THE BIG ASSIST: EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL SPORT AND
NON PROFIT RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH CSR AND ETHICS OF CARE

A Dissertation in
Mass Communications
by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

August 2014
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ABSTRACT

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) research in public relations often emphasizes organizational goals, examining how CSR is practiced and communicated, how stakeholders perceive CSR efforts, and how reputational and organizational benefits emerge. Notably, scholars have largely failed to examine CSR impacts from the perspective of those who benefit from corporate giving. This research fills numerous gaps in public relations CSR literature: In addition to exploring the nonprofit perspective of CSR relationships, this study presents the first known effort to explore sport CSR in public relations. To date, sport CSR has been studied almost exclusively in business and marketing literature, where the sport industry is presented as bearing unique characteristics for practicing CSR and creating social impacts (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006, 2009, 2013). These relationships were explored and situated within ethics of care, which is presented as a useful normative framework for engaging in and evaluating CSR based on caring practices and values that privilege the perspectives and needs of relationship partners (Held, 2006). To address scholarly gaps, 29 depth interviews were conducted with nonprofit representatives who worked for organizations that received support from sport organizations located in a major metropolitan area. Inductive coding strategies revealed numerous themes related to CSR impacts and relationships, particularly in the context of sport CSR and care ethics. Findings suggest that nonprofits primarily reach out to sport organizations to establish relationships, and the sport industry is perceived as yielding unique benefits and challenges for partnering organizations. Specifically, nonprofits can yield direct benefits from teams including awareness, reach, and credibility, while team visibility and celebrity serve as indirect benefits that enhance the ability for teams to provide direct benefits. In the context of care ethics, nonprofit practitioners prefer caring relationships that are built upon trust and mutual concern,
encourage human flourishing, and exist because of a genuine concern to assist others.

Specifically, the strongest nonprofit and sport organization relationships are marked by mutually shared caring practices and values. To advance theoretical development of caring CSR practices and to situate CSR in the public relations domain, a public relations-based definition of caring CSR is presented alongside a proposed model for testing the predictive value of emergent themes.
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Acknowledgements

It goes without saying that I owe the deepest appreciation and gratitude to my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Denise Bortree, who has truly become both a professional mentor and a personal friend. Since my first visit to Penn State’s campus, she has shaped the enthusiasm I have had toward my graduate studies. Over countless bowls of soup, she helped me formulate, critique, and mold the ideas that became this dissertation. Her flexibility and encouragement as I completed this project will forever stay with me as I begin the next chapter of my academic career. For your time, effort, enthusiasm, and friendship, thank you so much, Denise.

To my committee, including Drs. Colleen Connolly-Ahern, Frank Dardis, and Patrick Parsons, I also cannot express enough thanks for your continued support and encouragement. Each one of you has taken time to discuss ideas related to this dissertation, helping shape the way I have approached my research. Your interest in this work, and the guidance you have all given me since the beginning of this program have truly helped shape who I want to be as a scholar.

Among those who have contributed to my academic path, I express my gratitude toward my former faculty advisors at the University of South Florida, who exhibited a care and concern for my studies that encouraged me to pursue this degree, and who so well prepared me for the rigor of a doctoral program. And while it is impossible to list all of the graduate colleagues who have supported me, the friendships I made here have given me the motivation and inspiration to pursue research that can help others.

I would also like to thank one of my dearest friends, Kevin Bowlin, who brightened countless days. Your seemingly endless support (and access to Primanti’s) truly helped me remain motivated and focused on my goals. In the spirit of this research, to you I say: “If a lot of people love each other, the world would be a better place to live.”
Finally, my biggest thanks of all goes to my amazing mom, Ann Kessler Formentin, whose endless love, support, encouragement, and friendship has driven me to be the best person and scholar I can be. You have truly been my rock throughout this program, providing more guidance and support than I ever could have asked for. I dedicate this research to you, as this project is as much my work as it is your influence.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Since 2005, the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) social responsibility program, NBA Cares, has ”raised more than $230 million for charity, provided more than 2.8 million hours of hands-on service, and built more than 860 places where kids and families can live, learn or play in communities around the world” (NBA.com, 2014, para. 2). During the 2013 NBA All Star Weekend, the league’s senior vice president of global marketing partnerships highlighted the importance and meaning of these charitable efforts by stating: “Our partners recognize that this is what the league stands for. The league is synonymous with making a difference in the community” (qtd. in Jessop, 2013, para. 7). Sentiments such as these have been echoed across major professional sport leagues. Before the 2013 National Football League (NFL) season, league commissioner Roger Goodell estimated that the NFL Foundation would “provide more than $18 million to support health and safety efforts, youth and high school football programs and community health initiatives” (National Football League, 2013, para. 3). The National Hockey League’s (NHL) Hockey Fights Cancer initiative has purportedly raised more than $12.8 million to support cancer-fighting programs since being established in 1998 (“Hockey Fights Cancer,” n.d.), while Major League Baseball (MLB) has established more than a dozen programs to support causes ranging from autism awareness to veterans support to ALS initiatives (MLBCommunity.org, 2014).

While the total donations and overall commitments to community involvement are impressive, these are not new corporate strategies. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been at the core of both public relations scholarship and practice in recent years, and public
relations scholars have increasingly embraced and studied the organizational benefits of doing good. Research has largely focused on organizational benefits related to reputation (i.e., Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010) and stakeholder behavioral intentions (i.e., Wigley, 2008), and has also explored and described organizational communication strategies (i.e., Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). However, current research has seemingly overlooked a key perspective within CSR relationships: that of the beneficiary. In an effort to understand best communication practices and explore behavioral influences among stakeholders, scholars have largely failed to measure the CSR impacts from the perspective of those who receive support, such as nonprofit organizations. This study closes various gaps in current CSR scholarship starting with an exploration of the nonprofit perspective in CSR relationships. This research also forwards the notion that the professional sport industry provides a specialized opportunity for maximizing what we know about best approaches to CSR relationships. Finally, I argue that ethics of care provides a predictive, measurable framework both for envisioning caring relationships and for situating CSR practices in the public relations domain.

In addition to providing the context for this study, this chapter reviews the core goals that underpinned this work. The theoretical contributions of this study are briefly introduced, and the chapters in this study are outlined. This chapter concludes with a preview of the four research questions that guided this research.

Goals

In an effort to build CSR theory, three primary goals are at the heart of this study. First, this research closes a gap in CSR literature by presenting the nonprofit perspective of CSR practices. Scholars in disciplines ranging from public relations to business to marketing have historically overlooked a beneficiary-guided evaluation of giving impacts, thus failing to give
voice to those who benefit from social responsibility efforts. Using depth interviews with nonprofit practitioners, this study challenges current approaches to measuring CSR impacts by privileging beneficiary perspectives and uncovering what practitioners believe are positive and negative components of receiving corporate support. Next, this study evaluates the specific benefits and challenges of receiving support from professional sport organizations. Sport CSR is primarily explored in business literature that has noticeably overlooked the role of public relations in sport organization relationships. As such, in addition to situating sport CSR in the domain of public relations, this research stands as the first known attempt to understand relationship-building and communication-based practices in this context. Finally, this study presents ethics of care as an insightful normative framework for guiding and evaluating CSR practices. By conceptualizing CSR along dimensions of caring practices and values, scholars and practitioners can better understand how to strengthen organizational relationships and better apply public relations principles.

Theoretical Contributions

By privileging the nonprofit perspective in CSR relationships, particularly through the lens of care ethics, this study attempts to make two major theoretical contributions to the public relations and CSR literature. First, this research gives voice to benefiting nonprofits by privileging their perspective of CSR relationships and presenting a definition and model for evaluating those relationships based on their experiences and beliefs as beneficiaries. This moves theory away from its tendency to evaluate CSR practices as a return on investment, and suggests a more fruitful way conceptualize CSR is through an evaluation of social impacts and beneficiary satisfaction. Second, this research conceptualizes organization-to-organization CSR relationships using dimensions of care ethics—specifically, caring practices and values—to help situate CSR
as a relationship-based public relations practice that is best evaluated through assessments of relationship strength and the ability for giving organizations to meet the needs and expectations of beneficiaries. In short, I attempt to move CSR evaluations away from traditional forms of measurement by establishing a theoretical framework that evaluates normatively “good” CSR practices based on beneficiary perceptions of relationship satisfaction and social impacts.

By understanding the benefits and challenges beneficiaries experience as a result of CSR practices, both scholars and practitioners can more thoroughly understand the impacts of social responsibility efforts. Understanding how nonprofits establish relationships helps us appreciate the hurdles beneficiaries face when receiving CSR support. Better understanding what relationship characteristics nonprofit practitioners prefer also provides a new appreciation for whether CSR practices are creating positive experiences for beneficiaries. Most importantly, embracing the beneficiary perspective of CSR relationships can help us consider new ways to evaluate the impact of giving efforts. Arguably, it is important to understand whether CSR efforts achieve their stated goals of creating meaningful change. It is also worthwhile to conceptualize good CSR practices as those that are practically useful and meet beneficiary needs and expectations.

To date, few attempts have been made to conceptualize ethics of care in public relations scholarship even though the core concepts of care seemingly align with the predominant definition of public relations forwarded by PRSA (n.d.). This study suggests that principles of care ethics naturally emerge in the nonprofit perspective of CSR relationships. Not only do nonprofit practitioners personally embrace caring practices and values, but also they prefer being supported by organizations that foster genuine relationships built on trust, mutual concern, and flourishing. By analyzing the nonprofit perspective in sport CSR relationships, this research
arrives at a new definition of CSR that simultaneously positions the practice in the domain of public relations and emphasizes a normative approach that can lead to evaluations of “good” CSR practices. A framework is also presented to suggest certain qualities of CSR relationships can predict levels of care and organization-to-organization relationship strength. This framework privileges the nonprofit or beneficiary perspective in these relationships, encouraging scholars and practitioners to measure impacts beyond those benefits gained by organizations practicing social responsibility.

**Chapter Guideline**

The exploratory nature of this study required a detailed, step-by-step approach to gathering, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data. In Chapter 2, a literature review organizes the principles guiding this research. The chapter begins by exploring current CSR definitions and areas of research, particularly in public relations. Next, nonprofit communication research is briefly introduced to provide context regarding this study’s participants. This is followed by a review of existing sport CSR literature, which is buttressed with a presentation of both cause-related marketing (CRM) and cause-related sport marketing (CRSM) literature. Finally, ethics of care is evaluated as a normative framework for approaching CSR strategies and relationships. A history of care’s development and an argument for the appropriateness of this ethical framework are offered. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the gaps that remain in these bodies of literature and a presentation of how these gaps will be addressed by this research.

Next, Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the depth interview method used in this study. The method for this research follows the McCracken (1988) four-step method of inquiry, beginning with a thorough literature review and an analysis of the cultural categories that evaluates existing scholarly and personal knowledge about the subject, Interview schedule
development is reviewed in addition to highlighting how participants were recruited and interviewed, in part using the Rubin and Rubin (2012) responsive interviewing approach. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Lindlof and Taylor’s (2011) approach to inductive qualitative analysis was applied in the study.

To begin describing the nonprofit perspective, Chapter 4 describes the actors and organizational entities represented in this study. In addition to describing participant characteristics, I review the nonprofit organizations represented. Next, I describe the different types of CSR efforts being conducted by professional teams in host city, both describing CSR practices in general and reviewing how individual teams support their local community. This discussion is elaborated in Chapter 5, which successively offers results to each of the four research questions. These questions build on one another to begin addressing the three major goals guiding this research.

Results are elaborated via discussion in Chapter 6, in which two big-picture analyses and one theoretical framework are presented. The first big-picture analysis explores how participant perspectives align with existing CSR and CRM scholarships. I review how participant beliefs and insights can be contextualized using ethics of care. Taking a big-picture view of the overall results, I use exemplars to show how many of the research question findings appear to be a function of relationship strength. I describe different types of relationships to begin positioning the findings into a theoretical framework that seemingly emerges in practice. This theoretical framework is then presented, beginning with a public relations- and care-based definition of CSR. The definition is supplemented with a proposed model for evaluating and predicting caring relationships. Findings suggest that the more caring practices and values there are mutually exhibited in a relationship, the stronger the connection is between partnering organizations.
Finally, the Chapter 7 conclusion reviews the findings, acknowledges study limitations, and presents suggestions for future research.

**Research Questions**

To explore the relationships of interest and meet the proposed theoretical goals, the following four research questions guide this study:

**Research Question 1:** How are the relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations established from the perspective of nonprofit organizations?

**Research Question 2:** What do nonprofits perceive as the positive and negative components of their relationships with sport organizations?

**Research Question 3:** What unique benefits and challenges do nonprofit organizations believe they yield from partnering with professional sport organizations?

**Research Question 4:** How does ethics of care manifest in nonprofit and professional sport organization relationships?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

To understand the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in professional sport, this study explores how CSR efforts are perceived by benefitting nonprofit organizations. Because scholars have failed to illuminate the beneficiary perspective of CSR relationships, a thorough analysis of existing CSR research is required. This chapter examines how CSR has been widely defined in scholarly and industry literature before exploring recent CSR definitions within public relations scholarship. Next, current public relations CSR literature is reviewed. The scholarly focus on reputational benefits, attitudinal changes, and behavioral impacts of CSR initiatives means particular attention is given to these areas of interest. This discussion is followed by a brief review of existing nonprofit communication scholarship, examining how the study’s primary stakeholder group establishes organization-public relationships. Next, the existing body of sport CSR literature is reviewed to contextualize the industry of interest to this study. Notably, existing sport CSR research is primarily situated in business literature and focuses considerably on the strategic use of marketing initiatives. Although CSR is often conceptualized as a public relations function, current sport CSR research often contextualizes CSR as a business-driven, cause-related marketing (CRM) practice. Because CRM is generally considered a strategic but non-philanthropic CSR practice, and because sport CSR research seemingly eschews the importance of public relations strategies in these contexts, general CRM research is outlined before cause-related sports marketing (CRSM) is addressed. Finally, this study is underpinned by an exploration of how ethics of care can be applied in public relations practice and scholarship. Although CSR has been examined using other
normative frameworks, scholars have yet to explore how care may be a more appropriate ethic for conceptualizing, understanding, and establishing good and satisfying CSR relationships. Ethics of care literature is reviewed before arguments are presented for considering care as an optimal ethical framework for establishing and maintaining good CSR-based relationships, particularly from the perspective of benefiting nonprofit organizations. Finally, persisting gaps in the preceding bodies of literature are reviewed in concert with a discussion about how this study will challenge and address those gaps. The chapter concludes by explaining the rationale for the research questions guiding this study.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility

In recent decades, as businesses have increasingly implemented CSR initiatives, scholars have focused on categorizing and exploring CSR activities. Despite the work being done in this area, there is little consensus regarding how CSR can and should be defined in both general business and public relations scholarship. Internationally, the United Nations Global Compact LEAD encourages private companies to make practical commitments that address “social, environmental and governance problems” (Global Compact, 2012, p. 2) by “becoming actively engaged in issues that go beyond their responsibility to respect human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption” (Global Compact, 2012, p. 2). The Harvard Kennedy School, through its Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, has defined CSR within the context of how profit is both made and distributed, suggesting CSR:

… goes beyond philanthropy and compliance and addresses how companies manage their economic, social, and environmental impacts, as well as their relationships in all key spheres of influence: the workplace, the marketplace, the supply chain, the community,
and the public policy realm (Harvard Kennedy School, 2008, para. 1). Kotler and Lee (2005) argue that “corporate social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributes of corporate resources” (p. 3), while more simply, the European Commission recently revised its CSR definition to suggest it is “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” (European Commission, 2011, p. 6).

Although broad, these definitions point to an overarching call for organizations to embrace practices that exceed those required by law while showing a commitment to addressing social and environmental issues. By highlighting governance and economic issues, companies are also challenged to establish ethical business practices. Arguably, the most common CSR definition is forwarded by Carroll (1979) who suggests “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (p. 500). While alternate definitions have emerged and built upon Carroll’s four dimensions of responsibility, scholars argue that the numerous existing definitions have confused the concept and deterred CSR from being more finely developed (Carroll, 1999; Dahlsrud, 2008; McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006). After reviewing how CSR has been historically defined and measured, Carroll (1999) suggested the concept needed to be fine-tuned, “revise[d] and adapt[ed]” (p. 292) with additional research. Although he amended his definition to reflect only economic, legal, and ethical dimensions (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003), few scholars have adopted the new framework.

Ultimately, scholars such as Dahlsrud (2008) believe the lack of a clear definition has created theoretical confusion in which researchers adopt CSR definitions that meet their needs. In his meta-analysis of both scholarly and industry definitions, Dahlsrud (2008) found that five
CSR dimensions repeatedly appeared: environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness. Despite the emergence of these overarching dimensions, Dahlsrud found that existing CSR definitions lacked context; for example, most definitions imply a need for “optimal performance above regulatory requirements” (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 12) but fail to identify accompanying standards and guidelines. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) offer one such definition, suggesting CSR is “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (p. 117). Arguably, similar definitions seemingly rely on an implicit suggestion that CSR should exceed stakeholder expectations, and definitions altogether fail to address “what constitutes the social responsibility of business” (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 12). Essentially, the lack of an operationalized definition has left the practice is theoretical limbo (Dahlsrud, 2008).

