme within the Other Team category is Players, something that came up in four of the interviews. These individuals did not express strong feelings of dislike, even though the players play for a rival team. The second theme that emerged had to do with managing while the other team was more successful than their own team. Six of the participants contributed to the 2004/2006 Stanley Cup Finals theme and commented on how they managed in the mid 2000s when the other team was one in away from a Stanley Cup. Finally, the third theme was Fans, which was participants indicating a strong feeling towards fans of the other team. However, even though they are a rival out-group, there was not strong feelings of animosity. Both Flames and Oilers fans indicated that the worst the other fans would do would trash talk, and that it was a non-issue. While no participants said this directly, it can be implied through connecting different responses that any significant feelings of animosity was felt towards fans in the actual city, Oilers fans in Edmonton or Flames fans in Calgary, and not with any fans in Red Deer.

The fourth and final category also gave context to the situation in Red Deer, and involved understanding how the participants were committed to their current team. Within the Committed to Current Team category, four themes emerged within the data. First, four participants mentioned they stayed committed to their team for family reasons. This Family Time theme included that the team was a vessel for interaction with family
members, and a way to choose where family vacations took place. Two participants in particular stated they took their family vacations to coincide with their team playing in warmer climates. Second, five participants mentioned that their current team gave them something to socialize over. This included joining a community online, on Twitter for example, or a reason to go out to the bar with friends. Third, they had a sense of loyalty with their team. Five participants contributed to the Loyalty theme, which in essence is that they have been fans of their team for so long, they cannot abandon their team and maintain their loyalty to the team this way. Finally, a sense of hope exists among participants that their team will once again return to being competitive, and this is why they stay with their team. Three participants indicated that they hoped the team they cheer for would once again start winning and return to them the benefits of being with a winning team.

In total, four categories and a total of 15 themes emerged from the interview data. The themes were found to answer both research questions. However, the answers to the second question indicated that there was nothing special about the situation in Red Deer, implying that the assumptions that the question was based on were not accurate. Rather, the second research question had an answer that fit in with the rest of the literature – there was nothing distinctive about maintaining fandom in Red Deer, despite rival teams being so close to one another. Therefore, rather than answering the second research question, the final three categories shone light on the rivalry situation in Red Deer and what was unique and surprising about that – the intensity, or lack thereof. These themes also offered some explanation as to why nothing distinctive was found in terms of maintaining fandom in Red Deer.
Implications and Recommendations

A number of implications and recommendations can be derived from both the methodology and findings of this study. These include using Twitter in participant recruitment, and ways for teams to better market towards fans living in other cities, and a new finding in the sport consumer behaviour field.

As outlined in previous sections, Twitter was used in the participant recruitment phase of this study. Hutchins (2011) and Wenner (2014) outline that Twitter is both convenient and useful when it comes to accessing sport fans that are in a different location than you. The researcher felt that of all the recruitment strategies used, Twitter was the most effective based on the number of immediate responses received once recruitment began on the website (Appendix K). Due to this, Twitter will most likely be used further in future sport studies to recruit participants (Hanna, 2012; Wenner, 2014). This is also where the future of academia is mostly heading, combining technology with method; “sport scholars can advance knowledge in the unique aspects of sport and improve the conditions of people who both work in sport and are served by sport” (Burton & Bruening, 2003, p. 326).

The researcher recommends to academics, practitioners, and anyone conducting research that is considering Twitter to understand the upside that it offers. Of all the recruiting methods used, Twitter was the most successful for this study. Participants were found on Twitter that were not only willing to participant in the study, but also willing to speak in depth about their experiences, and quickly signed up to participate and schedule an interview. Perhaps that these participants were willing to discuss their fandom on
Twitter resulted in finding people willing to discuss their fandom in depth with a researcher they had never met before.

