

**Identity Management Strategies, Sports Fandom and Para-social Relationships in Cricket Fans**Vicar Solomon<sup>1</sup>, Faiz Younas<sup>2</sup>, Sana Saeed<sup>3</sup>**Abstract**

The current research investigated the relationship among identity management strategies, sports fandom and para-social relationships in cricket fans. It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship among identity management strategies, sports fandom and para-social relationships while sports fandom would mediate between identity management strategies and para-social relationships. By employing a cross-sectional correlational research design, a sample of ( $N = 120$ ) cricket fans with an age range of (18-30) years ( $M = 22.34$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ) was recruited through non-probability purposive sampling technique. Study variables were assessed through the Basking in Reflected Glory Scale (Spinda, 2009), Cutting off Reflected Failure Scale (Spinda, 2009), Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) and Celebrity-Persona Identification Scale (Brown & Bocarnea, 2007). Results revealed a positive association among all study variables while sports fandom was found to partially mediate identity management strategies and para-social relationships in cricket fans. Findings have interdisciplinary implications within the fields of group dynamics; sports sciences, sociology and social psychology as it is a research-based, empirical addition to existing indigenous literature regarding cricket that is the most popular game in the country. Also, it highlights the respective association and predictive value of the study variables which can be further investigated across other games, as well as across disciplines.

**Keywords:** Basking in Reflected Glory, Celebrity-persona Identification, Cricket Fans, Cutting off Reflected Failure, Pakistan, Para Social Relationships, Sports Spectatorship

Received: 07 April 2022; Revised  
Received: 23 June 2022; Accepted: 24 June  
2022

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**Introduction**

Sports activities play a significant role in the lives of people as they serve a variety of individual and social purposes like providing opportunities for socialization and recreation that entails potential physical

and psychological health-related benefits. Every year, many individuals either physically attend sports events or watch them online or on their TV screens through live broadcasts (Billings & Ruihley, 2013). There are now several channels dedicated especially towards sports that transmit live as well as recorded sports events of a diverse nature, catering for the ever-increasing demands of the sports fan. Along with these sports channels, the sports fan can also avail of other avenues to remain connected with sports events like subscribing to sports magazines, reading the sports section of dailies as well as web journals. This allows them to remain fully informed of their favorite sports and/or teams.

Dhurup (2014) argued that eager fans demonstrate their loyalty in certain ways that also includes purchasing team-based

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merchandise and spending a substantial amount of money to travel to watch their team play live. In this way, they did not only impact the sporting events with their enthusiasm but also through their indirect financial support. Without fans, many of the major sports would be reduced to just obscure leisure activities that nobody would care about (Kwon & Kwak, 2014). Over time, such participation has become an inexorably prevalent type of stimulation in society. In the light of this expanded enthusiasm for sports, analysts have contemplated the potential motivational elements and participation factors that are related to being a game or sports fan. Research on fan motivation and sports participation actuates the brand establishments into sponsoring sports events as well as creating merchandise for increment shopper utilization of group stock (Popp et al., 2018).

#### **Identity Management Strategies**

Motivation for upcoming participation or evasion becomes more and more understandable when one emphasizes the identification of fans. Defined as the degree to which a fan textures a psychological association to a team and the performance of the team is perceived as self-emphasizing, identity management strategies (Haugh & Watkins, 2016) involved two further psychological possessions, namely basking in reflected glory (BIRG) and cutting off reflected failure (CORF). Marquis and Baker (2015) regarded them worthwhile heuristics for forecasting behaviors grounded on the random outcomes that sports provide. It's quite common that people like to show off their connection with successful others, even if they were not successful themselves (Popp et al., 2018). While this tendency or desire to share in the joy of those who are successful is regarded as BRIG, CORF is a propensity to distance oneself from unsuccessful others (Cohen & Perse, 2003). Investigators have detected that the

tendency to CORF is extra overriding than the tendency to BIRG (Woo et al., 2008).