**CSR in Public Relations Research**

Scholarly research reflects the notion that CSR “is usually regarded as a public relations function” (Somerville & Wood, 2008, p. 152). Discussions about ethical public relations practices often turn into discussions about social responsibility (i.e., Baker, 1999; Bowen, 2004; Leeper, 1996) and public relations scholars have built a large body of literature dedicated to understanding CSR practices and benefits. Even so, the lack of a concrete CSR definition has posed challenges for scholars hoping to understand impacts, applications, and implications about the practice (Brown, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Dhanesh, 2012b; Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012). Current CSR definitions generally come from outside public relations literature (i.e., Carroll, 1979; Matten & Moon, 2008) and tend to change with time (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010). As Dhanesh (2012b) points out, “the field of CSR is filled with numerous definitions proposed from diverse perspectives” (p. 40) and public relations
scholars in particular do not seem to have an agreed-upon definition from which to examine the practice (see also Coombs & Holladay, 2009). This appears exacerbated by the fact that relatively few public relations scholars have overtly defined CSR or provided their working definitions within recent research. Scholars often report vague and, more problematically, presumed CSR definitions. As seen in broader business-based conceptualizations of CSR, definitions almost evade actual defining by reiterating the core terms without establishing baseline expectations (Dahlsrud, 2008). For example, Rolland and Bazzoni (2009) built on Werther and Chandler’s (2006) conceptualization of CSR, suggesting:

CSR can be discerned in these three words in that it covers the relationship between corporations and the societies with which they interact, it includes the responsibilities that are inherent on both sides of these relationships and by society, it includes all stakeholders and constituent groups that maintain on-going interest in the corporation’s operations (Rolland & Bazzoni, 2009, p. 250).

Similarly, Nielsen and Thomson (2009) point out that “according to Matten and Moon (2008), the precise definition of CSR is at the discretion of the enterprise concerned, i.e. enterprises are rooted in a specific social and cultural context” (p. 178). In other words, these definitions suggest CSR represents business responsibilities to society at large, but details about the types of responsibilities, the goals of responsibility, and the societal constituents are left unexplained.

Despite these challenges, public relations scholars have outlined, defined, and conducted research within the context of recognizable CSR variables. Although some argue CSR is an emerging practice that has loose definitional boundaries and does not yet resemble a theory (Spangler & Pompper, 2011), and others see CSR as a practice that creates opportunities to establish public relations as a strategic management function (Coombs & Holladay, 2009), recent
studies generally define the practice within the context of a few over-arching and widely recognized principles. Scholars often point to Carroll’s (1979) original definition (Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008; Byrd, 2009; Dhanesh, 2012b; Kim & Reber, 2008; Liu, Jia, & Li, 2011; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Nielsen & Thomson, 2009; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; Schmeltz, 2012), and while profit (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013) and reputational benefits (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010) are identified as CSR benefits, most scholars view the practice as something that voluntarily addresses societal concerns beyond those defined by legal requirements (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Hou & Reber, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; O’Connor, Shumate, & Meister, 2008; White, Vanc, & Coman, 2011). Both moral and discretionary approaches to CSR have been identified, with the former “address[ing] legal and ethical constraints” and the latter “reflect[ing] voluntary choices to improve the condition of society” (Rumsey & White, 2009, p. 301). Conceptually, corporations have a broad duty to society (Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009) and must “act as good citizens” (Kim & Reber, 2008, p. 338). This frequently involves meeting or exceeding societal demands and expectations, engaging in sustainable behavior, making philanthropic contributions, and practicing general community involvement (i.e., Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Gill, Dickinson, & Scharl, 2008; Golob, Jancic, & Lah, 2009; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Kim & Reber, 2008; Lee & Shin, 2010; Sones, Grantham, & Vieira, 2009; Spangler & Pompper, 2011; Sutantoputra, 2009; Trapp, 2012). Despite the lack of a clear CSR definition, public relations scholars have actively tackled understanding CSR communication practices and outcomes by relying on widely-recognized principles related to economic, social, and environmental impacts.
As public relations scholars have expanded literature examining CSR communication strategies and impacts, strategies have been explored primarily via case studies and content analyses, while impacts have been tested via experiments and surveys. Content analyses and case studies have generally relied on existing CSR definitions and have been particularly useful for describing both CSR practice and theory. Research has illuminated how CSR is positioned by CEOs (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012), described on corporate websites (Gill et al., 2008; Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Kim, Nam, & Kang, 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; Rolland & Bazzoni, 2009; Sones et al., 2009; Tang & Li, 2009), positioned in CSR reports (Hou & Reber, 2011; O’Connor & Gronewold, 2012), perceived by stakeholders (Cho & Hong, 2009; Duhe, 2009; Ragas & Roberts, 2009), and practiced by small and medium enterprises (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Lee, Mak & Pang, 2012; Nielsen & Thomson, 2009). Focus groups have enhanced academic understanding of how stakeholders perceive and define CSR (O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; O’Connor et al., 2008) and in-depth interviews have yielded insight into perceptions about CSR from the perspectives of public relations managers (Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Spangler & Pompper, 2011) and organizational employees (Uusi-Rauva & Nurkka, 2010). Similarly, surveys and experiments have used complementary theoretical frameworks to illuminate CSR benefits such as enhancing purchase intentions (Baksh-Mohammed, Callison, & Choi, 2012; Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012; Wigley, 2008), salient beliefs (Werder, 2008), stakeholder commitments (Dhanesh, 2012b), legitimacy (Bortree, 2009; Farache & Perks, 2010), trust (Hong & Rim, 2010), and reputation (Jo, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2011). Recent content analyses—particularly of web- and report-based CSR statements—and surveys highlight current knowledge about CSR practices and impacts.
As a prime tool for disseminating organizational information, websites are “an essential space through which to diffuse information about corporate responsibility” (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007, p. 87; see also Gill et al., 2008; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). Disseminating CSR information via the web can build stakeholder trust (Gomez & Chalmeta, 2011; Hong & Rim, 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009) and awareness of CSR strategies, which notably enhances both attitudes and trust while increasing stakeholder purchase intentions (Wigley, 2008). Although web analyses are primarily descriptive, they reveal widely used frameworks informative for understanding how CSR is being practiced. Tang and Li (2009) and O’Connor & Shumate (2010) both used Carroll’s typology outlining CSR as philanthropic, ethical, economic and legal to explore communication on organizational websites. In both cases, research suggested that concepts such as stakeholder responsibility, environmental awareness, and social duties were important to explicating CSR practices. O’Connor & Shumate (2010) found that corporate CSR rationale statements often identified beneficiaries (such as employees) and focused on communicating practices such as philanthropy (“quality of life,” volunteerism), ethical responsibility (environmental stewardship, health and safety, employee performance), and economic responsibility (community growth and development, production of useful goods and services). Legal aspects of CSR were less frequently noted. Similarly, Tang and Li (2009) found that Western conceptualizations of CSR mapped onto the CSR practices reported on Chinese company websites, although CSR was more likely to be communicated as ad hoc philanthropy, strategic philanthropy, and ethical business conduct. Research also suggests organizations use the web to communicate a triple-bottom line perspective of CSR, focusing on environmental, economic, and social impacts (Gill et al., 2010). Even when studies do not explicitly examine a triple-bottom line approach, findings suggest organizations communicate primarily about triple-
bottom line objectives related to environmental responsibility, social actions, human rights, philanthropy, and ethical business conduct (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Gill et al., 2010; Hou & Reber, 2011; Kim et al., 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; Sone et al., 2009; Tang & Li, 2009). One analysis of CEO statements appearing on the websites of Fortune magazine’s “Most Admired Companies” showed that the most commonly addressed CSR categories were economic responsibility, ethical responsibility, and community commitment (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012). Noticeably missing from this body of findings—and, more specifically, content analyses using the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as a framework (Gill et al., 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009)—is a focus on legal context. This lends credibility to the notion that CSR is implicitly a practice that requires organizations to go above and beyond what is legally required (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009), making it unnecessary for companies to report legal dimensions of social responsibility.

Findings such as these are complemented by research that examines how attitudes and behavior are affected by CSR communication. Surveys and experiments have been particularly useful for exploring these stakeholder outcomes. Recent public relations research has focused on how CSR practices impact varying behavioral intentions and consumer beliefs (Dhanesh, 2012b; Hong & Rim, 2010; Hong, Yang, & Rim, 2010; Kim & Choi, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2012; Lee & Shin, 2010; Wigley, 2008). Wigley (2008) tested the “commonly held assumption that has been virtually overlooked until now” (p. 308): that exposure to CSR messages enhances consumer awareness and attitudes. Exposure to messages about organizational CSR increased awareness of CSR activity; heightened awareness subsequently enhanced attitudes toward organizations and increased purchase intentions. Internationally, Lee and Shin (2010) found that CSR awareness similarly impacted purchase intentions; however, only perceptions of social and local community
contributions impacted those intentions. Similarly, Hong and Rim (2010) found that Wegman's Food Markets, Inc. customers who engaged with the supermarket’s website were more likely to have more positive perceptions about Wegmans’ CSR activities. The positive perceptions enhanced consumer trust and were positively associated with positive word-of-mouth communication intentions. Building on these findings, Hong et al. (2010) found that positive perceptions of CSR activities enhanced consumer intentions to provide organizational feedback (or engage in dialogue with organizations) and enhanced consumer identification with the company. Additional research suggests that firm- and public-serving motives may have little to do with supportive behavior intentions—instead, especially within stigmatized industries, perceptions may be based on levels of sincerity in communication (Kim & Lee, 2012; Ragas & Roberts, 2009). Finally, even among internal stakeholder such as employees, CSR can predict and impact organizational commitment. Adopting Carroll’s four dimensions, Dhanesh (2012b) found that “CSR practice is a significant predictor of organizational commitment, a construct that has previously been shown to positively influence other organisational outcomes such as employee motivation, productivity, turnover rates and absenteeism” (p. 51). However, as with the previously noted content analyses, Dhanesh (2012b) found that of Carroll’s four dimensions, legal commitments did not impact organizational commitment as much as discretionary, economic, and ethical practices.

Although public relations research within the previous five years has failed to clearly define CSR, this body of literature has explored similar, overlapping dimensions of CSR. Carroll’s four dimensions have remained a staple in current research, although findings suggest the legal dimension may be superfluous and legal obligations may be an insufficient measure of CSR practices going above and beyond what is required of organizations (Hou & Reber, 2011;
Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). This suggests that examining CSR along environmental, social, and economic dimensions may be more appropriate for public relations scholarship, particularly because these dimensions emerge in practice. Content analyses suggest these dimensions are widely described by organizations, especially via corporate websites (Hou & Reber, 2011; Gill et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2010; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Sone et al., 2009; Tang & Li, 2009). Similarly, research suggests positive perceptions of CSR enhance organizational trust, identification, and commitment as well as purchase, word-of-mouth, and dialogic intentions (Dhanesh, 2012b; Kim & Lee, 2012; Hong & Rim, 2010; Hong et al., 2010; Lee & Shin, 2010; Wigley, 2008).

To build on these findings and begin introducing the nonprofit perspective to this research, the following section both defines nonprofit organizations and explores how organization-public relationships drive much of the current public relations nonprofit literature.

Nonprofit Communication

Defining Nonprofit Organizations

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS, 2012) defines nonprofit organizations as tax-exempt entities that “must be organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes set forth in section 501(c)(3), and none of its earnings may inure to any private shareholder or individual” (para. 1). Also known as charitable organizations, nonprofits may not take part in political or lobbying activities (IRS, 2012) and are generally defined as either public charities or private foundations (IRS, 2013). Public charities include “churches, hospitals, qualified medical research organizations affiliated with hospitals, schools, colleges and universities” (IRS, 2013, para. 2), have active fundraising and contribution programs, and actively support sometimes multiple public charities (IRS, 2013). Conversely, “private foundations… typically have a single major
source of funding… and most have as their primary activity the making of grants to other charitable organizations and to individuals, rather than the direct operation of charitable programs” (IRS, 2013, para. 2). Nonprofits that meet this definition are the primary benefitting organizations of interest in this study.

**Nonprofit Partnerships**

Nonprofit sector collaboration is widely studied in the context of business—such as management and marketing—sociology, and public administration literature. Because a full review of this literature is outside the scope of this research, key partnership types, dimensions, and characteristics are discussed.

In this context, partnerships are defined as high-collaboration relationships between nonprofit organizations and businesses, which are usually marked by shared organizational goals of addressing social issues (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009; Shaw, 2003). Organizations in partnerships share resources and experience to achieve mutual goals. Also referred to as cause-based partnerships (CBP) and cross-sector partnerships to address social issues (CSSPs), nonprofit partnerships exist between various business entities (Parker & Selsky, 2004; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Referring to them as partnership “arenas,” Selsky and Parker (2005) have examined how business-nonprofit, business-government, government-nonprofit, and trisector partnerships exist and can be used to explore partnership activity in the context of resource dependence, social issues, and societal sector platforms. Scholars have spent considerable time exploring how partnerships are implemented (Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009), often focusing on the need for partnering organizations to create mutual goals, show organizational commitment, communicate regularly via designated individuals, share resources, and evaluate efforts.
In this vein, a number of dimensions exist to describe relationship strength between nonprofit and collaborative partners. Austin (2000) proposes a Collaboration Continuum that presents 7 dimensions along which partnerships can be evaluated. These continuum-based dimensions include level of engagement, importance to mission, magnitude of resources, scope of activities, interaction level, managerial complexity, and strategic values. At the low—or philanthropic—end of these dimensions, organizations engage in purely philanthropic relationships that are marked by distribution, more than sharing of resources. By enhancing the strength of the dimensions, however, integrative relationships can be formed wherein there are collaborative, highly strategic approaches to the relationships. Balancing this continuum, transactional relationships fall within the philanthropic and integrative relationship types, and are often based on cause-related marketing or sponsorship strategies that require lower levels of organizational investment, engagement, and strategy.

To build on dimensions such as these, a number of characteristics have been identified as defining partnerships. While Jamali and Keshishian (2009) suggest that partnerships include characteristics such as—but not limited to—resources dependency, commitment symmetry, individual excellence, investment, and integrity, others have explored how trust (Alexander & Nank, 2009; Gazley, 2010), mutuality and organization identity (Brinkerhoff, 2002), relationship longevity (Alexander & Nank, 2009), and power (Parker & Selsky, 2004; Selsky & Parker, 2005) impact partnership strength. Shaw outlines that:

“Studies of successful collaborative projects in the for-profit sector identify eight main characteristics: trust, flexibility, understanding, balance of power, shared mission, compatibility, communication, and commitment. All of these characteristics are interrelated and support each other, leading to collaborations that may be deemed
successful because the partners stay the course, overcome obstacles, and achieve objectives” (2003, p. 110).

These characteristics showcase the importance not only of trust, but of relationship longevity. Gazley suggests that trust is a factor that “can be an outcome as well as an ingredient of collaborative activity” (2010, p. 655). Examining the development of nonprofit and public agency relationships over a 10-year period, Alexander and Nank (2009) found that trust evolves and strengthens over time, even when nonprofits entered the relationships with an overt distrust of the agency they worked with. The increasing levels of trust resulted in shared progress between the organizations. For example, public agencies internally loosened some of their structural practices and externally gained more trust and respect from nonprofits and community constituents. Nonprofits, on the other hand, were increasingly capable of strengthening their programs and encouraging more significant social impacts. Additionally, research suggests that mutual investment in and shared goals toward issues can strengthen partnerships and relationship longevity, which also serves as an indicator of partnership strength (Gazley, 2010). Although challenges do exist to impact relationship strength—such as structural and strategic implementation challenges (Babiak & Thibeault, 2009)—it seems trust and longevity are key predictors of relationship strength in these contexts.

Nonprofits and the Organization-Public Relationship

Public relations research on nonprofit organizations primarily focuses on understanding how organizational-public relationships (OPR) impact nonprofit stakeholders such as volunteers (Bortree, 2011; Bortree & Waters, 2010; Francis, 2011; Waters & Bortree, 2010, 2012), donors (O’Neil, 2007; Waters, 2008, 2009, 2011), and nonprofit members (Banning & Schoen, 2007). Findings suggest that understanding how relationships are established between nonprofit
organizations and stakeholders helps enhance the benefits yielded by nonprofits. Specifically, OPR dimensions related to trust, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships, and openness can enhance stakeholder beliefs about nonprofits while increasing intentions to engage with those organizations. For example, among donors, OPR dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction and communal relationship were positively correlated with donation size and years of support (O’Neil, 2007). Overall positive perceptions of the nonprofit relationship also predict donor intentions to give and willingness to encourage others to donate. Banning and Schoen (2007) found that OPR predicted retention among members of an art museum, and although annual and major gift donors seemingly evaluate their nonprofit relationships on different OPR dimensions, research suggests that positive relationships with nonprofits predict donation behaviors (Waters, 2011). Although these findings are positive, use of coorientation methodology has found that nonprofit fundraisers evaluate their OPR relationships more favorably than donors (Waters, 2009). This suggests that underlying issues exist in which there is a gap between nonprofit and donor perceptions of giving relationships.

Similarly, studies about volunteerism highlight positive relationships using OPR dimensions while considering potential mediating variables in the OPR relationship. Waters and Bortree (2012) found that inclusion strategies impact male and female volunteers’ future intentions to volunteer. Among teenage volunteers, trust is a stronger predictor of volunteering intentions (Waters & Bortree, 2010), while factors such as involvement and relationship quality can mediate these relationship (Bortree, 2011; Bortree & Waters, 2010).