One of the results of the study was how important the social aspect of hockey fandom was for people in Red Deer, both online and in-person in local bars and restaurants. One recommendation that comes from this is for professional sport clubs to emphasize the social aspect for fans that do not live in their city, but still live within the spheres of influence outlined by Rooney (1974; 1975). On social media sites such as Twitter, encouraging fan engagement with the team account or between fans should, in theory, grow the social networking community, and help individuals socialize with one another. This would not only unite fans of the team, regardless of where they live, but also present an opportunity to make new friends with other users online knowing that the hockey team they cheer for is a point of commonality. Additionally, watch parties and bar nights in restaurants and bars would again be another way for the teams to encourage social interaction between their fans, allowing them to meet other fans and potentially creating fans that are more committed to their team in the process. By encouraging socialization, a finding of this study, either online or in-person, the teams would be promoting an element of fandom that individuals enjoy and connect with the team for.

Laverie and Arnett (2000) wrote that future research on fan identification should consider looking into place attachment because “it is possible that place attachment could be related to attachment to a team” (p. 241). While this study did not intend to look into place attachment when it was undertaken, this study inadvertently heeded the call of Laverie and Arnett (2000) by finding not only place attachment within a sport context, but also discovering that it can develop between an individual and a city they have never
lived in. This is an implication that this study has had on the field of sport management and consumer behavior. With people being required to be lifelong residents of Red Deer, finding place attachment to Edmonton or Calgary within these interviews was a unique and unexpected finding. This is something that has yet to be discovered within the literature, and could have implications on future studies in this field.

**Future Research**

Sport consumer behaviour is something that has been researched significantly from a quantitative standpoint (Collins et al., 2016; Fink et al., 2002; Funk & James, 2001; Parry et al., 2014; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). More sport consumer behaviour research from a qualitative methodology that looks at the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of hockey fans within their own context is something that should increase in number.

In conjunction with Lavarie and Arnett (2000), more place attachment research should take place in the future. While Aden and Titsworth (2012) began looking at the idea within a sport context, and it has recently been replicated by Delia and James (2018), further studies investigating the relationship between someone identifying with a certain geographical place or area and their fandom should be pursued. As seen in this study’s findings, there are still elements of place attachment that have not been significantly investigated or researched. Specifically, an underdeveloped area of this type of literature is studies that investigate fans that cheer for a team, and then cheer for the rest of the teams from that same city. For example, in this study, two of the participants mentioned they cheered for the Canadian Football League team in either Calgary or Edmonton first, and that lead to a connection with the city, which subsequently lead to cheering for the
Flames or Oilers, respectively. There is little to no literature that investigates situations like this, meaning this is a hole in the literature that should be filled as it becomes a theme in more and more studies. Future research should also investigate if what was found in this study, a connection to a city an individual has never lived in, takes place in other contexts and situations.

The uniqueness of this study was initially related to how fans deal with a heated rivalry head on – living just as close to their rivals as they do to their own team. However, the data collected indicated that the heated rivalry had cooled, and the animosity greatly decreased in the last couple of years. As explored previously, a number of participants indicated this was because the two teams have not played competitive games recently. Therefore, replicating this study once the teams play competitive games again may have different results. Additionally, another possible reason for this lack of animosity currently found in Red Deer could simply be a larger social explanation. Are people living in Central Alberta just nicer than other people? To account for this, recreating this study in a location that is outside of Alberta or the Canadian prairies, but still within the spheres of influence for two rivals should be pursued. The location may not be equi-distant to the two cities, but living within the two spheres of influence should create the conditions to recreate this study.

Another potential direction for future research could include studying Oilers and Flames fans in the moment of a game. While a number of participants acknowledge that the rivalry in Red Deer between the two teams is dying, if not dead, they did conceded that feelings of rivalry still flare up during games between the teams. Therefore, ethnographically studying Oilers and Flames fans at a bar, or similar location, during and
immediately after an Oilers vs Flames game could give a greater understanding of the rivalry. This could give an objective comprehension of the rivalry, and greater depth to the understanding when witnessing it at its potentially highest point.