Basking in Reflected Glory and Cutting Off Reflected Failure widely known as BIRGing and CORFing are based on Social Identity Theory and they work as a safeguard for enhancement of protection of one's self-esteem. Social Identity Theory as proposed by Tajfel & Turner (1986) postulates the phenomenon of investigation of interplay between personal and social identities and focuses to be specific and predictive about circumstances in which people see themselves as an individual or as members of any group. People employ BIRGing when they wish to increase their self-esteem by aligning themselves with any kind of triumph or any other significant success (Kwon & Kwak, 2014). On the other hand, CORFing happens when people try to distance themselves from any kind of failure that can have a negative influence on their self-esteem or self-image. Interestingly, it is invariably believed that it is just the function of expression but now it is also claimed that personality also plays a significant role in all this process. A baseball fan's use of the comprehensive term we tend to explain the success of his or her beloved team is a sample of BIRGing. Stating that one has taken a category instructed by a winner of a Nobel prize is additionally an instance of BIRGing. Alternative examples embody narrating the story of an opportunity encounter with a star, like sitting next to them on a plane or eating at an identical eating house and declaring that one is said to know an illustrious legislator or performer (Brown, 2000).

Basking in reflected glory need not stay restricted to vocal associations as described by Trail et al. (2003), for example, folk's area unit, a lot of possibilities to wear an article of clothing attached with a winning team than a losing team. BIRGing arises when the psychological association through a successful team increases; teamwork enhances self-esteem and enhances individual identity (Bernache-Assollant et

al., 2007). On the other hand, when a player or team flops, fans incline to reserve themselves over a marked procedure that cuts through thoughtful failure. The sport requires both victors and failures, with studies showing that the public reduces their connection with a squad or group that successfully protects their societal identity, a phenomenon recognized as cut off failure. CORFing's methods include remembering past victories, predicting better futures, or temporary dissociation with a team. In an experiment highlighting this phenomenon, students were assigned to one of the three group benefit return situations (success, lack of information, defeat), with the public in arrears far more likely to distance themselves from the group (Cohen & Perse, 2003).

Best English football clubs have long ironic antiquity as these squads have a great reputation. For them and their fans, winning is a standard and losing is not a choice in the first place, but there are good and bad times in every sports competition. The loss of a vital game is often undesirable, if not shocking. It contradicts the expectations of the advocates, and it was detected that frustrated prospects were an essential state to invoke CORFing. It is added that individuals would only distance themselves from the basis of a letdown during defeat (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2013). These two practices are frequently used to defend self, proved by psychological verdicts screening that people internalize victory and externalize letdown (Dhurup, 2014). Collected, psychological appliances can clarify fair-weather fans, proposing insight regarding team identity and external group identities (Carlson et al., 2009). These self-protection practices have been recognized amongst sports fans in some studies, providing supplementary provisions for this marvel in the setting of sport (Haugh & Watkins, 2016). Following a team success, sports fans will intensify their reference to their team. This development is remarked as Basking in Reflected Glory. The

development of basking in reflected glory is well familiar and mirrors the psychological flora of the fanship and also the evidence of indirect action (Carlson et al., 2009).

### **Sports Fandom**

An individual's pledge and emotive connection of clients with a game team can be regarded as sports fandom (Solansky, 2011). From a sport psychology perspective, sports fandom is a good predictor that mirrors the degree to which a person has a psychological association to a specific team or player performance. The identification of the sports team, or the measurement in the same team or psychological link with the team, attracted a lot of interest from the part of the scientists in the school of dreams (Wang et al., 2008). In a broader context, sports fandom is an individual's sense of belonging towards a specific group and claims that when a person classifies with a group, he turns out to be expressively devoted to the feats and defeats of that group (Tiago et al., 2016). Further, Carlson et al. (2009) claimed that sports fandom reflects the level of identification or care given to a specific athletic club.

A study conducted on golf audiences revealed that the ones who were more absorbed in the game were also more interested in watching and playing golf than less involved spectators (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2013). In agreement with the literature on identification management strategies, a study investigated elements of respect, fan relations and participation to predict the identification of supporters amongst sports audiences and found identification was more of an emotive state than an emotional, behavioral or persuasive measure when a person's character and team overlap. The sports fans found themselves to be very faithful and often fanatical to their favorite squads (Theodorakis et al., 2012).

### **Para-social Relationships**

Para-social relations are one-sided associations that the public cultivates with media characters such as artists, presenters,

talk show hosts and celebrities. These relations occur when the public devote time to the media, and a sense of closeness develops from experiences and shared connections over time. Media character becomes expectable and fans trust they distinguish and realize the media character. With social magnetism (the media character might be a friend) and frequent engagement with the character, a para-social relationship acquires an interpersonal reputation (Wang et al., 2008).