Arguably, these findings are important for considering and conceptualizing the overall nonprofit perspective of CSR. By positioning the nonprofit organization as the primary public of interest in a giving relationship, researchers can examine relationship-driven benefits yielded by
nonprofits. This approach conceptualizes nonprofits as relationship-driven organizations that carefully navigate ideas related to trust, commitment, and satisfaction among key stakeholders. However, existing research does not seem to consider how relationships beyond those established with donors, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations are created and maintained.

First, it is reasonable to suggest that relationships can be formed between nonprofits and corporations, and the strength of those relationships can be examined via OPR dimensions. Second, if gaps exist between nonprofit and donor perceptions (Waters, 2009), the same types of gaps may be occurring between nonprofits and corporate partners in CSR relationships. For example, nonprofits recognize that various conditions, interactions, and consequences drive these relationships (Rumsey & White, 2009). Because of various market pressures, nonprofits also realize they have opportunities to attract corporate partners because of the reputational benefits yielded by CSR practices. As previously noted, however, research fails to extend beyond this limited understanding of nonprofit perceptions of CSR relationships. And while OPR dimensions are not explicitly explored within this study—in part because of the desire to explore emergent perceptions—research related to nonprofit organizations suggests that exploring the nonprofit perspective of organization-to-organization relationships can illustrate how to establish relationships of varying strength while closing gaps in existing nonprofit research. Arguably, these gaps can be explored, elaborate, and conceptualized within the context of sport CSR.

**Sport CSR**

Although sport CSR has yet to emerge in public relations literature, the field has gained increasing interest among business and management scholars. In recent years the *Journal of Sport Management* (2009), *Journal of Management and Organization* (2010), and *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* (2011) have published special issues dedicated to
CSR in sport, while the first book to explore sport CSR was published in 2013 (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak & Wolfe, 2013a). Scholars have called for better integration of social responsibility in sport management pedagogy and scholarship (Mallen, Bradish, & MacLean, 2008; Ratten, 2010b), and have positioned sport as a unique industry for creating social change (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Godfrey, 2009). To strengthen these efforts, Babiak and Wolfe (2013) defined social responsibility of sport as the “socially responsible activities and initiatives engaged in by professional sport businesses and organizations” (p. 21). These entities include for-profit sports organizations, non-profit sport oriented organizations, professional teams and leagues, and sport-based individuals such as athletes and coaches. This section explores the state of sport CSR research, focusing on key frameworks proposed for guiding existing scholarship before challenges to and gaps in this body of literature are reviewed.

**Developing Sport CSR**

Early sport CSR research examined the initiatives established for Super Bowl XL in Detroit, finding that the National Football League (NFL) implemented programs related to education, culture, infrastructure, and charity (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). Estimates suggest the league contributed more than $5.8 million to programming that supported local, minority-owned businesses; provided $6 million to establish and maintain a youth education project in the host city; and used fundraising events to raise $8 million for more than 200 nonprofit organizations. Although these efforts generated controversy, they exemplify what leagues such as the NFL attempt to accomplish. More recently, Walters and Tacon (2013) used stakeholder engagement to assess how teams in European football leagues prioritize stakeholder-focused practices. They found that teams emphasize reporting practices, typically support local schools and youth programs, offer training and development programs as well as social events for employees, focus
primarily on recycling and waste minimization in the context of environmental issues, and prioritize the seriousness of social needs when determining CSR activities. Showcasing the scope of giving practices and even how sport CSR is practiced internationally, these two studies illustrate why Godfrey (2009) suggests that issues in CSR research—such as reframing the evaluative focus, addressing economic tradeoffs, exploring negative stakeholder reactions, and understanding global impacts—can be effectively explored within the context of sport. Elements of sport—including sport organizations as cognitive, regulative, and normative institutions—can set the stage for exploring concerns such as which social obligations sport should embrace, whether sport-based regulations should be encouraged outside games, and how sociological elements of sport can map on to issues related to values such as fair play and athletes as role models (Godfrey, 2009). Arguably, sport can actively “play [a] role as an important agent of social change” (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 696), particularly because the industry has been noted for its ability to provide both local and global platforms for initiating social change, in part because of the scope of large sporting events (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Carey, Mason, Misener, 2011; Misener & Mason, 2009).

Babiak and Wolfe (2006; 2009) have spearheaded efforts to present sport as a specialized industry within which to explore CSR. Specifically, they argue that four factors and six pillars set sport CSR efforts apart from those found in other industries (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, 2013; Godfrey, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walters, 2009). The four factors identified as unique to sport CSR include passion, economics, transparency, and stakeholder management, all of which can impact or be impacted by CSR practices. In the context of sport, passion refers to the devotion and emotion elicited by sport and fandom. Economics are the “unique economic elements of the sport industry” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 19) including antitrust protections and
public support for sport venues. Transparency involves the open knowledge and scrutiny that accompanies team transactions, organizational successes and failures, and employee (particularly player) behaviors. Finally, stakeholder management refers to the breadth of groups that sport organizations interact with, including “various levels of government, sponsors, fans, local communities, minor leagues, media, [and] players” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 19).

Extending the notion that CSR in sport can be specialized and contextualized, Babiak and Wolfe (2013) outline “six areas in which sports organizations practice [social] responsibility” (p. 21). These areas—or pillars—include labor relations, environmental management and sustainability, community relations, philanthropy, diversity and equity, and corporate governance. Labor relations refer to employee treatment; for example, how discourse about athlete concussions has emerged in the NFL and National Hockey League (NHL). The environmental pillar focuses on how sustainability has become prominent in sport, particularly as related to venue-building, management, and operations. Next, community relations “[encompass] businesses’ responsibility not to harm, and to make efforts to improve, their communities” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 24) by addressing and supporting community-based social issues such as homelessness, education, and health. Philanthropy refers to in-kind and monetary donations made by sport organizations; this includes initiatives such as grant programs that distribute funding to local nonprofits. The fifth pillar, diversity and equity, focuses on “creating a fair, equitable, and inclusive work environment” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 27), particularly as it relates to team employees and encouraging community-based diversity through CSR programming. Finally, corporate governance is a broad area that is concerned with establishing and enforcing ethical business practices such as oversight, accountability, risk identification, and transparency.
These pillars and factors emerge through existing research, which has focused primarily on understanding how sport CSR is viewed by executives (Babiak, 2010; Sheth & Babiak, 2010), how it is practiced by teams and athletes (Babiak, Heinze, Lee, & Juravich, 2013; Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Cousens, Babiak, & Bradish, 2006; Tainsky & Babiak, 2011), and how its benefits can be maximized using practical models (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Berrett & Slack, 2001; Breitbarth & Harris, 2008). Findings have depended on in-depth interviews and case studies describing why and what CSR initiatives have been undertaken in the industry (i.e., Babiak et al., 2012; Collins, Flynn, Munday, & Roberts, 2007; Babiak, 2006), including why executives view CSR as a necessary component of sports management (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009) and how internal and external drivers can influence sports organizations in their choices of CSR involvement (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). These approaches to sport CSR development have embraced attempts to recognize and incorporate organizational, practitioner, and athlete goals and experiences. For example, although CSR in sport is often a strategic endeavor, it is also driven by athlete desires to give back to their communities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Babiak et al., 2012, 2013). Many athletes actively create their own charitable foundations both for the derived personal satisfaction and because they are compelled to serve as role models. As one athlete suggested: “The community gives us a lot, and so for me, it is important for me to be seen giving back to the community that supports me and my team so strongly” (Babiak et al., 2012, p. 168).

From an organizational perspective, Babiak and Wolfe’s (2009) preliminary study of sport CSR found that organizations are influenced by external and internal pressure to establish CSR initiatives. Because teams are ingrained in their communities, they are expected to maintain a responsible presence. For example, community advocates encourage teams to be philanthropic.
because of their available financial and physical resources and the varying infrastructural support they receive (e.g. stadium-based tax breaks). Teams and leagues also face external pressures to address environmental concerns because of the impacts they create and because proactively addressing environmental problems can reduce legal and stakeholder challenges related to energy consumption and sustainability (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2010). Finally, many teams are required to engage in specific CSR initiatives because of league mandates (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). The National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Read to Achieve program is one such required league-mandated initiative that is spearheaded by the league and implemented locally through teams. Internally, sport organizations engage in CSR because executives recognize they have valuable and rare resources at their disposal (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). In addition to having multiple outlets for engaging and reaching stakeholders, sport teams have resources such as regular media access and coverage, physical spaces such as stadia, and high-profile public figures such as athletes and coaches. Athletes particularly recognize the benefit of added media attention to generate more interest for their causes (Babiak et al., 2012).

Notably, Babiak and Wolfe (2009) argue that in sport the “identity, admiration, and passion are imperfectly inimitable” and “organizations not in the sport industry cannot duplicate or develop substitutes for these resources” (p. 732). Sport executives point to players, coaches, and team owners as recognizable individuals who can be harnessed for positive social change. These insights led Babiak and Wolfe (2009) to establish a framework for the adoption of CSR in professional sport. Arguably, the most valuable approach identified is strategic-CSR, which “leverage[s] a company’s core competencies and take[s] societal needs into account” while carrying “optimum benefits for their beneficiaries and for the company” (p. 736). Survey research elaborating these findings suggests that “professional sport executives approach CSR in
a community-oriented, collaborative, and strategic manner in order to achieve their ethical, philanthropic, and legal responsibilities” (Sheth & Babiak, 2010, p. 446).

Although this and the earlier framework highlighting internal and external factors contributing to the corporate-sport organization relationship were designed to assess sponsorship relationships between sports organizations and benefiting partners (Cousens et al., 2006), little has been done to elaborate or test its assumptions. It is possible that because the framework was established within a marketing context—one that aimed to generate the most benefits for the sport organization and its corporate partners—it has received little attention to date. Arguably, this lack of empirical, theoretical development of ideas stands as one of the primary gaps in existing sport CSR research.

Challenges and Gaps in Sport CSR

Providing a critical assessment of sport CSR, Levermore (2013) suggests “that the majority of CSR through sport lacks sufficient substance, promotes too much greenwashing and distorts power relations” (p. 52). Arguing that the sport industry is inherently corrupt, Levermore (2013) believes that using CSR as a strategic approach to enhance competitive advantages, brand identity, reputation, and consumer activity undermines social responsibility practices. Charging international sport organizations with implementing strategies that are disengaged and distant, he suggests awareness campaigns and CSR initiatives are tied to unrealistic or weak objectives. He also argues that “greenwashing” occurs when sport teams, leagues, and bodies implement CSR strategies that cover up, ignore, or draw attention away from cheating and corruption in sport. Finally, he posits that CSR in sport is “largely driven by asymmetrical power relations, where initiatives are heavily influenced by aims infused with top-down, northern, competitive, heterosexual and masculinist traits” (Levermore, 2013, p. 56). In short, the power enjoyed by
sport leagues and institutions privileges the elite and makes those without resources unable to challenge these entities. Sadly, these comments are not without merit, making it increasingly important to conceptualize and encourage ethical CSR practices, particularly in sport. One way to start doing this is by filling in gaps in existing sport CSR literature, particularly as it pertains to measurement and methodological approaches.

With sport CSR scholarship still in its formative stages, benefits of CSR practices and managerial challenges related to measuring CSR and its impacts are considered complex and underdeveloped (Paramio-Salcines et al., 2013a). To this point, measurement has focused primarily on understanding benefits to the practicing organizations, examining how CSR is perceived by stakeholders and enhances image and reputation (Walker, Heere, & Kim, 2013). Additionally, attempts to situate benefits using business and management approaches have yielded inconclusive results. In the sport context, an analysis of financial correlations may be insufficient due to the lack of stakeholders and role of affect (Waddington, Chelladurai, & Skirstad, 2013). Professional teams are typically privately held corporations, and the primary objective for most owners involves winning games as opposed to increasing profits. Further, scholars who utilize attendance as a measure of impacts generate weak or insignificant results believed to be due, in part, to the fact that attendance is often predicated on team success and driven by affect toward teams. Additionally, little work has explored the impacts of responsibility, particularly in the context of who benefits and how (Waddington et al., 2013). And while scholars are increasingly making calls to understand the societal benefits created by sport CSR practices (Walker et. al, 2013; Inoue & Kent, 2013; Godfrey, 2009), research has yet to move into a stage of empirical testing. Inoue and Kent’s (2013) proposed framework for understanding the social impact of sport CSR specifically focuses on intermediate and long-term...
individual and community impacts, and draws scholars closer to quantitatively measuring CSR impacts. However, the framework remains in a developmental phase, using a case study approach to justify the potential usefulness of the approach.

This lack of empirical analysis seems driven by the methodological gaps in sport CSR literature. Research in this area primarily relies on case analyses, interviews with sport executives, and surveys, and by failing to understand the consequences of CSR activities—focusing instead on image and reputational benefits—scholars have constructed a limited view of the practice. For example, survey research aimed at exploring stakeholder perceptions attempts to understand and gauge whether sports organizations can reap reputational benefits (Walker & Kent, 2009) and conceptual models have presented variables to enhance reputation, awareness, and program integration (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008). Additionally, although sport is considered unique due to its stakeholder reach—both through active stakeholder-, fan-, and media-based relationships—little work has examined how communication practices can enhance sport CSR. Instead, current CSR sport scholars overtly dismiss public relations practices, with some going so far as to suggest that strategic CSR is a marketing- and public relations-driven approach that “takes advantage of the consumer” (Walker et al., 2013, p. 311) by disseminating vague information about CSR impacts. Considering that existing business and management based commentaries seemingly reduce CSR benefits into opportunities to avoid media scrutiny and external regulations (Waddington et al., 2013), it is curious that communication-based approaches to sport CSR research are either ignored (e.g., Paramio-Salcines et al., 2013a) or criticized (e.g., Walker et al., 2013, Paramio-Salcines, Babiak, & Walters, 2013b). Paramio-Salcines et al. (2013b) take a particularly confusing stance, stating:
“… to what extent is CSR considered by sport organizations to be a marketing or PR tool? By itself this is not necessarily problematic: if a sport organization is able to realize business benefits from engaging in CSR, whether through an enhanced reputation that translates into increased attendance, improved levels of loyalty from fans, or through larger sponsorships deals then it can benefit both the sport organization and those stakeholders that benefit from the CSR initiatives. However, the point is that this comes back to the long-standing issue of why organizations engage in CSR and the concerns that if it is simply to deliver business-benefits then the level of engagement will perhaps be at a superficial level and that sport organizations are only moved by the issues that they perhaps feel will enhance their brand” (p. 345).

By questioning the public relations approach in this manner, current sport CSR scholars exhibit a failure to understand the relationship- and awareness-building practices privileged by public relations scholars. Additionally, they continue to reduce CSR practices to an organizational behavior intended to generate organizational benefits, thus prioritizing and praising the practices that arguably lead to stakeholder cynicism. Instead, it seems that embracing public relations scholarship and perspectives can seemingly answer the calls to focus on stakeholder benefits, understand more stakeholder perspectives, and take a more critical approach to understanding sport CSR practices, thus meeting the challenge of “companies do[ing] more than simply generat[ing] wealth and shareholder profits by demonstrating a commitment to societal issues through social and environmental activities” (Paramio-Salcines et al., 2013b).

As such, despite the value of proposed models and insights gleaned from sport executives and professionals, sport CSR scholarship is still developing. Researchers have yet to actively test proposed sport CSR frameworks and have only started understanding stakeholder impacts. And,
as with general CSR literature—particularly that based in public relations—beneficiaries have remained an unstudied stakeholder group. As such, although sport CSR research offers new insight into the implementation of CSR practices, a significant body of research remains uncovered. One way to begin bridging these gaps is to explore the use of cause-related marketing (CRM) strategies in sport CSR (Bradish & Cronin, 2009). Widely studied in marketing and business literature, CRM practices can help illuminate the sport-sponsor-beneficiary relationship.

**Cause-related Marketing**

Since the early 1980s when American Express blazed the trail for what has become known as cause-related marketing (CRM), businesses and nonprofits have regularly teamed up to support social causes (Ceasar, 1987; Cone, 2008). In 1983, as the Statue of Liberty celebrated its centennial anniversary, American Express partnered with the Statue of Liberty Foundation to raise funds for the statue’s renovation (Ceasar, 1987; Kotler & Lee, 2002). American Express committed to donate one cent each time one of their cards was used, ultimately raising $1.7 million for the foundation while seeing a reported 30 percent increase in transactions. Since then, CRM has become one of the most popular business approaches to social responsibility (Cone, 2008). In the context of CSR, cause marketing is defined as a “communications tool” that harnesses “advertising, packing, [and] promotions” (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001, p. 207) to simultaneously increase sales and do good. As CRM definitions have evolved, attempts have been made to moved this practice beyond a sales-only approach. Arguably, this has blurred the line between public relations- and marketing-based CSR practices. Although challenges exist for organizations implementing CRM programs—such as issues related to consumer cynicism (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001; Webb & Mohr, 1998) and overall costs (Porter & Kramer, 2002)—it still remains a popular approach for achieving product differentiation and enhancing organizational
reputation (Adkins, 1999; Bronn & Vrioni, 2001). This section explores the changing definitions of CRM before highlighting current research related to CRM strategies and impacts, particularly in the context of sport.