A final possible direction for future research could include a wider study that factors in geographical proximity in Red Deer. Instead of limiting the study to Oilers and Flames fans, taking into account fans of other teams could give further understanding to why fans choose the Oilers or Flames in Red Deer. In this case, geographic proximity should play a role as the researcher would look into fans that choose to cheer for a team other than the two closest teams (Calgary and Edmonton). This could offer a different explanation or a great understanding for why hockey fans in Red Deer choose the Oilers or Flames when other teams are considered.

**Limitations**

Like any other research methodology, semi-structured in-depth interviews present limitations. Using this method presented some limitations including personal knowledge of the topic, issues with finding the sample of participants, and some issues with data collection.

Passion for a topic is often the driving force in most research projects, and this research endeavour is no different. As mentioned in the trustworthiness section previously, the topic of this research project is something that is very close to the researcher as he is an Edmonton Oilers fan. The interview guide was used to assist the researcher in limiting his biases and pre-conceived notions during the interview phase to limit any possible influence on participant responses (Liampittong, 2009). Any form of influence, or swaying participant answers, could have been extremely detrimental to not
only that interview, but also the study as a whole (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, a conscious effort was made to not interrupt, correct, or challenge participants with the researcher’s pre-existed knowledge, notions and biases.

At times, the researcher’s novice level of experience with interviewing was noticeable, however, interview quality did improve with each discussion. This likely resulted in the final interview being “better” than the first interview, as the researcher’s skills improved with every interview conducted. Additionally, having the ability to go back over previous interviews likely contributed to subsequent interviews being of a better quality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, these subtle differences and improvement in interviews through the study should be embraced in the interpretive paradigm. It normally means a deeper understanding of the research purpose and questions is being developed over time. Another limitation that occurred because of the researchers’ status as a novice interviewer was the length of the interviews. The shortest interview was 25:23, and the longest was 38:51, with an average interview time of 31:35. While good conversation and information came from all the interviews conducted, some interviews fell short of the desired 30-60 minute length. This was likely a result of novice interviewing skills, especially in regards to probing follow up questions. While the researchers skills, and the interviews themselves improved over time, the element of final interviews being longer and “better” still exists.

A lack of rapport was another potential limitation to successful interviews for an inexperienced interviewer (Goodwin, Pope, Mort, & Smith, 2003). Goodwin et al. (2003) believe that the rapport-building process in qualitative research must be initiated from the first encounter with a participant. This will build a relationship that should allow the
participants a willingness to share their stories with the researcher. If this rapport-building is not successful, interview quality will undoubtedly be affected negatively. For this reason, rapport plays a critical role in how an interview turns out. However, Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007) state, “often researchers reassure their participants that the interview will be a one-off encounter and this may heighten disclosure” (p. 339) because the two parties are not familiar with each other. This was the case with this study, as there were no issues with rich and thick description in interviews due to a lack of rapport. The opening statement, where participants spoke about their earliest memories with the game of hockey gave the participants an opportunity to share with the researcher and to become comfortable with the situation of being interviewed.

Trying to get the most diverse sample as possible was important to try and get a true understanding of the phenomenon in Red Deer. However, of the 12 individuals that reached out to the researcher with the intention of participating, and actually went through with the interview, nine fit into the age category of being between 32 and 40 years old. The three outliers were 24, 55 and 70 years old. With the majority of participants being so similar in age, a limitation exists. These individuals lived through the same historical events, and developed their fandom at a similar time. This means that their stories are likely similar, and their fandom was likely influenced by similar events, especially success and Stanley Cup runs. A more diverse age range would have further explored different stories and contexts, and shed light on larger ideas that influence fandom in Red Deer.