There have always been well-known persons in the world. Though, it appears that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, individuals are more inquisitive and fascinated with superstars. The fascination for celebrities is ubiquitous in our society. Many popular television shows and specials are dedicated to celebrity life, with talk shows where animators talk celebs and honor prizes where celebs accept admiration for their performances. Though media users can sense and act as if they are in a usual role associated with a multimedia character, it is the media character that controls the message. Except for the interaction among the media user and the media character is established, the affiliation remains para-social (Cohen & Perse, 2003).

Para-social interaction has been the subject of much speculation and partial experiential investigation as affiliation by the viewer of friendship or intimacy with a distant "character" of the media (Spinda & Puckette, 2018). Television personalities encourage para-socialists to interact with spectators by using informal styles and gestures in casual, personal contexts that reflect relational communication and call collaborative responses (Solansky, 2011). The relationship is enhanced by manufacturing techniques such as close-ups and camera zoom, which foster a sense of closeness. Para-social relation is, therefore, favored by a combination of features that include the estimated degree of the reality of the character, the frequency and constancy of the screen time of the

character, conventional behavior and conversation mode of the character and the actual use of the official characteristics of TV. These aspects together brand the character as an expectable and non-threatening role companion, perfect for the spectator (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2008). Though para-social interaction occurs only during the period of the visual practice, some scholars protracted the idea and recognized the components of social interaction programming. This entails interaction, identification and enduring identification with TV characters, which shows curiosity in the characters, joining in what is trendy to the characters, and knowing the characters (Theodorakis et al., 2012).

### **The Rationale of the Study**

Prior psycho-social exploration on sports fans showed that the level of sports fandom is a perilous factor in determining which identity management strategy would be assumed, it provided few descriptive elements on the variety of highly recognized fans' responses to their team presentations (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2007). Earlier work had not discovered how sports fandom develops in response to identity management (Trail et al., 2003). In the current study, BIRGing and CORFing with sports fandom and para-social relationships were investigated, among indigenous cricket fans. The study aimed to understand how identity management strategies figure para-social relations by examining the ways people respond to the thought of the success and failure of such relations. This would put to test this idea that identity management strategies do not only shape para-social relationships but would also offer a general alignment toward human identification with the sports team.

### **Hypotheses**

- There would be a significant relationship between identity management strategies (basking in reflected glory, cutting off reflected failure), sports fandom and para-

social relationships among cricket fans.

- Identity management strategies (basking in reflected glory, cutting off reflected failure) and sports fandom would predict para-social relationships among cricket fans.
- Sports fandom would mediate identity management strategies and para-social relationships among cricket fans.

## Method

### Research Design

A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed.

### Participants and Sampling

A sample of cricket fans ( $N = 120$ ) with an age range of (18-30) years with ( $M = 22.34$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ) was recruited from Lahore city through purposive sampling technique. Data collection started after seeking approval from the Institutional Board of Studies (BOS) and APA ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Permission was also sorted for the usage of scales from all the authors or/and official bodies. Moreover, all the participants were briefed about the nature and purpose of the study and only those were recruited who gave their consent to voluntarily participating in the research.

### Measures

#### Sociodemographic Information Sheet

A self-constructed sociodemographic information sheet was developed to gather information from each participant that included their age, sex, family system, birth order, education level, education of father, education of mother, favorite team and time spent watching cricket.

#### Identity Management Strategies (IDM)

As it was established earlier that IDM involves BRIGing and CORFing that's why scales by Spinda (2009) were used to measure this variable.

#### Basking in Reflected Glory Scale

Basking in Reflected Glory Scale was developed by Spinda (2009) included nine Likert-type items that request respondents to rate whether they strongly disagree (1) or

strongly agree (5) to each statement that was provided. Every statement is a postponement of the statement "When my favorite team wins...". Basking in Reflected Glory Scale has been originated to be very reliable, attaining Cronbach alpha reliability scores of .83 or higher (Spinda, 2009).

#### Cutting off Reflected Failure Scale

Cutting off Reflected Failure Scale was developed by Spinda (2009) is a 10-item Likert-type scale. This scale implies conversely avoidance of the very similar self-reported celebratory behaviors tinted in the BRIGing scale, such as choosing not to attire team apparel or show team logos (I usually won't wear clothing or jerseys that display my (favorite team) logo, emblem, or insignia) and choosing not to consume media linked to losing team performance (I am not as likely to read stories online so I can forget about the (favorite team performance)). Scale impelled respondents to answer items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cutting off Reflected Failure Scale has been initiated to be very reliable, reaching Cronbach alpha reliability scores of .81 or more (Spinda, 2009).