**Defining CRM**

Following American Express’ successful partnership with the Statue of Liberty Foundation, businesses and organizations have actively used CRM to boost sales and enhance consumer attitudes (Cesar, 1987; Cone, 2008), and the new philanthropic approach generated complementary interest among business scholars. Varadarajan and Menon (1988) explored the evolution of corporate philanthropy, showing its initial shift from a voluntary activity to a legally-required practice. Newer approaches to philanthropy suggested that corporations were becoming “driven by the concept of ‘enlightened self interest’” and were “realiz[ing] that, for their survival and competitive advantage, they must evolve from doing good to doing better” (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 59). By creating programs that could generate sales and help “worthy causes,” organizations were linking doing good with gaining competitive advantages. This led to the first general definition of CRM:

> Cause-related marketing is the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 60).

Notably, CRM was initially conceptualized as a profit-motivated form of giving that strategically tied philanthropy to product promotions and sales. Varadarajan and Menon (1988) took issue with varying CRM approaches, arguing that “the distinctive feature of CRM is the firm’s
contribution to a designated cause being linked to customers' engaging in revenue-producing transactions with the firm” (p. 60).

Recent conceptualizations of CRM have evolved to incorporate a wider array of benefits from and approaches to corporate philanthropy. As Adkins (1999) succinctly suggests, “business does not operate in a vacuum” (p. 52), and public relations scholars might argue that reducing CRM to a mere profit-mechanism serves to ignore the inherent goals of CSR. Because business greatly impacts and is impacted by society, Adkins argues “this impact needs to be understood, quantified and managed” (p. 52), while Kotler and Lee (2002) consider CRM one of the six social initiatives companies can use to practice CSR. Although a business-minded approach, CRM can and should break beyond the bonds of profit-driven relationships (Adkins, 1999). To encourage this, Adkins (1999) expanded previous definitions to conceptualize CRM as “a commercial activity by which businesses and charities or causes form a partnership with each other to market an image, product, or service for mutual benefit” (p. xvii). While this definition still establishes CRM as a practice for generating measurable returns on investment, the types of returns and approaches to generating those returns are shifted to portray CRM as a mutually beneficial philanthropic relationship; charities and causes should gain benefits from partnering with businesses that have greater reach and financial strength. And while partnering businesses should benefit from the established relationships, CRM should also resemble a form of corporate community investment, “a strategy… focusing on an alignment of the business objectives with the social, environmental and economic needs of the community in which it operates with the objectives of promoting its long term corporate interests and to enhance its reputation” (Adkins, 1999, p. 37). Although the goal is still to enhance corporate interests, it is done so with the recognition that business cannot be sustained without respecting communities and embracing the
varying responsibilities that come with having immense size, influence, and economic power (Adkins, 1999). A leading consumer- and cause-related research agency, Cone Communication, echoed the sentiment that the “cause” concept has changed with time, forwarding a definition of CRM that feels more like broad CSR rather than narrow CRM practices:

Cause is no longer just about driving short-term sales, but also creating trusted and lasting relationships with diverse stakeholders. In the future, companies will increasingly recognize how societal needs and business growth are intrinsically linked. Cause is evolving to new models of social engagement and global citizenship as companies become drivers of change (Cone, 2008, p. 5).

**CRM Practices and Impacts**

As an approach to corporate giving that involves generating positive outcomes for businesses and partners, CRM is used to enhance reputation, brand identify, and consumer trust; improve consumer attitudes toward brands and products; increase consumer behavioral intentions and product sales; and attract news customers (Adkins, 1999; Kotler & Lee, 2002). Although these benefits derive from activities that generate funding, donations, action, and awareness for nonprofit partners and social causes, the desire to establish and measure quantifiable outcomes has driven much of the existing industry and scholarly research.

Industry research shows CRM investments have grown in recent years. From 2011 to 2012, cause-related sponsorship spending grew from $1.68 billion to $1.70 billion in North America (IEG, 2013), and that number increased to $1.78 billion in 2013, good enough to account for 9% of all sponsorship spending in North America (IEG, 2014). Coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the American Express giving campaign, Cone (2008) released a comprehensive report highlighting the growth and development of CRM. In addition to noting
the longevity and impact of programs like the Ronald McDonald House Charities (established in 1984) and Box Tops for Education (which has generated $200 million since 1996), Cone’s findings showed consumers are increasingly aware of and engaged with cause-related business efforts. In 2008, 85% of study respondents felt it was “acceptable for companies to involve a cause in their marketing, compared to 66% in 1993” (Cone, 2008, p. 11). Additionally, nearly 80% of respondents would consider switching to a similar brand if it was associated with a cause of interest (Cone, 2008). These findings support the notion that creating long-term cause-related links can serve as a differentiating factor in increasingly homogenous marketplaces (Adkins, 1999; Bronn & Vriono, 2001). Research also showed that consumers overwhelmingly believe businesses are responsible for collaborating with government and nonprofits “to solve pressing social and environmental issues” (Cone, 2008, p. 15). This trend is reflected in companies supporting causes based on societal pressures, likely leading to recent rises in support for education, health, and environmental initiatives (Cone, 2008). Matching the belief that companies should prioritize local, community-based issues, consumers eagerly seek information and make purchasing decisions based on CRM activities. To achieve these outcomes, however, companies must promote their efforts to consumers who overwhelmingly believe businesses are responsible for communicating about ongoing initiatives. Here, CRM practices start treading the CSR spaces normally situated in public relations. Research suggests this demand encourages heightened trust toward companies and increases the likelihood that consumers will purchase products that demonstrate CRM impacts (Cone, 2012), which aligns with scholarly suggestions that communicating about CRM leads to reputational and financial benefits (Adkins, 1999). Existing scholarly research has supported the trends noted by IEG (2013) and Cone (2008, 2012), and most work in this area has explored attitude formation, purchase intentions, and
cause-brand fit, particularly via experimental research methods (i.e., Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Grau & Folse, 2007; Kim, Kwak, & Kim, 2010).

In line with industry findings, scholarly research suggests consumers expect businesses to be socially responsible, and CRM programs serve to positively impact consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Demetriou, Papsolomou, & Vrontis, 2009). Webb and Mohr (1998) provided and early framework for exploring consumer responses, encouraging research related to how CRM campaigns alter company images (and consumer attitudes) and, subsequently, consumer purchasing behaviors. Webb and Mohr (1998) posited CRM activities elicit varying responses from different types of consumers—skeptics, balancers, attribution-oriented, and socially concerned. Questions about the honesty and fairness of a promotion impact skeptics and attribution-oriented consumers’ willingness to support a cause. And among attribution-oriented and socially concerned consumers, the consistency of a business’ CSR programs and reasons for participating in a CRM program mediate perceptions about a company’s image. When considered in conjunction with traditional purchase criteria assessments, Webb and Mohr’s (1998) framework highlights the relationship between changes in company image leading to changes in purchase behaviors. Early empirical work supporting this framework examined the impact of CRM on purchase intentions and suggested a link between perceived corporate motivation and brand options (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000). If organizations were perceived as genuinely supporting a cause—in a non-exploitative manner—participants were more likely to favor brands promoting causes. Additionally, for brands selling products with similar price and quality, CRM strategies served as a differentiating mechanism among consumers (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Demetriou, Papsolomou, & Vrontis, 2009). Similar studies have replicated and extended these results. Grau and Folse (2007) found
that consumer issue involvement and proximity impacted willingness to support CRM initiatives; for less involved consumers, the more local a cause was, the more willing they were to alter their participatory behaviors. Additionally, involvement research suggests consumers are more likely to contribute to campaigns that allow a variety of donation options (Robinson, Irmak, & Jayachandran, 2012).

In addition to exploring the attitude-purchase intention relationship, CRM research has honed in on the cause-brand fit concept. Mixed results related to the effectiveness of aligning business and cause missions have led researchers to examine moderating variables that explain the outcomes of high or low cause-brand fit partnerships. For example, findings suggest that retailer-cause fit is moderated by perceptions about retailer motivations for implementing a CRM strategy and by existing consumer attitudes toward the cause (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007). Research also shows that level of fit can evoke different associations in the brand-attitude formation process (Bigne-Alcaniz, Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe, & Sanz-Blas, 2012). For consumers who believe a CRM program has high cause-brand fit, CSR associations are more likely to be elicited during the process of attitude formation. Consumers who believe the cause-brand fit is low tend to form attitudes based on perceptions about corporate ability. However, perceptions of cause-brand fit are also moderated by levels of consumer involvement. While fit has been shown to contribute to enhanced product evaluations, research suggests low involvement consumers make more heuristically-based decisions when choosing between products that do or do not support a cause (Hamlin & Wilson, 2004). Similarly, when CRM messages are imbedded in ads, a positive attitudinal effect is related to high brand-cause fit among consumers who are high in brand consciousness (Nan and Heo, 2007). This research suggests that current conceptualizations
of cause-brand fit and CRM impacts are moderated by numerous variables. One way to explore these more nuanced CRM impacts is to study cause marketing in the sports context.

**Sport Sponsorships**

As CRM initiatives took off in the mid-80s, sport sponsorships simultaneously grew (Wilber, 1988). The 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles was the first major sponsored sporting event, one that generated media exposure and brand-building opportunities for partners. What followed was unprecedented growth in sport-corporation partnerships. By 1988, reports suggested “that 3,700 companies will be involved in sports marketing programs” and “those companies will spend more than $1.75 billion” (Wilber, 1988, p. 8). Beyond the scope of general sponsorship, cause-related sports marketing (CRSM) also started gaining attention, and “although not wholly altruistic, cause related promotions help[ed] companies create a responsible image while making worthwhile contributions to communities” (Wilber, 1988, p. 10). As sport presented new marketing opportunities that allowed companies to more finely target consumers using refined demographic, psychographic, and geographic analyses, some questioned whether the sport industry was reaching sponsorship saturation (Wilber, 1988). They hardly knew how wrong their predictions were. By 2012, overall sponsorship spending in sport hit staggering numbers, reaching $13.01 billion (IEG, 2013). That number increased by 5.1% to $13.68 billion in 2013, accounting for 69% of overall sponsorship spending in North America (IEG, 2014).

Highlighting the pervasiveness of sport sponsorships, these numbers implicitly suggest the value sponsors place on the reach, visibility, and marketing opportunities in sports.

Although these numbers do not indicate how much is spent on cause-related marketing in sport, research suggests sport organizations primarily practice CSR by actively establishing CRM, social marketing, and cause sponsorship programs (Kwak & Cornwell, 2013; Pharr &
Lough, 2012). Arguably, in this context, social responsibility benefits can transfer to CRM efforts, particularly if cause marketing and sponsorship is conceptualized as a philanthropic aspect of CSR (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001; Kwak & Cornwell, 2013; Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). For example, prior to the fallout from his doping scandal, Lance Armstrong served as an example of how sporting stature could drive cause awareness (Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2013; McGlone & Martin, 2006). By its 15th anniversary, the Livestrong Foundation had raised $500 million (Mintz, 2012), sold at least 47 million wristbands (McGlone & Martin, 2006), and had partnered with a wide range of notable organizations including Nike, Oakley, RadioShack, and American Century Investments (Lance Armstrong Foundation, 2011; McGlone & Martin, 2006). At one time, the relationship between Livestrong and Nike was recognized as a partnership that provided reputational protection to Nike through a CRSM program whose benefits outweighed its risks (McGlone & Martin, 2006). Although this example highlights the challenges of this approach to social responsibility, the size and reach of the sport industry has prompted scholars to begin looking at the advantages of CRSM and sport sponsorship strategies.

**Cause-related Sports Marketing**

An early exploration into CRSM, defined it as “strategic sport marketing aimed at creating a mutually beneficial link between a company, sport organization, or athlete and a social cause through the use of sports events and programs” (Lachowetz and Gladden, 2003, p. 319). More recently, Kwak and Cornwell (2013) have embraced the term cause-linked marketing, expanding sport-based conceptualizations of CRM to highlight the practice as “an alliance between a sport property and a nonprofit organization and the entire array of cause-promoting activities in which it engages (e.g., donation, fundraising, sale of licensed merchandise)” (p. 286). In this context, cause-linked sponsorship is also differentiated, “refer[ing] to linking the
brand to an event or property that promotes socially responsive causes” (Kwak & Cornwell, 2013, p. 286). Arguably, these definitions begin to blur the lines of CSR and CRM strategies in sport. As Lachowetz and Gladden (2003) highlight the potential relationships between multiple organizational entities, athletes, causes, and nonprofits, and suggest “many business relationships, including in sport, occur not as sponsor-sponsee relations but as alliances for mutual benefit” (p. 319), Kwak and Cornwell emphasize the philanthropic and promotional nature of these practices. These relationships may be initiated by corporations or the sport leagues and teams, and it is common for major professional leagues to have CRSM and sponsorship initiatives that align with specific causes or organizations (Kwak & Cornwell, 2013; Lachowetz & Gladden, 2003). The NFL is one league that promotes its involvement with various emergency relief efforts while running a $150 million Youth Football Fund and offering $10 million in grants annually (National Football League, 2011).

Similar to general CRM programs, research suggests that CRSM and sponsorship initiatives can enhance brand image and consumer attitudes, can impact behavioral intentions, and can influence brand switching for CRSM partners (Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell, & Clark, 2003; Lachowetz & Gladden, 2003). Gwinner and Bennett (2008) found that brand cohesiveness and sport identification predicted the cause-brand fit link, which is also explored in general CRM research. Findings suggest brand cohesiveness—“the extent to which the brand image is characterized by associations or subsets of associations that share meaning” (Keller, 1993, p. 7 quoted in Gwinner & Bennett, 2008, p. 413)—and sport identification (social identification with a particular sport) lead to increased brand knowledge, allowing consumers to make more nuanced assessments of brand fit characteristics and leading to enhanced attitudes toward sponsors and greater purchase intentions (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). This relationship is
supported by research that shows active stakeholders with greater knowledge about sponsored sporting events and participating sponsors have stronger attitudes and purchase intentions (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Close, Finney, Lacey, & Sneath, 2006). Additionally, involvement impacts attendee satisfaction at sport events organized by not-for-profit organizations while significantly increasing the willingness to attend similar events (Taylor & Shank, 2008).

However, research also shows that CRSM may not be a surefire way for sport teams to reach sport consumers. Roy and Graeff (2003) found that associating with a cause did not enhance brand image for teams more significantly than for other businesses, and consumers actually had lower purchase intentions for teams than other business. Similarly, Kim et al. (2010) found that CRM enhanced spectator attitudes toward teams, but did not influence spectators to re-attend games—instead, the choice to attend games was based primarily on attitude toward the team. This was compounded by the fact that a team’s motivations for engaging in CRM did not impact fan attitudes or attendance intentions. Finally, Lee and Ferreira (2011) found that team identification superseded cause identification when consumers were offered choices between purchasing team-licensed products with or without cause-related ties.

Although these findings seemingly work against the notion of implementing sport CRM initiatives, a number of factors have been left underappreciated or possibly misinterpreted. Roy and Graeff (2003) acknowledge, for example, that the cost of attending sporting events may serve as a differentiating device when determining purchase intentions. And while Kim et al. (2010) suggest “CRM is an important predictor of sport consumption behaviors regardless of the perceived motive for the team’s CRM” and “there may be universal appeal and effectiveness of CRM in a sport context” (p. 524), these findings are dubious. Research suggests more active fans
are more likely to identify with CRSM, and the lack of impact related to team motivation may have less to do with “universal appeal and effectiveness” and more to do with fan identification among active stakeholders (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008). The fact that spectators—or highly involved consumers—at a sporting event were surveyed highlights a key issue with existing CRSM research. In sport, active stakeholders exist regardless of CRM or other promotional strategies, and loyalty and identification associated with sport fandom means CRM and promotional strategies may better serve as differentiators among less invested spectators and sport stakeholders. For example, an exploration of merchandise purchasing intentions revealed that less active fans were more likely to buy team merchandise if it promoted a cause (Lee & Ferreira, 2011). Additionally, studies show that within high or low cause-brand fit contexts, consumer involvement levels can impact attitudes and behavioral intentions (i.e., Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Nan & Heo, 2007).

Arguably, existing research may not explore the full potential of CRSM impacts. For example, instead of examining whether CRSM enhances attitudes and purchase intentions among existing fans toward specific teams, researchers should examine ideas related to whether CRSM programs enhance fan attitudes and involvement related to the causes and partners being supported. Although this is outside the scope of the current study, it shows just one of the stakeholder perspectives seemingly lost in CRSM research. Additionally, scholars have failed to consider and explore the beneficiaries’ perspectives in the CRSM relationship. Although teams are capable of reaping certain benefits from active and passive stakeholders, research has not uncovered whether and how those benefits are transferred to partnering organizations. This is a CRSM area worthy of exploration, particularly because CRM research has shown that less involved consumers find local causes most appealing (Grau & Folse, 2007) and outside
organizations have yielded behavioral and reputational benefits by partnering with sport entities (Irwin, Lachowetz, & Clark, 2010; Lachowetz & Irwin, 2002). The “local” nature of sport teams may enhance opportunities for partnering organizations to reach less involved stakeholders through appeals to community connections, and it is possible that certain CRSM benefits may be reaped by partners rather than teams.