Further, another limitation of the sample of participants was gender, as 10 of the 12 participants were male compared to only two females. This limitation presented a
similar issue as the age range. The stories and experiences for male hockey fans are likely similar, so more female representation would have been ideal to gather more stories and experiences. Finding participants was a challenge in itself, however. The requirement to have potential participants spend most of their life in Red Deer resulted in many interested individuals self-select themselves out of the potential participant sample. A number of interested individuals were asked how long they lived in Red Deer, and responded that they moved to Red Deer in their teenage years or older. This eliminated them from the study because they moved to Red Deer at an age that fandom would have already developed. The living requirement of the research design prevented a number of respondents from participating, and made finding eligible individuals that were also interested difficult.

A final limitation of the study was how long it took to find participants and complete the interviews. Interviews were conducted from October to February, coinciding with the NHL hockey season where both the Oilers and Flames were playing. As the season unfolded over time, the teams did better or worse, and held different spots in the standings at different times. The participants’ hope, outlook for the season, and general attitude towards the team could have changed as games were played and fans understood how their team’s season was projecting. Therefore, an Oilers fan interviewed in October may have a different attitude, and subsequently answered the question differently, than an Oilers fan interviewed in February. Consistency between interviews was safeguarded through the interview guide, probing follow up questions, and notes that were reviewed after every interview in anticipation of the next interview. However, with open ended questions, there is little control over what the participants answer and respond
with in the interview discussion. While this is an essential part of interpretive research, and should be embraced, the success and outlook of their team at the time of the interview could have an unforeseen effect on the interview conversation.

**Conclusion**

The primary purpose of this research study was to understand why hockey fans in Red Deer became fans of the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames, and how they have maintained that loyalty through the years. A secondary motivation existed in hoping to contribute to the academic literature and fill a knowledge gap. Through semi-structured interviews done in an interpretive approach, these purposes were satisfied.

Fans of the Oilers and Flames in Red Deer picked their team through influence from family members, place attachment, success and Stanley Cup victories, and a rebellious nature. Although the Oilers and Flames are historic rivals, and Red Deer is halfway between the two cities, there was no animosity or heat in the rivalry between Flames and Oilers fans in Red Deer. This resulted in no abnormal methods of maintaining fandom being present in Red Deer. The lack of animosity, or heated rivalry, was credited by participants to a lack of recent success and meaningful games between the two teams. Participants also indicated that they maintained their fandom because it offered them an opportunity for family time, a chance to socialize with friends and a larger community, a sense of loyalty, and hope for more success in the future.

The surprise result of no animosity or heated rivalry in Red Deer, a city within the spheres of influence (Rooney, 1974; 1975) for both the Oilers and Flames, and the finding that place attachment can be developed with a city that an individual has never lived in suggests this study was a valuable and worthwhile pursuit. This study also aided
in extending the academic literature on rivalry and fandom development within the sport consumer behaviour literature in sport management. Findings from this study provide important implications for sport teams looking to build their fan bases, especially in a location that is not within the area the team plays.
References


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Appendix A

Map of Alberta
Appendix B

Public Recruitment Poster

NHL Fans from Red Deer Wanted for Research Study

Who: Anyone who is 18 years of age or older, a life-long adult resident of the City of Red Deer, who is a fan of either the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League (NHL)

What: Participants will be interviewed (via FaceTime or In-Person) for approximately 30-60 minutes about being a fan of either the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames. Participants will also be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire.

Research Question: How did Flames and Oilers fans living in Red Deer come to cheer for either team, and how do these fans maintain their fandom over time?

If interested, please take a tab below or contact Blair Cipywnyk at bc15bl@brocku.ca or Dr. Craig Hyatt at chyatt@brocku.ca or 1-905-688-5550 ext. 4382

This study has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (REB #18-061)
Appendix C

Online Recruitment Post

NHL Fans from Red Deer Wanted for Research Study

Who: Must be a life-long adult resident of the City of Red Deer who is a fan of either the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League (NHL)

What: Participants will be interviewed (via FaceTime or In-Person) for approximately 30-60 minutes about being a fan of either the Edmonton Oilers or the Calgary Flames.