#### Sport Spectator Identification Scale

Sports fandom was measured with the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) which contains seven semantic difference items that determine the level of psychological association an individual feel with their beloved or most familiar team. In this scale, response options range from one to eight. Sample items contain "how strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the favorite team" and "how much do you dislike the greatest rivals of the favorite team". Sport Spectator Identification Scale is a highly reliable measure of sports fan identification. It has been functional in over 100 researches of sports fandom globally and has been converted into numerous diverse languages. The scale has been internally reliable in

sports fans, with Cronbach alpha scores fluctuating from  $a = .91$  to  $a = .93$ .

### Celebrity-Persona Identification Scale

The para-social relationships were investigated through the Celebrity-Persona Identification Scale (CPI) (Brown & Bocarnea, 2007), which is a 20-item Likert-type scale. Respondents were requested to rank their level of agreement with statements about their identification with superstars on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. CPI is very consistent, attaining Cronbach alpha reliability of .87 or greater (Brown & Bocarnea, 2007).

### Results

Results were generated by running several analyses that include descriptive statistics,

Pearson product-moment correlation, stepwise-hierarchical regression and mediation through SPSS version 21.

Table 1 revealed sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample and showed that most of the participants were men (55%), between the ages of 18-24 years (65%), last-born (45.8%), with a graduation degree (44.2%), studying in public sector universities (72%), belonged to nuclear family system (61.7%), considered Pakistani cricket team as favorite (80%) and spent more than 3 hours in watching cricket (61%). Moreover, the fathers of most of the participants had graduation degrees (25.8%) while mothers had matriculation degrees (31.7%).

**Table 1**

*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N=120)*

Variables	<i>n</i>	(%)
Sex		
Men	66	55
Women	54	45
Age (in years)		
18-24	79	65
25-30	41	35
Favorite team		
Pakistan	96	80
Other Teams	24	20
Time spent in watching Cricket		
Less than 3 Hours	47	39
More than 3 Hours	73	61

*Note:* Participants on average were 22.35 years old ( $SD = 2.62$ ).

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables (N=120)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
Identity Management Strategies	62.55	8.78	-	.34**	.51**
Sports Fandom	40.60	9.57		-	.51**
Para-social Relationships	62.89	16.33			-

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 2 revealed a significant positive relationship between identity management strategies and sports fandom, as well as with para-social relationships. Similarly, sports

fandom was found to have a significant positive relationship with para-social relationships.

**Table 3**

*Stepwise-Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Para-social Relationships from Identity Management Strategies and Sports Fandom (N=120)*

Variables	B	95% CI		SE B	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.26	.26***
(Constant)	25.53***	16.37	38.68	5.63			
Sports Fandom	.87***	.60	1.14	.14	.51***		
Step 2						.38	.12***
(Constant)	-6.43	-23.99	11.13	8.87			
Sports Fandom	.66***	.39	.92	.13	.39***		
Identity Management Strategies	.68***	.39	.96	.14	.37***		

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the impact of sports fandom and identity management strategies on para-social relationships in cricket fans through stepwise hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, the  $R^2$  value of .26 revealed that the sports fandom explained 26% variance in para-social relationships with  $F(1, 118) = 41.59, p < .001$ . This shows that sports fandom positively predicted para-social relationships ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ).

In step 2, the  $R^2$  value .12 revealed that the sports fandom and identity management strategies explained 12% variance in the para-social relationships with  $F(2, 117) = 35.69, p < .001$ . This showed that both sports fandom ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ) and identity management strategies ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ) positively predicted the para-social relationships. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .12 revealed 12% change in the variance of model 1 and model 2 with  $\Delta F(1, 117) = 22.29, p < .001$ .



**Table 4**

*Regression Analysis for Mediation of Sports Fandom between Identity Management Strategies and Para-social Relationships (N = 120)*

Variables	<i>B</i>	95% CI	SE <i>B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1					.25	.25***
(Constant)	5.08	[-13.15, 23.67]	9.39			
Identity management strategies	.92***	[.63, 1.22]	.15	.50***		
Step 2					.38	.13***
(Constant)	-6.43	[-23.99, 11.13]	8.87			
Identity management strategies	.68***	[.40, .97]	.14	.37***		
Sports fandom	.66***	[.40, .92]	.13	.39***		

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

Lastly, Table 4 shows the impact of identity management strategies and sports fandom on para-social relationships in cricket. In step 1, the  $R^2$  value of .25 revealed that the identity management strategies explained 25% variance in para-social relationships with  $F(1, 118) = 38.66, p < .001$ . This shows that identity management strategies positively predicted para social relationships ( $\beta = .50, p < .001$ ). In step 2, the  $R^2$  value .38 revealed that the identity management strategies and sports fandom explained 38% variance in the para-social relationships with  $F(2, 117) = 35.69, p < .001$ . This showed that both identity management strategies ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ )

and sports fandom ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ) positively predicted para-social relationships.