Essentially, current CRSM research has ignored one of Lachowetz and Gladden’s (2003) defining principles—that CRSM involves multiple organizations. Although the benefits to sports organizations and sponsors have been examined, research has failed to tap into the third member of the sport organization relationship; the benefitting causes and cause organizations (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Because the sport industry may have better brand-fit options both for themselves and for other organizations (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), this study partially aims to uncover the social impacts yielded from CRSM initiatives.

In addition to considering gaps in existing CSR and CRM literature, normative gaps will be addressed by this research. Specifically, although normative theories about public relations and CSR have been explored, scholars have yet to consider how an ethics of care approach may be most suitable for theorizing about and practicing CSR, and sport CSR scholars have altogether failed to consider normative ethical approaches to the practice. As such, especially with the effort to explore new stakeholder groups—that of the beneficiaries—it seems ethics of care can provide a new and insightful way of studying CSR impacts. A review of current normative approaches to public relations and CSR, as well as a review of ethics of care, follows.

**Ethics of Care**

Although CSR has been conceptualized within normative ethical frameworks such as utilitarianism (i.e. Lantos, 2002), deontology (i.e., Bowen 2004, 2007), and communitarianism
(i.e., Baker, 1999), these ethical lenses seemingly overlook or under-appreciate the relationship-building approaches stressed in public relations and CSR research. Because the dominant normative frameworks are marked by critical flaws when applied to public relations and CSR practices, this study presents ethics of care as a more beneficial normative theory for conceptualizing good CSR practices that embrace relationship-building with partners.

This section begins with an exploration of four normative theories—teleology, deontology, communitarianism, and ethics of care—establishing how they have been applied to public relations and CSR. The strengths and weaknesses of these approaches are discussed, followed by a review of the historical development and current constructions of care, thus setting the foundation to critically consider how care may be a beneficial ethical lens for establishing, conceptualizing, and defining good CSR practices as a relationship-building function of public relations.

**Normative Ethics in Public Relations and CSR**

In limited ways, public relations and CSR scholars have considered ethical frameworks appropriate for communicating and interacting with stakeholders. Major normative theories such as utilitarianism (i.e., Lantos, 2002) and deontology (i.e., Bowen, 2004, 2007) have been applied to public relations and CSR research, but are challenged for practical gaps and weakness in application. Although communitarianism (i.e., Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988, Baker, 1999) has emerged as a framework that addresses problems within utilitarian and deontological perspectives, it is challenged in its conceptions of individualism. Arguably, care can fill numerous gaps in these normative frameworks. This section briefly reviews how these normative theories have been applied in public relations and CSR scholarship.
Teleology

Teleology, often articulated as utilitarianism, focuses on the consequences or outcomes of an act (Somerville & Wood, 2008; Tilley, 2005). Instead of believing actions are judged as inherently good or bad, utilitarianism suggests goodness is determined by an action creating good or bad consequences. Philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill believed the ultimate utility is happiness and all actions should maximize happiness or minimize unhappiness (Somerville & Wood, 2008). Bentham suggested that happiness is based on a common good wherein ethical acts create happiness for the greatest number of individuals; the “greatest happiness principle.” Challenges to utilitarianism question who good is done for; how increasing good for the greatest number may diminish good for minority groups; and how it can be determined that those seeking “good” are doing so ethically.

Public relations offers a poignant business-based example for examining utilitarianism, particularly as a profession that interacts with numerous publics while representing specific entities (Tilley, 2005). Benefit-harm assessments or consequence reversibility can help establish potential stakeholder harm, and successful practices involve identifying majority groups, then enacting policies to please those groups most (Lantos, 2002). However, as a general flaw of utilitarianism, identifying a dominant stakeholder group is challenging. In the CSR context, economist Milton Friedman is a widely recognized opponent of corporate philanthropy because serving dominant groups means harming shareholders (Lantos, 2002; L’Etang, 2006; Somerville & Wood, 2008). Agreeing with this view, Lantos (2002) suggests the only responsibility organizations have is to increase shareholder wealth, leaving philanthropy and altruism as an individual shareholder choice after wealth has been maximized via increased organizational profitability. Lantos (2002) believes that CSR is impractical because it creates financial harm to
a business’ shareholders by invariably privileging other majority publics over shareholders. Additionally, he suggests the ability to foresee long-term consequences is difficult. Although L’Etang (2006) suggests that for organizations practicing utilitarian CSR can “demonstrate cost-benefit analysis from the perspectives of donor, recipient and society in general” (p. 415), Lantos (2002) asserts this is impossible because one cannot know when those analyses should be made.

**Deontology**

Often contrasting utilitarianism, deontological—or duty-based—approaches suggest the good of an action is determined by motivations instead of consequences (Bowen, 2004; L’Etang, 2006; Smith & Higgins, 2000; Somerville & Wood, 2008). Articulated as a Kantian approach, deontology suggests a moral sense of duty outweighs an action’s consequences. Kant’s approach outlines two categorical imperatives: the first poses that “an action is only moral if you can make your reason for acting into a rule that everyone can follow” (Somerville & Wood, 2008, p. 153); the second states that people have infinite value and should never be used as a means to an end. Kant also believed that autonomy is essential for ethical decision making (Bowen, 2004, 2007). The primary challenge to this ethic questions how actors may choose courses of action when categorical imperatives are in opposition.

Shannon Bowen has notably examined deontology in public relations, establishing her perspective within Excellence Theory and arguing that deontology best suits practical public relations goals (i.e., Bowen, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008). With proper autonomy practitioners can best make ethical decisions for the good of both business and publics (Bowen, 2007, 2008). Suggesting deontology “allows a thorough consideration of all publics involved in or affected by [a] decision” (Bowen, 2007, p. 279), practitioners can maintain respect and dignity for others by allowing publics to “have some voice in organizational decisions” (Bowen, 2007, p. 281).
Additionally, she argues the symmetrical model of Excellence encourages dialogue while respecting public perceptions of organizations (Bowen, 2004, 2007). This contrasts with one-way or asymmetrical models of communication that mimic utilitarian approaches by treating publics as ends, failing to acknowledge action consequences to minority stakeholder groups, and failing to respect stakeholder perceptions and input (Bowen, 2007). In CSR, L’Etang (2006) suggests deontological approaches should evaluate organizational motivations for practicing responsibility. Specifically, Somerville and Wood suggest organizations engaging in CSR must show a duty motivation: “If a company were attempting to improve its image or reputation via community involvement then it would be treating beneficiaries as a means and not as ends in themselves and thus breaking Kant’s categorical imperative” (2008, p. 153). Similarly, Lantos (2002) argues CSR creates conflicting organizational responsibilities by putting welfare rights in conflict with liberty rights—the latter of which should take precedence—and that organizations should ultimately practice what he terms ethical instead of altruistic CSR. Ultimately, deontology makes positive contributions to public relations and CSR by valuing and dignifying publics.

Communitarianism

Diverging from the dominant normative theories, communitarianism emerged in response to libertarianism (Christians, Ferré, & Fackler, 1993; Leeper, 1996). Regaining interest in the concept of community, philosophers suggested the social connections created by communities were more ethical than individualism—arguably, pointed liberalism was harming communities and creating social divides. Instead, individuals should be conceptualized as having individuals rights, but not exist in isolation (Christians et al., 1993). Leeper (2001) describes four arguments by leading communitarian theorists: individualism and liberalism ignores historical connections to community; the government should not be a neutral actor as it serves to situate communities;
situating the government as a neutral actor is a value choice; and rights should be seen as “historically contingent” instead of transcendent (also see Bivins, 2004). In short, communitarians value community traditions and history and believe pursuing individualism ignores the notion that individuals are integrally connected to their communities (Bivins, 2004). Christians et al. (1993) argue that persons cannot exist without community, and to put communitarianism into practice—for example, in the context of media systems—is to be concerned with social change and civic transformation. Because ties exist between individuals and their communities, “communitarianism demands involvement in the community in which one resides” establishing “a general focus on the community rather than the individual” (Bivins, 2004, p. 36).

From a business perspective, communitarianism at the organizational level is concerned with mutuality (Christians et al., 1993). Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) were the first to consider communitarian principles in public relations. They argued that “a loss of trust in society and a concomitant loss of a sense of community” (Leeper, 2001, p. 94) simultaneously contributed to a rise in social issues and the rise of public relations (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988; Kruckeberg, Starck, & Vujnovic, 2006). Specifically, Kruckeberg et al. (2006) suggest existing public relations theories such as Excellence and relationship management can be improved with a communitarianism lens. Arguing that “public relations practitioners should be primarily responsible within their corporations for the development and nurturing of the consumer communities” (p. 486) they believe organizations should embrace their shared place within social systems, challenging both liberalism and Excellence Theory.

Extending this argument to conceptualizations of CSR, Leeper (1996) suggested the increasing importance of business-driven social responsibility emerges in three issues: quality,
social responsibility, and stewardship. By recognizing interdependent community ties, businesses become more ethical societal institutions by considering that “anything which affects the community negatively ultimately affects the organization negatively (Leeper, 1996, p. 173).

In her “five baselines for ethical justification for professional persuasive communications” Baker (1999) included a Social Responsibility model couched in communitarianism. Quoting Christians, Fackler and Rotzoll she argued “the essence of social ethics is to recognize that ‘humans are accountable to each other, interdependent and not isolated selves’” (quoted in Baker, 1999, p. 75). In this context, interdependency should guide moral and practical corporate responsibilities “to the societies in which they operate and from which they profit” (Baker, 1999, p. 76).

As with other approaches, communitarianism is critiqued in public relations. Bivins (2004) suggest the tension between libertarian and communitarian philosophies is falsely dichotomous; although individualism is not ideal, individual rights and individuality should be valued. To their fullest extents, neither individualism nor communitarianism can seemingly stand alone, leading to questions about how well communitarianism can be applied to public relations (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). While CSR falls within the purview of public relations, Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) argue that communitarianism privileges organizational obligations over individual practitioner ethics, creating practical ambiguity.

**Ethics of Care**

Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) are credited as establishing the groundwork for care as it is currently conceptualized, offering what was originally considered a feminist approach to normative moral theory (Held, 2006; Steiner, 2009). Responding to Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral stages of development, Gilligan (1982) asserted that women move through different—although
just as valuable and powerful—levels of moral development than men. For women, developmental levels were highlighted by perceptions of responsibility and the impact of relationships, factors that conceptually evolve into a morality based on care. Noddings (1984) added to this by elevating the importance of traditionally feminine virtues and values, highlighting the caring, selfless work done by women in the home. Challenges to both perspectives have expanded care into some of its current forms (Steiner, 2009). Feminist theorists have argued that care ethics should not be confined to the home and the values of privileging caring relationships and nurturing the dependent can be applied on a broader scale, particularly in social, political, and economic settings (Held, 2006; Robinson, 1999; Ruddick, 1995). Ultimately, ethics of care is built on the assumption that human flourishing relies on existing, caring, mutually beneficial relationships (Held, 2006). Instead of focusing on character-based ethics, care focuses on ethics as relationally developed and governed by responsibilities. Care values the emotional experiences of daily life, while embracing the arbitrariness of lived experience. And unlike moral theories that use abstract reasoning to establish universals, care privileges the idea that uncontrollable relational connections often guide moral decision-making and ethics are best explored through contextually relevant examples. Held (2006) believes care is more appropriate for everyday challenges and care-based institutions, asserting universals are more appropriate for specialized domains of morality, such as law-based fields.

To address the need to more discretely define what it means to be “caring,” Held (2006) conceptualizes caring ethics as being built on practices and values. Caring practices are those actions that are taken in relationships to support others, and determining whether work is caring involves understanding both the effectiveness and motives of those efforts. Likewise, caring values are the attitudes or characteristics embodied by those doing the caring, and these
characteristics generally drive a desire to act in good ways. Held (2006) believes that, combined, caring practices and values set a stage wherein “ethics of care build relations of care and concern and mutual responsiveness to need on both the personal and wider social levels” (p. 43).

Arguably, these characteristics move care beyond a gendered ethic based on levels of moral reasoning. Although this approach is rooted in feminism, current conceptualizations of care are more likely to transcend feminism by focusing on those perspectives that privilege open interpretations of ethics and ethical decision making (Held, 2006). Care, in this sense, is not about gendering ethics. It is about recognizing the interconnectedness of individuals and how diverse experiences and situations lead to relationships that are impacted by varying power differentials. In this sense, care can be applied to public relations practices, particularly with respect to the professional focus on building and maintaining organizational-public relationships.

**Ethics of Care in Public Relations and CSR**

Ethics of care has been widely overlooked in public relations research. Scholars have examined and conceptualized feminist public relations, even pointing to public relations as a profession that emerges from a feminine worldview (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Hon, 1995), but they have not done so within the context care. Although scholars have pointed to and emphasized the distinct difference between feminism and care (Borgensen, 2007), feminist-based public relations literature seemingly teeters on the edge of care, pointing out the relationship- and responsibility-based qualities of public relations that promote care, dialogue, and partnership. For example, Grunig et al. (2000) suggest that positive feminist values should be taught in the classroom in an effort to pursue more ethical public relations practices, but they never refer to these values as “care.” Hon (1995) and O’Neil (2003) explored female practitioner experiences from a feminist perspective, but these studies primarily addressed gendered differences within
the field. And while Tilley (2005) suggests that care may be examined and incorporated into the ethical assessment of public relations campaigns, she does so in passing, merely offering care as an appropriate framework for determining if a campaign met ethical goals involving the practice of good intentions and appropriate ends and means. Business-focused approaches to communication have looked at care in the context of crisis management (Linsley & Slack, 2012; Simola, 2003, 2005) and Ciulla (2009) has argued for the necessity of care in leadership, but not within the specific context of care. More broadly, Bivins (2004) suggests public relations tends to promote caring principles, especially in the context of relationship building, but he also points out that merely recognizing multiple stakeholder groups is not enough to qualify as “care.”

Care has been equally missing in work addressing CSR—even from a business perspective. Lantos (2002)—who argues that altruistic CSR is essentially immoral because it privileges community welfare over stockholder obligations—suggests an ethics of care approach may present one of the only legitimate ways to practice CSR:

The concept of prima facie duties and the ethics of care framework both suggest that organizations have stronger responsibilities to those closest to them, notably employees, and sometimes other stakeholders, such as customers, supply chain partners and major stakeholders. Distant relief organizations, charitable foundations, and such are lower in the pecking order of concerns, unless they are causes that are near and dear to the hearts of the firm’s closest stakeholders. If altruistic CSR is to be practiced at all, it should be among these groups. Helping them will also most likely benefit the firm, turning altruistic CSR into strategic CSR (Lantos, 2002, p. 218).

While this greatly restricts the concept of care to one that privileges only the closest business relationships, it also sadly provides one of the only commentaries directly connecting
corporate social responsibility to an ethic of care. Discussions about ethics tend to center on business ethics in general instead of corporate social responsibility, and as with public relations research, broader feminist perspectives seem to be favored in this domain. Even so, it has been argued that “feminist ethics in many ways preceded business ethics into areas of concern that business ethics and corporate social responsibility now seek to engage in” (Borgensen, 2007, p. 505). However, this argument is couched in a careful delineation between feminist ethics and ethics of care (Borgensen, 2007). For example, Borgensen (2007) takes great issue with the conceptualization of feminist ethics presented in the first two editions of the well-known Business Ethics text by Crane and Matten (2010). Arguing that their early conceptualizations muddied the line between feminist and care ethics, Borgensen (2007) suggests they offered a poor account of feminist ethics in business. Crane and Matten (2010) have since updated their account, pointing to relationships, responsibility, and experience as the key tenets of a feminist approach to business ethics. Despite Borgens’s (2007) protests, it is hard to review these arguments and not take note of how closely these principles align with ethics of care. And, unfortunately, this seems to be where the literature related to ethics of care as an approach to business, public relations, and CSR ethics ends.

Adopting Ethics of Care in Public Relations

Despite the lack of scholarship connecting public relations and CSR with ethics of care, it seems care and public relations values closely align. In addition to these value connections, care can also address the issues inherent in applying the other normative ethical theories to public relations and, subsequently, CSR. Arguably, care can offer an approach to public relations that bridges the gaps left by utilitarianism, deontology, and communitarianism. First, I discuss care as
a useful alternative to the dominant normative perspectives. Next, I argue that care appears to align inherently with public relations goals.

Each of the leading normative theories presents challenges when applied to public relations, so much so that one scholar has proposed a public relations planning framework that combines the best of utilitarian, deontological, and virtues approaches (Tilley, 2005). Utilitarian ethics, for example, focus on the consequences or outcomes of an act (Somerville & Wood, 2008; Tilley, 2005). Instead of positing that actions can be judged as inherently good or bad, utilitarianism suggests the goodness of an act is based on whether the action creates good or bad consequences. Utilitarianism has been applied to public relations, focusing on benefit-harm assessments or consequence reversibility as approaches to understanding potential stakeholder harm. This approach suggests public relations professional should engage in practices that identify and benefit majority stakeholder groups (Lantos, 2002). However, this type of distinction can not only be hard to make, but also leaves practitioners with questions related to how outcomes should be measured (L’Etang, 2006).