Research Question: How did Flames and Oilers fans living in Red Deer come to cheer for either team, and how do these fans maintain their fandom over time?

This study has received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (REB #18-061)

It Interested, Please Contact:

Blair Cipywnyk, Grad Student
Department of Sport Management
Brock University
bc15bl@brocku.ca
Appendix D

Twitter Recruitment Message

Hello, my name is Blair, I am a grad student at Brock University, and I am studying life-long Red Deer residents who are fans of the Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames. I was wondering if you would be interested in a 30-60 minute interview, either in-person or via FaceTime, to help understand how Flames and Oilers fans in RD became fans of their team, and how they’ve maintained that identity. If interested, please email me at bc15bl@brocku.ca for more information.

Thank you for your time,

Blair
Appendix E

Invitation E-Mail

Title of Study: A Study of NHL Fan Identification in Red Deer, Alberta

Principal Student Investigator: Blair Cipywnyk, Graduate Student, Sport Management, Brock University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Craig Hyatt, Associate Professor, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

I, Blair Cipywnyk, Graduate Student from the Department of Sport Management at Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled “A study of NHL fan identification in Red Deer, Alberta.” In my study, I wish to answer the following research question: How did Flames and Oilers fans living in Red Deer come to cheer for either team, and how do these fans maintain their fandom over time. I seek approximately 12-15 participants who are life-long residents of Red Deer and identify as a fan of either the Calgary Flames or the Edmonton Oilers. Study participants will be asked to participate in an online interview (via Skype or FaceTime) that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. I ask that each participant is 18 years of age or older and is willing to fill-out an informed consent and demographic form. The demographic form will ask you questions about you: your age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, employment status, and education. This information will help me with the data.

This research should benefit sport marketing scholars who are trying to better understand the behaviours, thoughts, and feelings of hockey fans.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB #18-061). If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905-688-5550 ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Blair Cipywnyk
Graduate Student, Sport Management
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
bc15bl@brocku.ca
Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

Date:
Project Title: A Study of NHL Fan Identification in Red Deer, Alberta

Principal Student Investigator (PSI):
Blair Cipywnyk, Masters of Arts (candidate) in Applied Health Sciences
Department of Sport Management
Brock University
bc15bl@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Craig Hyatt
Associate Professor
Department of Sport Management
Brock University
905-688-5550 Ext. 4382; chyatt@brocku.ca

THIS FORM
You are encouraged to keep a copy of this form for your own records.

INVITATION
You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Flames and Oilers fans living in Red Deer came to cheer for either team and how they maintained their fandom over time.

WHAT’S INVOLVED
As a participant, who is 18 years of age or older, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Before the interview begins, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. This questionnaire will ask you your gender, age, ethnicity, education, marital status and employment status. Once the interview begins, you will be expected to answer questions that will be posed by the researcher and be actively involved with the discussion. All interviews will be audio recorded, which the researcher will use to transcribe the data collected from the interview at a later date. Participation will take approximately 30-60 minutes, depending on the level of discussion generated.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS
There are no known or anticipated benefits or risks associated with participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
To ensure confidentiality, only the researcher will be present at the agreed upon location to carry out the interview. The information you provide will be kept confidential through
the use of assigned code names or aliases, rather than your given name; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send a copy of your interview transcript for you to read to confirm the accuracy of our conversation, and add or clarify any points that you wish. You will be given two weeks to review the interview transcript that I send you, but it should not take you more than 30 minutes to read through. If you do not get back to any changes or edits back to the researcher within two weeks, the researcher will assume the transcript is appropriate and will continue in the process.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure accurate reporting of participant responses; interview recordings will be permanently deleted after being transcribed by the researcher. Data collected during this study, both the filled out questionnaire and the interview, will be stored on the researcher’s personal computer and a USB device, which will both be password protected. The questionnaire and interview data will be kept for two years, after which time all electronic copies will be deleted and any hard copies will be shredded and disposed of.