The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .13 revealed 13% change in the variance of model 1 and model 2 with  $\Delta F(1, 117) = 24.89, p < .001$ . The regression weights for identity management strategies subsequently reduced from Model 1 to Model 2 (.50 to .37) but remained significant which confirmed partial mediation. More specifically, identity management strategies have direct as well as indirect effects on para-social relationships.

### Discussion

Our findings showed that there was a significant positive association among identity management strategies, sports fandom and para-social relationships. This is in line with a previous study by Kelley and Tian (2004) who found that a team's identification influences one's identity management as identification with a sports team becomes part of participants' identity. BIRGing was found to have a significantly positive association with team

identification and para-social relationships. Similarly, Theodorakis et al. (2012) showed that the need for affiliation is positively correlated with the degree of identification with a native sports team, but not with a reserved team or a simple sports fan.

According to Dalakas and Melancon (2012) especially in sport, consumers can become very loyal and often fanatical to their favorite teams. Also, Kassing and Sanderson (2010) emphasized that identification is more an emotional state



than an emotional, behavioral or persuasive measure when an individual's character and squad overlap. They also found CORFing to have a positive relationship with para-social relationships. It is significant to note that scholars have argued that the tendency to CORF was extra dominant than to BIRG. Bernache-Assollant et al. (2007) presented strong provision for the BIRG phenomenon between two ultra-fan groups, but a slight indication of the CORF phenomenon in both groups being more dominant. Moreover, previous studies have also tried to look into the reason for the development of para-social relationships and found that lonely people tend to seek this form of attachment rather than going for traditional inter-personal relational dynamics (Wang et al., 2008).

Further, our findings reported that both identity management strategies and sports fandom predicted para-social relationships. These results are following another study that found that the closer the club gets to the local community; the more identification with the team increases (Solansky, 2011). Similarly, while studying team identification and brand devotion, a study found that a strong emotive attachment to a sports team had a positive impact on the buying behavior of the individuals (Hinckson & Curtis, 2013).

Although to the best of our knowledge, we could not find any study undertaking the mediational aspects of sports fandom about identity management strategies and para-social relationships, our intuition guided by the results of inter-correlation and predictions involving study variables enabled us to assume mediation. And eventually, it was found that sports fandom partially mediated between identity management strategies and para-social relationships among cricket fans. This finding can be regarded as an addition to research scholarship of sports sciences; sociology and psychology, especially as it brought in indigenous perspective.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

The data was collected from cricket fans of only four different universities of Lahore and in future to further enhance the external validity of the results, a more vast and eclectic sample can be taken, that may also investigate the dynamics of the study variables in the context of sports other than cricket. Also, other than the student population, a representative sample of other populations can be collected in future studies to see the extent of generalizability of these findings. As all the information was collected through self-report measures, therefore, there might be chances of participants' bias. This can be addressed through the application of other data collection methods that can minimize this bias.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Sports psychology is an emerging sub-field of social psychology and there is scant indigenous research literature. The present study will be a valuable addition to the academic and research literature of this area, especially when one is looking for scholarship on variables like sports fandom, identity management strategies and para-social relationships, specifically in the sample of cricket fans. This study can also serve as a basis for qualitative exploration of these phenomena that will bring in the indigenous as well as specific sports based aspects to the scientific body of research. Moreover, as we are aware now that players can inculcate awareness about identity management strategies so that they can understand fans' reactions to their performances and can better deal with the reactions of their fans. Different sessions, seminars, awareness campaigns and sports-related educational courses should be conducted for students to promote awareness and for enhancing their well-being. The inter-correlations, predictions and mediational findings of the current study have interdisciplinary implications within the fields of group dynamics; sports sciences, sociology and social psychology

as it's a research-based, empirical addition to existing indigenous literature regarding cricket that is the most popular game in the country. Also, it highlights the respective association and predictive value of the study variables which can be further investigated across other games, as well as across disciplines.

### Contribution of Authors

Vicar Solomon: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Faiz Younas: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing- Original draft, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Sana Saeed: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by authors.

### Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding.

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