And while deontology comes closer to meeting public relations goals—and is the most widely cited normative framework for the field—it still seems plagued by various issues. Briefly, deontological, or duty-based, approaches to ethics are usually articulated as a Kantian approach that suggests a moral sense of duty outweighs the consequences of actions (Bowen, 2004, 2007; L’Etang, 2006; Smith & Higgins, 2000; Somerville & Wood, 2008). Kant based his approach to ethics on two categorical imperatives that suggest first “an action is only moral if you can make your reason for acting into a rule that everyone can follow” (Somerville & Wood, 2008, p. 153) and second, people have an infinite value such that they should never be used as a means to an end. This has become the preferred moral approach among public relations scholars because it
privileges the autonomy of individual actors, “allows a thorough consideration of all publics involve in or affected by [a] decision” (Bowen, 2007, p. 279), and emphasizes a more dialogic approach to public relations (Bowen, 2004; 2007). Despite the seeming benefits of using a Kantian ethics in public relations, it is difficult to overlook some of the flaws of this ethical approach. First, even within the context of public relations, the issue of competing categorical imperatives cannot be adequately addressed. Second, in order for a Kantian approach to CSR to be truly ethical, the intentions of the organization must be morally good and pure (Bowen, 2007). For example, if an organization initiates public relations CSR efforts merely to enhance or boost reputation, it has inherently violated Kantian imperatives. That is to say, it may be deemed universally appropriate for organizations to gain reputational benefits from practicing CSR, but doing so may put nonprofits or nonprofit clients at risk of being used for corporate benefit. If that happens, then the second categorical imperative has been violated because those nonprofits and their clients have been made a means to a corporate end. Bowen (2007) inadvertently emphasizes this type of example when discussing relationships with advocate groups:

To ignore activists is not only to risk missing valuable input from the environment, but also to court disaster in the form of expensive strikes, boycotts, and other activities that lead to a tarnished reputation for the organization (p. 288).

Although this likely was not her intention, the preceding quote illustrates why public relations is often criticized for having misplaced, unethical intentions when engaging in public relations. Although it is advisable to suggest that public relations practitioners take activist stakeholders into consideration when establishing organizational goals, reducing activist groups to publics who carry valuable information and can threaten organizational reputation inadvertently reduces this public as a means to an end—quite the opposite of what she is attempting to accomplish.
Finally, communitarianism steps closer to conceptualizing public relations ethics in more useful ways. L’Etang suggests that “in many cases corporate literature is confusing because it appears to appeal to both utilitarian and Kantian principles yet apparently delivers on neither” (L’Etang, 1996, p. 93). Communicatarianism may provide an answer by focusing on the power and connections between organizations and community members instead of envisioning these entities as independent, liberal actors. By recognizing the interconnected nature of individuals, organizations, and community (Christians et al., 1993), and appreciating the notion that “the organization is only an organic part of the whole social system of society” (Kruckeberg et al., 2006, p. 487), the focus can shift from mere organizational benefits to the establishment of stronger, mutually beneficial organizational relationships. However, this still leaves open questions about presumed organizational responsibilities, whether such a far-leanin conceptualization of community is actually beneficial to society, and how individual practitioners should act within this context.

This is where ethics of care can provide a clearer approach to establishing a normative theory of public relations. For example, when the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) internationally crowdsourced an effort to establish a new definition of public relations, the result was a straightforward statement: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d., para. 3). Specific words and terms within the definition were intended to note the changing nature of public relations practices and the intention was to describe public relations as a process instead of a “‘management function,’ which can evoke ideas of control and top-down, one-way communication” (PRSA, n.d., para. 5). The focus on relationships, particularly “mutually beneficial relationships” is an attempt to draw on public relations as having a relationship-
building role within and between organizations and organizational publics. Finally, the term “publics” is adopted in lieu of “stakeholders” because it expands the breadth and reach of groups and individuals that public relations impacts.

This definition can fit well within the concept of ethics of care while because it privileges relationships in a way that removes the primary debates between liberalism and communitarianism. Not only does care privilege the notion that we live in symbiotic societies built on relationships, but also it treats individuals as autonomous members who have learned and acquired independence from dependent situations (Held, 2006). And for those individuals that are still dependent, the community can serve as a place to elevate those in need. Public relations can arguably be used to meet those community needs—particularly through CSR, as will be discussed. Ultimately, care embraces the framework of communitarianism but not to the detriment of obscuring individual rights. Next, by privileging the importance of caring, mutually beneficial relationships, ethics of care removes issues related to establishing universal principles that seemingly cannot be met in practice and avoiding the challenges associated with treating stakeholders as means to ends. For example, publics generally recognize they receive certain benefits from organizations, including benefits that are not defined as social responsibility. Kruckeberg et al. (2006) recognize and define “consumer communities” as “a group of enthusiasts who believe in the superiority of a product or service… [and] publicly identify with this product or services” (p. 492). If an organization cannot profit, it cannot exist—and in the context of care, this can be viewed as a function of a relationship between stakeholders, businesses, and society. Finally, in this sense, it also seems care can account for the practical shortcomings of utilitarianism. By privileging a wide network of relationships, care does away
with the notion of privileging the greatest good. Instead, it attempts to put appropriate groups on equal footing through the context of existing relationships (Held, 2006).

**Challenges to Care Ethics**

These arguments are not to say that care comes without challenges. Moral philosophers have questioned whether care is simply a moral virtue and have argued that it should not be considered on par with justice virtues (Held, 2006; Steiner, 2009). Care philosophers have met this argument by noting that care virtues are represented by “care, compassion, concern, kindness, thoughtfulness, and generosity (Blum, 1994, p. 199 quoted in Held, 2006, p. 96) and can stand on their own as a moral approach (Held, 2006). Additionally, care has been criticized for its extended use of the mother-child metaphor because it degrades liberal autonomy and creates a false notion of adults needing care (Held, 2006). Cudd (1995) in particular suggests “for normal adults it is not the case that others are better judges of their interests” (p. 612) and believes “care is not what most normal adults need or want from most others in society” (p. 612). Held (2006) highlights the latter criticism and then challenges this argument by pointing out the mother-child relationship is meant both literally and metaphorically. It is largely designed to highlight the notion that all humans have, at some point, been in dependent relationships—particularly as children. As such, the metaphor should not be mistaken for an assessment that adults must care for each other as dependents, but instead should consider how dependency plays a role in society.

Finally, because care appears to address the weaknesses of other normative theories, I believe the greatest strength of considering public relations through an ethic of care is that both practically and ethically, public relations and care seem to align along a number of key dimensions. As mentioned, ethics of care suggests caring, mutually beneficial relationships
contribute to human flourishing (Held, 2006). People should care for each another both at personal and societal levels, and the encouragement of human flourishing should be at the forefront of ethical goals. Additionally, pre-existing relationships—such as that of parent and child—come with responsibilities that should help guide, but not define morality. By definition, PRSA suggests “public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (n.d., para. 3). By focusing on the concept of mutually beneficial relationships, public relations taps directly into the heart of the ethics of care. By recognizing various “publics,” public relations also recognizes the breadth of relationships that a business engages. Here, relationships are at the core of both public relations and care principles. In this vein, Held’s (2006) interpretation of care provides a springboard for conceptualizing practical and ethical CSR, because she extends care beyond the domain of the home and argues for a broader conceptualization of care that is both theoretical and practical. For example, CSR, as a function of public relations, can help organizations contribute to human flourishing. By actively assuming responsibilities toward existing publics and communities, organizations can create more meaningful relationships. For these reasons, I believe ethics of care provides a more appropriate normative theory for exploring, understanding, and establishing a more ethical approach to public relations and CSR practices. This, in turn, can lead to a more thorough understanding of the potential impacts of CSR, particularly from the perspective of organizational stakeholders.

**Adopting Care in Corporate Social Responsibility**

Despite the noted challenges, ethics of care arguably can provide a useful normative framework for thinking about, approaching and increasing the value of CSR—particularly in sports organizations. Specifically, Held’s (2006) interpretation of care provides a springboard for
conceptualizing practical and ethical CSR, especially because she extends care beyond the domain of the home and argues for a concept of care that is both theoretical and practical. However, before discussing the aspects of care that are most complementary for addressing CSR, some challenges to Held’s conceptualization of care will be addressed primarily to strengthen the arguments for applying care to CSR.

To begin, it should be noted that Held (2006) argues strongly against “the market”—or the current capitalist system—and believes care should be practiced primarily in the domain of caring professions. She argues that institutions such as schools and hospitals should remain outside the boundaries of the for-profit market despite the fact that the current trend is to see education, health, and news media institutions becoming more “privatized,” “marketized” and profit driven (Held, 2006, p. 107). And while it is worth agreeing with her contention that corporate advertising and product placement should be kept out of public schools, it is difficult not to take issue with her strong language referring to “entrepreneurs, pitchmen, advertisers, public relations manipulators, and corporate promoters” (Held, 2006, p. 116). Although there can be a dark side to strategic communication, this language brings to mind the less ethical and undeveloped side of communication professions. More recent formulations of public relations—both practically and academically—have taken care to stress ethical approaches to communication. Recent scholarship has forwarded theory that calls for opening dialogue with stakeholders (i.e., Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003) and using social responsibility to give back ethically (see Somerville & Wood, 2008).

Further, Held (2006) makes seemingly contradictory arguments worth closer examination. First, she strongly argues for the separation of care institutions and for-profit markets, stating:
“Contrary to recent developments, there are very good reasons to put most health care and almost all child care in this category of what should not be governed by market norms. And, in a vein that is even more utopian given current realities, I have argued for the liberation of culture from market domination” (Held, 2006, p. 122).

Second, she suggests:

“We should not preclude the possibility that economies themselves could be guided much more than at present by the concerns of care. Economies could produce what people really need in ways that contribute to human flourishing. But long before an economy itself is influenced by the values of caring, persons for whom care is a central value can and should affect the reach of the market through their government and their choices” (Held, 2006, p. 120, italics in original).

Although Held is not addressing public relations or business ethics directly, I feel these particular insights can contribute to a better understanding of how an ethic of care can be applied to public relations practices and, more specifically, corporate social responsibility. First, the reality of current market and economic conditions means that culture will not likely be “liberated” from market domination any time soon. As such, it seems more fruitful to acknowledge the way the market comes to bear on culture and care domains; instead of fighting it, the perspective adopted for this research will take the approach of working within the system that exists, thus respectfully allowing philosophers such as Held to do the dirtier work of challenging the system in favor of market ideals. In that vein, Held’s (2006) thoughts about the potential for economies to contribute to human flourishing are worth expounding. Although the current markets may not be perfect, and Held’s concerns about the melding of markets and care domains is often legitimate, it seems care can—and should—come from the corporate sector. Corporations, through
responsible business practices such as philanthropic and environmentally conscious activities, can contribute to human flourishing and, to an extent, may value and privilege caring practices. If nothing else, they can contribute to care domains—for example, nonprofit organizations, schools, medical institutions, etc.—such that those organizations may receive varying contributions and beneficial resources that allow them to improve the caring work they offer and Held (2006) privileges.

Finally, Cudd’s (1995) contentions regarding the metaphorical maternal relationship are not unfounded. She brings up a valuable point when she questions: Who serves as children and who serves as mothers in society? Although Held (2006) largely fails to address this question, perhaps the answer can be found in CSR; and perhaps the answer can start moving us away from notions of care as a maternal ethical approach. While I hardly want to suggest corporations or for-profit organizations are the “mothers” of society, it is reasonable to suggest businesses have certain relationships, resources, and responsibilities that make them capable of being leaders who can offer care via specialized resources. Remembering that Held (2006) argues the mother-child relationship is a metaphor, it may be useful to think of organizations as having the potential to be caring leaders instead of “mothers.” Corporations have resources that can contribute to human flourishing and the enhancement of local communities through CSR programs and initiatives. In sports, for example, team executives recognize they have resources at their disposal that prompt them to feel responsible for contributing to local communities through CSR programs and initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). If organizations can take advantage of their stature to lead by example, then not only can they recognize the strong relational ties they have to their communities, but also they can acknowledge and show overt respect for key stakeholder relationships. As such, by recognizing their potential reach and acting as socially responsible
leaders, businesses such as sports organizations can use their resources to serve as role models while encouraging both change and awareness within and among local and extended communities. And while this is not dependency in the sense that Held (2006) suggests, it is an example of corporate leadership—perhaps a type of mothering role—that can affect, guide, and encourage positive societal changes. Robinson’s (1999) interpretation of care strongly supports this notion, arguing that by applying care on a global scale in the context of international relations, social challenges can be more successfully conceptualized and addressed. By assuming that relationships come with responsibility, care can ethically and rationally argue that organizations are obligated to act as members of the communities in which they operate.

Ultimately, care for environmental, social, and economic impacts is at the core of prominent conceptualizations of CSR. By definition, public relations is concerned with building and maintaining relationships. CSR, as a function of public relations, represents the inherent responsibility that businesses have to communities and publics and helps establish the mutually beneficial relationships public relations privileges. In short, public relations and CSR practices are about relationships, relationship building, and relational communication strategies. Arguably, these practices can and should be conceptualized within the context of ethics of care. Care focuses on relationships and relationality—on how individuals and groups are interconnected by the communities they live within and their behavioral practices. Extending current iterations of care means moving beyond the notion of gendered, maternal relationships and focusing instead on care as a normative approach that privileges context, practicality, and mutually beneficial relationships in ethical decision making. From a business perspective, care can allow us to better respect those we share relationships with while situating how organizations function within their communities. Care can help us better understand the impacts organizations have on their
communities, and can help us improve relationships with the various publics whose lives are connected to organizational practices and outcomes of those practices. If the public relations profession truly wants to build “mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d., para. 3), it is worth considering how these goals align with ethics of care perspectives and principles. In public relations—particularly in the context of CSR—practitioners can respectfullly communicate and interact with key publics while working to encourage human flourishing. Finally, it also seems the unique societal position and resources found in sports organizations in particular may make the professional sport industry an ideal starting point for conceptualizing CSR through the lens of care. Through sports it may be possible to productively examine the ways in which an ethic of care can be applied to CSR. More specifically, it can allow for an exploration of how these practices may privilege the relationships, responsibilities, and lived experiences of the numerous publics that organizations and businesses serve.

**Addressing Disciplinary Gaps**

In her commentary about the state of public relations research, Gregory (2012) makes numerous calls to enhance academic work in the field. Specifically, she lists three primary concerns related to scholarly diversification, methodologies, and obsessions in an attempt to engage scholars in a critical assessment of current public relations research. Although her concerns are related to the general body of public relations knowledge, her arguments can be applied to current CSR research. This study uses Gregory’s commentary as a springboard for addressing and filling disciplinary gaps.

First, Gregory (2012) discusses diversification in the field, focusing on international diversity, theoretical diversity, and practical perspectives in current public relations research.
Although she acknowledges that public relations research has become more diverse in recent years, featuring studies that highlight international scholarship and practices, she believes more can be accomplished. A similar trend is noticeable in CSR literature that provides comparative studies and assessments of multi-national communication practices (i.e., Birth et al., 2008; Cho & Hong, 2009; Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Dhanesh, 2012a; Liu et al., 2011; Schmeltz, 2012; White et al., 2011). Although research has explored whether Western conceptualizations of CSR are found internationally, results suggest more attention may be needed to understand differing cultural conceptions of CSR (i.e., Dhanesh, 2012a; Jo, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; Tang & Li, 2009).

In the context of theoretical views and concepts, Gregory (2012) believes scholars are successfully forwarding interdisciplinary work, but she questions whether critical scholarship in this area is doing enough to build new ideas and encourage theoretical advances via those critiques. Arguably, CSR scholarship has relied too heavily on business-based definitions, but has successfully introduced diverse theories into assessments of CSR practices and impacts.

Even so, the heavily descriptive nature of current CSR research means gaps still exist, and much of the critical thought about CSR practices comes from scholars in other disciplines—particularly business. Gregory wraps up her arguments about diversification, lamenting the false dichotomy between practical and academic perspectives. Arguing that more practitioner perspectives are needed, she suggests that “many practitioners have profound insights into their own profession and have much to teach the academy on applied high-caliber conceptualisations and theory grounded-in-action” (Gregory, 2011, p. 4).

It seems CSR literature has already started incorporating a more practical perspective through the use of in-depth interviews (i.e., Spangler & Pompper, 2011), allowing researchers to better understand organizational perspectives while providing opportunities for practitioner insights to guide CSR research and knowledge. Camilleri
(2008) described sustainability communication through a practitioner’s lens (and was the Senior Technical Manager at the time of writing), highlighting his company’s sustainability program and communication strategies while “working with the University of South Australia on an environmental communications research program” (Camilleri, 2008, p. 41). Even so, more work can be done to embrace these insights and bridge gaps between practitioner and academic perspectives. For example, research into existing corporate communication strategies reveals an overt absence of legal dimensions in CSR. Scholars can reasonably take a cue from this absence to focus primarily on triple-bottom line approaches, as those appear to represent the industry standard. And because CSR communication can involve communicators from multiple organizations (e.g., both corporate and nonprofit perspectives), CSR theory can be better explored by incorporating information about practical experience and program implementation into theory. Arguably, practitioner perspectives may help address problems related to the lack of cohesion among and guidance provided by the CSR definitions being used in academic settings.