Access to this data will be restricted to the researcher, Blair Cipywnyk, as well as Dr. Craig Hyatt, my faculty research supervisor.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty. Should you wish to withdraw from this study, contact Blair Cipywnyk and he will ensure your interview transcript, corresponding audio file, and any other records that contain your identity are destroyed.

**PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional and/or academic journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available from Blair Cipywnyk via e-mail by March 2019. Individual participants will not be identified in the possible publications from this research.

**CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Student Investigator or the Principal Investigator (where applicable) using the contact information provided above. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (REB #18-061).

**CONSENT FORM – (REB #18-061)**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in this Informed Consent Form. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

YES I agree to participate in this research study [_____]
NO I do not agree to participate in this research study [____]
Name: ________________________________________________________________
Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire for Participants in the research study “A study of NHL fan identification in Red Deer, Alberta”

1. What is your gender? ____Male ____Female ____Prefer not to answer

2. What is your age? _____ ____Prefer not to answer

3. What is your ethnicity?
   ___ Caucasian ___ Asian
   ___ Hispanic ___ African
   ___ Other: Please identify __________
   ____Prefer not to answer

4. What is your marital status?
   ___ Married ___ Widowed
   ___ Single ___ Other
   ___ Divorced
   ___ Prefer not to answer

5. What is your level of education?
   ___ Some high school/Secondary school
   ___ High/secondary school graduate
   ___ Some college/university
   ___ College/university graduate
   ___ Advanced degree holder (Master’s/PhD)
   ___ Prefer not to answer

6. What is your current occupation? (Leave blank if you prefer not to answer)
   ____________________________________________________________
Appendix H

Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today and allowing me to interview you. Do you have any questions or concerns about my research project or what we will be discussing today? Is there anything I can make more clear for you?

I would just like to remind you that nothing that could reveal your identity will be included in any of the final works for this study. Further, your participation is entirely voluntary, and we can stop the interview at any time. If you want to withdraw from the study, just let me know and I will make sure that your interview transcript, the audio file of this interview, and any other records that contain your identity are destroyed. Finally, I’m interested in your stories and experiences, so there are no “right” or “wrong” answers, and anything you would like to tell me is important to me.

1. Tell me about your earliest experiences with the sport of hockey.
2. How did you originally become a fan of the Oilers/Flames?
3. Why didn’t you become a fan of the (rival team)?
4. Tell me about your first experience as a fan of the Oilers/Flames.
5. How has being a fan of the Oilers/Flames impacted your life?
6. What is your opinion of the (rival team) organization?
7. What is your opinion of (rival team) fans?
8. How do you feel about the Flames/Oilers rivalry?
9. How have you been able to maintain being a Oilers/Flames fan while living in Red Deer, surrounded by fans of the (rival team)?
   a. Tell me about maintaining being a Oilers/Flames fan when the (rival team) has been more successful?
10. Could you ever imagine a situation where you would ever pull for the (rival team), and want them to win?
a. (If they answer yes) Tell me what you imagine the circumstances having to be.

b. (If they answer no; for an Oilers fan respondent) Can you recall the 2004 Stanley Cup Final, where the Flames were one win away from the Cup? How did you feel?

c. (If they answer no; for a Flames fan respondent) Can you recall the 2006 Stanley Cup Final, where the Oilers were one win away from the Cup? How did you feel?

11. Are you a fan of the Red Deer Rebels?
   a. (If they answer yes; for an Oilers fan respondent) Has being a Rebels fan combined with Nugent-Hopkins being in Edmonton had an effect on your relationship with the Oilers?
   b. (If they answer yes; for a Flames fan respondent) Has being a Rebels fan combined with the connection of the Sutters in Calgary had an effect on your relationship with the Flames?

12. What’s your favourite part about being an Oilers/Flames fan?

13. What do the Oilers/Flames mean to you?

14. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about you being a fan of the Oilers/Flames?
Appendix I

Thank You Letter and Member Check

Hello [Name]:

Thank you for participating in my study! I am emailing you today to let you know I have transcribed my interview with you, and that it is attached to this email. You’ll notice that I didn’t use your real name, instead you were given the pseudonym [pseudonym]. Please read the transcript to ensure that it is accurate and I understood what you were trying to tell me. (By “accurate”, I’m simply referring to any factual errors I may have made. For example, maybe I misheard a 15 as a 50. I’m hoping to avoid such inaccuracies in the data.) If you find any inaccuracies, please note them, correct them, and send them back to me. Also, if you want to change any of the response you gave me, or you no longer want to have any of the responses you gave me included in the study, please indicate them to me and I will make the change and exclude them from my analysis. If everything looks fine, please let me know that as well. I want to also take this opportunity to remind you that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if you wish to withdraw you can do so at any time and I will delete all files related to you and your interview. I look forward to hearing back from you. Please return your comments within two weeks. If after two weeks I have not received your feedback, I will assume that you find the transcript to be accurate.

Have a great day,
Blair
## Appendix J

**Participants’ Remarks and Indicators for Fandom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Remark or Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Michael   | - Oilers flag in the background  
|           | - Spoke of getting excited when the Oilers made the playoffs  
|           | - Spoke of the Oilers as his team for “forever” and how he won’t switch  |
| Dwight    | - Spoke about streaming games at work, even when on the way to a call  
|           | - Indicated an Oilers tattoo  |
| Jim       | - Wearing a Flames golf shirt at work for the interview  
|           | - Planning family vacation to see Flames in Vegas  |
| Stanley   | - Took previous family vacation to see Oilers in Arizona  
|           | - Spoke about being upset at refs decisions  |
| Darryl    | - Wore a Flames hat for the interview  |
| Kelly     | - Spoke of how important and central the Flames are to her life  |
| Pam       | - Drinking coffee from an Oilers mug  
|           | - Oilers are central to her social life  |
| Kevin     | - Spoke of how watching the Flames was a “ritual”  |
| Andy      | - Talked about trying to watch the games while in the Manitoba wilderness  |
| Ryan      | - Named watching the game with friends one of his favourite things to do  |
| Oscar     | - Spoke about how following the Oilers has become an everyday thing for him through the winter  |
| Roy       | - Specifically mentioned how attached he was to the team  
|           | - He’s “too attached” and “too proud” to stop being a Flames fan  
|           | - Talked about how the eustress of the Flames winning is something he wants  |
Appendix K

Participant Profile Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Recruited Via</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>At the College</td>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dwight</td>
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<td>Firefighter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Project Coordinator</td>
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<td>Stanley</td>
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<td>Kelly</td>
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<td>Pam</td>
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<td>Kevin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
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Breakdown –
- Male-to-female ratio: 5:1
- Average age: 38.6 years
Appendix L

Participant Theme Contribution Summary

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<th>Category #3</th>
<th>Category #4</th>
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<td>Place Attachment</td>
<td>Rebellious</td>
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<td>No Threat/Ignore</td>
<td>Current State</td>
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<td>Stanley Cup Finals</td>
<td>Fans</td>
<td>Family Time</td>
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<th>Category #4</th>
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<td>X X 5</td>
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</table>

| Total   | 9 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 |

**Category #1: Becoming a Fan**

Themes: Family Influence, Success, Place Attachment, Rebellious

**Category #2: Rivalry in Red Deer**

Themes: Showing, Interaction, No Threat/Ignore, Current State

**Category #3: Opinion of the “Other” Team**

Themes: Players, 2004/2006 Stanley Cup Finals, Fans

**Category #4: Committed to Current Team**

Themes: Family Time, Socializing, Loyalty, Hope