Gregory’s (2012) second concern relates to methodologies, as she notes that new and current public relations scholars tend to focus too closely on specific methods and narrow themes of interest. Pointing out that public relations research is predominantly quantitative, she questions, “are these papers about proving methodological mastery, or about topics that matter to the field?” (p. 3). Arguably, CSR research has employed more diverse methods, but improvements can be made. As described, content analyses (both quantitative and qualitative) and surveys have been predominant, but research has incorporated qualitative methods including focus groups and in-depth interviews. Case studies have combined these methods to explore CSR strategies from multiple angles and perspectives. Despite the use of multiple methods in CSR research, content analysis has emerged as the most used method—and while this method is
beneficial in its own right, its over-use can create a tendency to spend considerable time investigating existing strategies instead of developing new theory, exploring new communication strategies, or understanding different messaging impacts. Because content analysis is limited to describing content, it cannot establish communicative effects (Hocking, Stacks, & McDermott, 2003). As such, Gregory’s arguments may be applied to CSR research that has emerged as primarily descriptive instead of prescriptive. Moving forward, CSR research can benefit from using more rigorous methods that describe and explain impacts and best practices; additionally, scholarship may benefit from including stakeholder perspectives beyond those that predict behavioral intentions yielded by CSR awareness and strategies.

Finally, Gregory (2012) suggests that public relations research has become obsessed with narrow themes of interest, focusing too heavily on specialized areas of concern and failing to connect ideas about public relations roles and global, societal issues:

For example, there is much scholarship on the role of public relations in organisations and indeed a growing subdivision of the field called corporate communications. There is also considerable writing about the role of public relations in society; what it could be, what it is and its relationship to, for example, economic and power structures. However there is little linkage between these two areas (p. 3).

Arguably, CSR research can offer a fruitful ground for addressing these concerns, perhaps at both local and global levels. Debate already exists as to the role of public relations practitioners in organizations and how CSR may provide an opportunity for those practitioners to gain more prominent managerial and decision-making roles (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). Additionally, arguments exist to dispel the business-based correlations between profit and responsibility, establishing that organizations have a moral obligation to take a greater role in curing social ills.
(Margolis & Walsh, 2003). And because CSR is conceptualized as a public relations function that can address corporate-community relationships (i.e., Roland & Bazzoni, 2009), it is reasonable to suggest that CSR, as a public relations function, can be explored for its impact on communities and economies. Unfortunately, little has been done to assess the social impacts of CSR; instead, most literature focuses on organizational benefits such as stakeholder perceptions (i.e., reputational benefits), legitimacy, and organizational commitment. In short, Gregory’s (2012) calls to address diversities, methodologies, and obsessions in public relations research apply to the current body of CSR knowledge.

**Reviewing Gaps in CSR Literature**

Building on Gregory’s (2012) commentary, it is worth addressing gaps specific to CSR literature. Although CSR is positioned as an ethical public relations practice aimed at enhancing benefits to both the organization and stakeholders (Somerville & Wood, 2008), little research exists to understand actual and potential CSR benefits beyond those reaped by organizations. In a historical review of CSR development in business and management literature, Godfrey (2009) pointed to the Margolis and Walsh (2003) call “for a change in empirical research away from justifying CSR to examination of the impacts of CSR on recipients and society at large,” noting that “research heeding that call has yet to reach the publication stage” (p. 703). In particular, Godfrey (2009) reiterates Margolis and Walsh (2003), suggesting CSR research needs to shift “away from a focus on the motivations for CSR… and toward an investigation of the social impacts (e.g., reductions in poverty, increases in health) arising from the social activities of corporations” (p. 709). Arguably, this can be accomplished by speaking with and studying one of the most overlooked publics in CSR literature—benefitting nonprofit organizations. Since 2008, only one known public relations study has explored CSR from the perspective of nonprofit
beneficiaries, and that work focused primarily on beneficiary perceptions about organizational involvement in CSR (Rumsey & White, 2009). To truly explore the whole impact of CSR, it seems a push is needed to embrace calls to move beyond assessments of the organizational benefits of doing CSR toward focusing on the societal improvements created by CSR (Godfrey, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Instead of building conceptual understandings of what CSR can do for an organization, understanding the beneficiary perspective in CSR theory can position practitioners to move beyond strategic two-way communication practices, making them more informed about these strategic relationships while better situating them to act as organizational managers fluent in CSR practices (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). By simultaneously answering Gregory’s (2012) call to increase diversity, utilize more diverse methodologies, and include more practitioner input, CSR scholars can better understand whether CSR efforts truly alleviate and support social issues.

**Reviewing Gaps in Sport CSR Literature**

As sports CSR is in a developmental phase, various calls have been made to advance theoretical perspectives in this field. Paramio-Salcines et al. (2013b) present questions for future consideration, challenging scholars to establish whether sports CSR is about social or strategic goals and encouraging an examination of how sport organizations should be structured to support CSR activities. Among their suggestions for future research, they echo existing sentiments that express a need to shift our focus away from understanding organizational benefits to understanding CSR impacts in sport (Godfrey, 2009; Inoue & Kent, 2013; Waddington et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013). Arguably, exploring more diverse stakeholder perspectives can help scholars and practitioners gain a more holistic understanding of sport CSR, helping establish whether these practices and strategies are creating social change. Waddington et al., (2013)
emphasize the importance of unlocking this perspective, pointing out that “if the benefits of CSR to sports clubs are relatively clear, the benefits of CSR to local communities are much less clear” (p. 45). Further, they suggest that the “almost complete absence of studies of the impact of CSR on the wider society is… indicative of the values and ideologies which have underpinned much of the research on CSR” (p. 42).

Attempting to account for this shortcoming, Waddington et al. (2013) propose an approach to understanding the effectiveness of programs, breaking sport CSR practices into three schemes: charitable donations, supporting local community projects, and international development. First, charitable donations refer to organizations giving money to support a cause. Although no research exists to show the impact of these practices, the authors suggest “it is a reasonable assumption that those organizations which are the recipients of charitable donations will derive some benefit from those donations” (Waddington et al., 2013, p. 43). Next, supporting local community projects refers to supporting community development through educational, health, and social issue programming. Again, Waddington et al. (2013) suggest that comprehension of direct benefits is difficult to judge because these programs generally lack built-in monitoring and are often characterized by grand claims that lack empirical evidence. Finally, international development focuses on the ways in which large, international organizations attempt to alleviate developmental issues globally. As with the other two schemes, international responsibility programs have yet to be empirically assessed. Arguably, this simply adds to the growing body of CSR literature that justifies CSR use without offering prescriptive guidelines for how the practices should be carried out and prioritized (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013).

I believe two major issues arise within these calls. First, the lack of empirical evidence for much of the research in this area is a shortcoming, one that focuses on the organizational
perspective in a way that positions sport CSR as having significant potential for creating social change without accompanying proof of these claims. The descriptive nature of much of the work in this area also means that the assessment of organizational benefits and impacts is poorly understood, making these claims about sport CSR benefits worth critical analysis. Second, research in this area is firmly embedded in business and management literature, leaving it unable to account for additional theoretical perspectives. Current sport CSR scholars are almost derisive toward public relations practices, thus closing off potential opportunities to understand how relationship-building can impact and enhance sport CSR practices. Additionally, the continued use of Carroll’s (1979) CSR dimensions (e.g. Babiak & Wolfe, 2013; Harada, 2013) prevents scholars from better understanding the practical perspective organizations take to communicating and implementing CSR strategies. I believe that taking a public relations approach in sport CSR can help bridge some of these gaps, particularly in the context of understanding benefits. For example, scholars suggest that CSR practices can help sport organizations reduce media scrutiny and the threat of external regulations (Waddington et al., 2013), and that “taking an active interest and role in the communities in which they operate, sport teams can foster well-being, loyalty, support, and good will of community stakeholders” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 25). These perspectives, however, play into the criticisms raised by Levermore (2013) who points to sport CSR as a practice that is mired in corporate and institutional corruption. Although these scholars suggest that future CSR research should focus on social benefits as opposed to strategic, organizational benefits, their calls continually highlight and extend a line of thinking that privileges organizational benefits. Instead of focusing on the “strategic benefit of establishing loyalty, understanding, and interest in the game, and developing a potential future pool of talent and fans” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 25), sport CSR scholarship should challenge the lack of
substance, greenwashing, and power differentials that Levermore (2013) addresses. Arguably, a public relations based approach can meet those challenges by focusing on the relationship-building aspect of CSR practices. Instead of being viewed as a tool for disseminating messages to raise awareness about initiatives, public relations can lend insight into appropriate ways to build mutually beneficial relationships with key publics and CSR beneficiaries, thus adding to the existing insights provided by business and management scholars.

**Meeting Disciplinary Challenges**

This study aims to meet the described challenges by using professional sport as a specialized industry within which to contextualize CSR impacts. Answering Gregory’s (2012) calls, I first achieve diversification by studying CSR in a context that has been explored primarily in business, management, and marketing disciplines. Public relations scholars have yet to study sport CSR, providing an opportunity to understand how practical communication-based differences exist in this industry. For example, sport CSR provides an opportunity to address how CSR and cause-related marketing (CRM) intertwine in practice (Kotler & Lee, 2005). This is also important because sport CSR scholarship is primarily grounded in existing CRM literature (i.e., Cousens, Babiak, & Bradish, 2006), thus overlooking communication-based aspects of the practice. In that vein, while it is not in the realm of this study to meet the challenge of cultural diversification, a major goal of this study is to offer a critical analysis of existing normative public relations theory while offering an ethics of care-based solution to bridge the gaps between theory and practice.

Next, by using depth interviews I meet Gregory’s (2012) methodological challenge to expand current public relations and CSR research. By speaking with nonprofit practitioners using a rigorous qualitative method, I aim to contribute to the advancement of public relations theory.
Additionally, by providing nuanced insight into communication and relationship-building processes, this work adds to current CSR literature by being both descriptive and prescriptive.

Finally, although this study can be challenged for continuing a line of inquiry that constitutes an “obsession,” focusing on nonprofits lends a new perspective to current scholarship aimed at more thoroughly understanding CSR impacts while extending ethical debates. Although Gregory (2012) argues that ethics are among those topics that scholars dwell upon, few have advanced normative ethical frameworks in public relations and scholars have only started exploring the potential for conceptualizing public relations through a lens of care. To date, hardly any work has applied care directly to public relations-based CSR.

Finally, focusing on CSR efforts implemented by sport teams allows a close examination of the perceived impacts of CSR practices, particularly as it relates to business- and management-based sport CSR scholarship. By understanding how nonprofit organizations are supported by CSR initiatives in professional sport, this research directly answers calls to change our scholarly perspective (Godfrey, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003), further bridging theoretical and practical gaps in existing public relations and sport CSR literature. However, I challenge existing sport CSR research by suggesting that suggested approaches to measuring impacts is fraught with inconsistencies that leave scholars with a narrow understanding of CSR impacts. Although calls are made to measure CSR impacts, the end result of these suggestions typically ends with an understanding of the organizational benefits of practicing CSR. I believe that by going directly to benefitting nonprofit we can better understand and measure impacts, and bring sport CSR scholarship closer to establishing itself as a socially conscious—rather than strategic—business tool.
Research Questions

Based on the preceding review of CSR and sport CSR, CRM and CRSM, and ethics of care literature, the following questions guide this research. Each question is presented with a short explanation of the insights this research attempted to uncover.

**Research Question 1:** How are the relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations established from the perspective of nonprofit organizations?

Because little work has explored CSR practices from the perspective of nonprofit beneficiaries (i.e., Rumsey & White, 2009), a goal of this study is to understand how nonprofits negotiate CSR relationships. Specifically, it is important to know how relationships are established and maintained. This involves understanding who the primary communicators are in the nonprofit and sport organizations. Illuminating who key figures are in these relationships helps contextualize nonprofit experiences.

**Research Question 2:** What do nonprofits perceive as the positive and negative components of their relationships with sport organizations?

To continue learning about the nonprofit perspective of relationships with sport organizations, this research question is designed to understand how component of the relationships are perceived by participants. By exploring perceptions about the positive and negative aspects of these relationships, we can better evaluate which components of sport organization support are being done well and creating satisfaction among participants.

**Research Question 3:** What unique benefits and challenges do nonprofit organizations believe they yield from partnering with professional sport organizations?

The heart of most current CSR research—both in the public relations literature and within the context of sport—has focused on attitudinal and behavioral benefits generated for the giving
organizations. This research aims to expand conceptualizations of CSR impacts by understanding the perceived benefits yielded by nonprofit organizations. Especially because scholars portray the sport industry as being uniquely positioned to establish and enhance CSR opportunities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), this research explores how benefits and challenges emerge when nonprofits work with sport organizations. For example, efforts were made to understand whether nonprofit organizations perceive greater benefits from partnering with local professional sport organizations compared to other local businesses or corporations. Conversely, attempts were made to understand whether special challenges exist when working with sport teams. Overall, understanding the benefits and challenges of receiving support from sport organizations can illuminate whether sport is truly a venue for specialized CSR practices.

**Research Question 4:** How does ethics of care manifest in nonprofit and professional sport organization relationships?

Although CSR has been conceptualized in the context of various normative ethics, scholars have yet to consider how an ethic of care approach may be most appropriate for implementing CSR strategies and building relationships between organizations and nonprofits. To understand how care can inform CSR approaches, it is important to embrace caring principles by understanding how benefitting nonprofit organizations perceive their relationships with giving organizations, using sport organization CSR for context. Exploring whether nonprofit practitioner perceptions of sport organization relationships reflect the caring practices and values forwarded by ethics of care (Held, 2006) can help position this normative ethic that privileges nonprofit needs and perspectives to offer a more constructive and mutually satisfying relationship-focused approach to CSR practices.
Chapter 3

Method

Researcher Statement

My goals as a researcher are shaped by my time as sport fan and communication practitioner. After graduating college, my love of hockey turned into an communications internship and job with a National Hockey League (NHL) team. Although I primarily wrote for the team’s website, I spent considerable time working with the organization’s philanthropic foundation. Slowly, my interest in being a sport communication professional began shifting. While working with the foundation director, I started seeing a new side of professional sport. The game was no longer centered on wins and losses; instead, I started seeing sport as an industry focused on community impact and involvement. The foundation held silent auctions during each game and often hosted events aimed at raising money and awareness for local causes. At the end of each season, auction earnings were transferred to a competitive grant program through which local nonprofit organizations could apply for multi-thousand dollar grants to support their causes and programs. Although I knew about this initiative before I worked for the team, it was not until I was an insider that I saw the program’s impact; it was both heartening and disheartening to see how much local organizations relied on the annual grants. It was heartening because I had never seen firsthand the positive ways in which organizations and businesses could help local nonprofit organizations. It was disheartening because I could not ignore the potential pitfalls of this reliance—if the team pulled its support from a cause or an organization failed to receive a grant, what would this mean for those nonprofits?
Eventually, I returned to school to work toward a master’s degree, doing so with a new focus. Working for a professional team raised new questions for me and I wanted to learn more about the dynamics of giving and philanthropy in the context of professional sport. This was partially pushed by the fact that had I not been enamored with sport I likely would have pursued a career in nonprofit communication. Through various service-learning projects, I came to value the idea of working for nonprofit organizations or supporting specific causes.

Because of these ties, I am interested in understanding the nonprofit perspective of corporate social responsibility (CSR). When I started exploring CSR, it was surprising to discover that few scholars have addressed the nonprofit perspective, particularly because of my experiences working in professional sports, which allowed me to see both the reach and impact that one organization could have. However, I also realized that a bigger factor was contributing to the foundation’s impact—that specific tie to professional sport. Between working for a professional team and exploring CSR from an academic perspective, I developed a sense that not only was it good for professional sport organizations to give back to their communities, but also it was necessary and expected.

Because of the reach and size of sport organizations, as well as the community ties forged by fandom, I came to believe sport organizations have a responsibility to be active community members and leaders for community-based change. From both the perspective of a fan and the perspective of a scholar, I realized how strong fandom can be, and how much sport can—and does—actively harness its reach and size to increase revenues, push sponsorships, and feed a sense of fan loyalty. Sport organizations openly embrace their stature, and actively work to convince fans they are part of a great relationship; that they are neighbors in both tightknit and extended communities. Ultimately, these strategies are used to generate large revenues, to
convince tax payers to help build stadiums, and to partner with local businesses through sponsorships. Sport promotion is about evoking a sense of loyalty and community among fans and convincing resident non-fans to join the club and be part of a group. Additionally, sport truly embraces community relations as a communication function, often relegating its public relations functions to media relations management and organization. In practice, traditional public relations and relationship-building is being forwarded by the charitable arms of organizations. By seeing this in action from both the fan and practitioner perspective, I believe that if sport organizations wish to harness fandom for their own benefit—especially by evoking a sense of community—then they need to balance the inherently unequal community-based relationship they have created. If sport organizations truly want to be community members and want to reap the benefits of their stature, then that means acting like a community member by giving back and helping neighbors. This means partnering with local charities, engaging in fundraising efforts, volunteering employees to support causes, and giving nonprofits a platform to spread awareness about their causes. And while sport organizations have increasingly embraced these qualities and efforts, I feel too much academic focus has been placed on the organizational benefits gained by these efforts. To me, it is not enough to act neighborly—if teams are going to maintain their stature, then their neighborly actions should affect change that genuinely impacts and improves the communities in which they operate. It is with this conviction in mind that I want to study the most overlooked perspective of the sports CSR relationship—the perspective of benefitting nonprofits.

Long Interview

As a method that allows researchers greater depth of insight and understanding of individuals’ experiences, interviews have become an increasingly useful public relations research
tool for learning about practitioner and stakeholder knowledge, relationships, and experiences (i.e., Coppa & Sriramesh, 2012; Spangler & Pompper, 2011; Uusi-Rauva & Nurkka, 2010). This chapter re-states the research questions, then explores the benefits and appropriateness of the long interview method for investigating sport organization-nonprofit relationships. The four-step method of inquiry used to conduct this research is outlined and includes descriptions of how each step was implemented. This includes describing how participants were recruited and how interviews were conducted. References to responsive interviewing practices are made throughout this analysis, as many of the prescribed responsive interview strategies were adopted to complement the long interview approach used in this study. Next, data collection and coding methods are described in detail, and emergent data analysis procedures are explored to strengthen the validity of interpreted findings. Finally, I address the key issues associated with this method and describe how I met and accounted for potential challenges.

Using the long interview method, this study explored the impacts of CSR practices from the perspective of nonprofit beneficiaries. This research stands as the first known attempt to assess the value of CSR in professional sports by understanding the CSR impacts not only through the lens of the nonprofit organizations that receive support, but also through the lens of care ethics. The four research questions addressed in this exploratory study include:

**RQ1:** How are the relationships between nonprofits and sport organizations established from the perspective of nonprofit organizations?

**RQ2:** What do nonprofits perceive as the positive and negative components of their relationships with sport organizations?

**RQ3:** What unique benefits and challenges do nonprofit organizations believe they yield from partnering with professional sport organizations?
**RQ4:** How does ethics of care manifest in nonprofit and professional sport organization relationships?

To answer these questions, this research explored perceptions of the existing relationships between nonprofit and professional sport organizations located in a major U.S. metropolitan area (MMA). Long interviews were identified as the most appropriate method for conducting this exploratory study, which seeks to understanding the benefiting nonprofit perspective. Although these questions can be explored quantitatively, there is a distinct lack of research focusing on the nonprofit perspective of philanthropic relationships. And while research exists to outline the benefits yielded by sport organizations (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Walker & Kent, 2009; Walters, 2009), the reasons for sport philanthropy (Babiak, 2010; Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Tainsky & Babiak, 2011), and the unique factors that sport can bring to philanthropic initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, 2013; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), no work has explored the beneficiaries’ side of these relationships. As such, interviews with nonprofit practitioners who are familiar with their organizations’ relationship with sport organizations can illuminate perceptions and beliefs about the benefits of those relationships. Additionally, because this research seeks to explain an unstudied experience and perspective, interviews were an ideal method for gathering information and insights while laying the groundwork for future research in this area. Per Appendix A, this study was approved by The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board.

**Using the Long Interview**

As a research method that privileges the lived experience of individuals, the long interview can illuminate patterns in and context of specific situations and social practices
This systematic qualitative approach to open-ended interviewing is “sharply focused, rapid, [and] highly intensive” (McCracken, 1988, p. 7) but is designed to maintain the goals of yielding rich and insightful information from interview partners (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Often, it can “enable researchers to gather information about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 175). Further, as the instruments of data collection (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988), researchers take part in a reflexive process that calls for heightened awareness of personal biases and expectations (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This is done, in part, because the qualitative method of long interviewing is particularly concerned with achieving shared meaning and understanding between the researcher and interview partners.

Qualitative methodologies such as the long interview received increased interest following a period of concentrated, positivist social science research practices in the 1960s and 1970s (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988). Positivism upheld principles that favored collecting numerical data aimed at building quantitative explanations for lived experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The perceived value was in the ability to predict patterns of experience through data collected from detached, “politically and socially neutral” positions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). Specific phenomena could be reduced to closely defined variables that could be measured, quantified and examined for the presence of cause-and-effect relationships (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Postpositivists, however, believed that understanding the depth of lived experiences required a close examination of human practices and interactions, ones that recognize even the researcher as an individual living subjective experiences. As such, postpositivists upheld qualitative methods for their evaluative capabilities and ability to hone in on lived experiences that could not be captured via tightly defined
variables of statistical analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A variety of disciplines ranging from anthropology to sociology to communications have come to embrace and expand qualitative approaches such as symbolic interactionism, ethnography, social constructionism, and hermeneutics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988).

Born out of practices related to participant observation methods, long interviewing has become a popular method that maintains qualitative foundations but is influenced by social scientific approaches to data analysis (McCracken, 1988). Although this method values rigor and structure, it does not do so to the detriment of gathering rich data about participant experiences (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Instead, interviewing has emerged as a method that yields insight into phenomena that cannot be measured or observed easily, but does so in a more straightforward, open manner than other qualitative methods (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As McCracken argues, the long interview is a particular method that can be embraced by social scientists because it shows “that qualitative methods can be routinized and made accessible to all” (1988, p. 13).

In order to capture and understand participant “experience, knowledge, and worldviews” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 173), interviews are considered “evolving conversation[s]” (Paget, 1983, p. 78, quoted in Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 172) that help “researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3). Interviewing, although conversational, is truly a process that is guided by well-designed, open-ended questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although researchers are charged with guiding the conversation in an effort to elicit theoretically useful and insightful information, they must do so without leading participants or becoming the topic of conversation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011;
McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A researcher must be aware of personal biases and pre-conceived notions because it is important not to impose beliefs on interview participants and because qualitative approaches value the notion that personal experiences and insights can help researchers better understand the experiences being recounted (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Most importantly, as a member of a conversation, the researcher must hone listening skills. Researchers should be able to recognize valued information as it is being shared, while simultaneously showing respect for the participant’s role as an individual who is voluntarily sharing knowledge and insights (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

While different interview approaches call for different levels of researcher involvement—for example, Rubin and Rubin (2012) promote a responsive interview model that emphasizes relationship building—the long interview values an approach that discourages the investigator from becoming overly involved in the conversation (McCracken, 1988). Active listening should involve silently confirming what one is hearing, establishing ways to help participants express themselves, and acknowledging participant thoughts through clarification and visual acknowledgements (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Ultimately, by being an active conversational partner, the researcher can develop rapport and trust with the interview participants while showing utmost respect for those who volunteer insight into their lives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

**The Four-Step Method Of Inquiry**

In an effort to encourage a strategic and straightforward approach that can still yield “crucial qualitative objectives” (McCracken, 1988, p. 11), McCracken offers a four-step approach for building an interview-based study. In addition to carefully addressing the previously mentioned approaches to interviewing, this study followed the outlined four-step
process. Specifically, McCracken’s steps build upon each other, moving the researcher from phases of literature review to interview development and analysis that includes: a review of relevant literature, a review of “cultural categories” (McCracken, 1988, p. 29), partaking in the interview, and interview analysis. The following sections outline each of the prescribed steps and the actions taken to meet their suggested requirements.

**Reviewing Literature**

The first step in McCracken’s (1988) four-step method of inquiry involves “an exhaustive review of the literature” (p. 29), which is presented in Chapter 2. Simply, he argues that the qualitative nature of the long interview should not preclude a thorough analysis of literature related to the topic of interest. By using existing literature, the researcher becomes familiar with existing concepts and findings and is better positioned to ask questions—and construct an interview schedule—that will yield useful and insightful information. He also argues that one needs a firm grasp of existing data because this encourages stronger analysis of and argumentation toward contradictory findings, should those emerge. However, this familiarity with existing literature should not prevent the researcher from being open to new concepts and ideas that emerge from interviews. Existing research should be noted and recognized so findings can be firmly grounded in information that already exists about a phenomenon. As he suggests, this is “both a review and ‘deconstruction’ of scholarly literature” (McCracken, 1988, p. 31).

Meeting the goals of this step, I used a thorough literature review to consider how CSR is explored in multiple scholarly areas including public relations, business, and marketing. Particular attention was paid to current trends in public relations-based CSR research, which focuses primarily on understanding how CSR is practiced, communicated, and perceived among organizations and stakeholders. Additionally, I attempted to explore all existing sports CSR
literature, finding that most of this work is situated in business literature and has not emerged in public relations research. This exploration led me toward understanding cause-related marketing (CRM) and cause-related sports marketing literature (CRSM), as the two practices often co-occur with corporate CSR practices. Eventually, the three primary CSR dimensions identified in existing scholarship—environmental, social, and economic—and relationship-building emerged as important core concepts for situating this study in the body of public relations knowledge.

The concept of relationship-building was more deeply explored in the context of ethics of care to extend current public relations scholarship and deconstruct current conceptualizations of best CSR practices. Although scholars have considered normative ethical frameworks for best public relations practices (e.g.; Bowen, 2004, 2007; Baker, 1999), this study presents care as a more appropriate, relationship-based approach to public relations and CSR, specifically. A review of existing public relations literature revealed that little has been done to explore care and what has been written focuses on crisis communication practices. As such, a thorough review of existing scholarly work about care was conducted to understand its development, current iterations, and potential for practical application. This helped me conceptualize CSR in the context of care and encouraged me to focus on the less understood perspective of CSR beneficiaries—in this case, nonprofits that receive support and funding from professional sport organizations. This helps deconstruct of existing scholarship by highlighting the importance of CSR impacts from the perspective of nonprofit beneficiaries, as opposed to considering outcomes only from the perspective of organizations practicing CSR.

**Reviewing Cultural Categories**

In Step 2, McCracken (1988) suggests the researcher must review cultural categories. This is a time for reflexivity, a phase when the researcher should look inward and catalogue what
is personally known about the topic of interest. This allows the researcher to benefit from personal knowledge, while simultaneously encouraging the recognition of biases so they can establish distance from the subject matter. For this research, I actively acknowledged that my experiences working for a professional sport team and with nonprofits both colored and informed my findings. As I approached the data collection stage, I closely considered what my expectations were, how they were formed, and what biases they carried. For example, although I am keenly aware that sports teams actively establish CSR-related events that are often co-sponsored by corporate partners, I did not fully understand how these relationships are established. Additionally, I could not speak to whether teams or corporate partners are more involved in planning these events, and I was unaware of who communicated with the involved nonprofits. I also presumed that many of the working relationships teams have with nonprofits involve additional corporate partners, something that appeared to be supported by sport CSR literature. As will be discussed, this was not the case. I also acknowledged that because of my background as both a sport fan and public relations practitioner, I entered this study with a firm belief that professional sport organizations can have significant, noticeable impacts on their communities when practicing CSR. This belief was actively checked when conducting interviews, so as not to lead or influence participants. Additionally, I suppressed my interest as a sport fan in an effort to continually privilege participant insights and opinions. Although I wanted to understand CSR in the context of sport, the primary objective throughout this study was to understand and privilege the nonprofit perspective.

Countering those biases, my knowledge and experience served me well when it came to developing my research questions and interview schedule. In addition to knowing how to find and reach out to nonprofit beneficiaries, I used my experience to easily converse with
participants. By understanding how sport organizations are structured, I could follow participant explanations of how they reach out to teams and communicate with people within the organizations. I understood the often-discussed grant process, was familiar with the names of top executives, and was aware of how team foundations operate. This level of familiarity, as well as my knowledge about ongoing grant programs and how they are structured, allowed me to establish questions that tapped directly into nonprofit experiences with sport organizations. I eventually used my personal experiences and insight to modify my interview schedule early in the data collection process.

**Developing the Interview Schedule**

Step 3 in the four-step method of inquiry involves developing the interview schedule based on the analytic and cultural categories established in Steps 1 and 2. It also involves conducting the interviews. This section describes how the interview schedule was developed, while the next two sections describe how participants were selected and how interviews were conducted.

The interview schedule (see Appendix B) used to collect data was built around a set of “grand tour” questions that are “phrased in a general and nondirective manner” and are intended to “move [participants] to talk without overspecifying the substance or perspective of the talk” (McCracken, 1988, p. 34). In addition to establishing these broad questions, complementary prompts were established (McCracken, 1988). Although all prompts were not asked within each interview, they were meant to encourage participants to delve into broader points, such as those established via grand tour questions (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

For this study, grand tour questions were designed to illuminate how nonprofits work with professional sport organizations. This aligns with the concept of topical studies, which aim
“to work out a coherent answer to a research question by piecing together what a variety of people with different information and distinct perspectives tell you” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 32). By acting “more like a portrait painter than a photographer” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 32), the researcher asks questions that can illustrate a phenomenon in depth. Because I wanted to learn about the organizations and decision-makers themselves—not just about the nonprofit’s relationship with sport organizations—I began the interviews with grand tour questions about each participant’s daily job with the organization, then asked about each organization’s cause and reasons for supporting that cause. After establishing questions that helped me learn about the nonprofit, I developed questions to start conversation about each nonprofit’s relationship with sport organizations, focusing primarily on understanding how the relationships are established and perceived. Participants were prompted to describe the support they have received from the teams and were asked broad questions about the extent to which nonprofits seem to rely on sport philanthropy. In general, grand tour questions were designed to allow participant opinions—particularly those with positive and negative connotations—to guide the overall conversation, but were specific enough to ensure that certain topics important to the study (such as whether sport organizations should be required to support community partners) were addressed.

Prompts were primarily used to encourage elaboration or provide clarification for participant opinions and insights. For example, when discussing how partnerships were established, prompts were used to understand how long the nonprofit had worked with the team and whether participants had a primary team contact they communicated with. When participants described what sport organizations have done for them, I specifically asked about player and coach involvement if those parties were not mentioned.
During interview schedule development I included questions that met theoretical needs—for example, asking about relationships and the perceptions of those relationships. Because research exists describing the benefits of practicing sport CSR from the perspective of the sport organization (e.g.: Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), a question was included so participants could describe how they believe teams benefit from CSR partnerships. The exploratory nature of the study also opened opportunities to ask broader questions about how the relationships work. For example, in order to address the concept of care, I wanted to understand how much power nonprofits feel they have when working with sport organizations. This meant asking questions about how things have gone well or poorly in these relationships, about whether there is cause for concern when entering into these relationships, and about whether nonprofits have changed their operations to make these relationships work. In addition to learning about what nonprofits have been able to do because of the support they have received, I also wanted to understand what sport organizations can do differently to better help their communities and the causes they support.

It is worth noting that interviewing is a fluid, ongoing process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and using interviews means recognizing when changes are necessary to collect more useful, informative insights. Responsive interviewing in particular “emphasizes flexibility of design and expects the interviewer to change questions in response to what he or she is learning” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 7). After my fourth interview, I revisited the interview schedule to amend questions that seemed poorly constructed or failed to gather useful insights, oversights that were due to my own prior lack of knowledge about nonprofit-sport organization relationships. For example, instead of saying to participants, “I see you have worked with X organization, could you describe what they have done for your nonprofit?” I amended this question to allow more
open responses from participants. In the remaining interviews I first asked which sport organizations the nonprofit had worked with, giving them control to tell me which relationships existed. After they responded, I asked them to explain what those organizations have done for the nonprofit. I also added a question asking participants to describe their organization’s greatest needs. During my early interviews I learned about what the sport organizations were doing for the nonprofits, but by being unaware of the nonprofit’s primary needs (e.g.; funding, volunteers, in-kind donations, etc.) I could not assess as to how useful the sport organizations’ efforts truly are. I also learned quickly that athletes, coaches, and corporate partners were not a common part of CSR efforts with my nonprofit participants. As such, I amended certain questions to focus less on what players have done for nonprofits and instead focused more on the perceived impact of player involvement. Additionally, in light of my interest in care, I amended certain questions to tap into participant experiences that could explain whether these relationships reflect caring practices. For example, after learning that certain teams were harder to connect with than others, I asked participants to describe why they thought this was the case. I also attempted to explore whether nonprofits felt the teams were invested in their causes, and if so, how that manifested.

**Recruiting Participants**

In an effort to protect participant anonymity, the MMA where this research was conducted is not identified. However, information about the region is provided to help establish the context of this study. The MMA boasts a population of nearly 3 million residents, ranking it among the 20 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), and has consistently ranked among the top-20 designated market areas (DMA) in the United States (Nielsen, 2012). Important to this study, the city is home to multiple major professional sport organizations including teams from the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey
League (NHL), and Major League Baseball (MLB), and each team is associated with both team and player foundations. Details about team giving efforts are described in Chapter 4. In addition to hosting these sport organizations, the region boasts a diverse corporate and business climate that serves as home to multiple Fortune magazine “World’s Most Admired Companies.” The geographic spread of the MMA also makes it possible for organizations and corporations to reach a wide variety of nonprofit organizations. This is particularly important because of the rich base of nonprofits operating in this area. A search of the ProPublica (2013) IRS 990 Filings for this MMA reveals that more than 2,500 local nonprofits filed tax returns in 2012. With so many nonprofits in the area, I felt that exploring relationships with fewer professional sport organizations made it easier to identify, locate, and speak to nonprofits that received support from those teams. Ultimately, this community offered an opportunity to analyze the sport CSR impacts among a large, diverse sample of nonprofit organizations.

To identify nonprofits that received funding from sport organizations, I visited the team websites and reviewed all pages within the “community” sections. Although each team provides various in-kind and financial supports, the most straightforward approach to giving is via competitive grants. Information about the nonprofits receiving grants was readily available on two of the teams’ community sites, and information was collected about nonprofit organizations that received grants during the 2011-12 seasons. Although grant information was harder to find for the third team, that organization’s “news” section contained a more specific “community news” option. I explored community news articles to gather information about the grant program dating back to early 2011. Because it appeared as though no grants were announced in early 2012, the names of all grant-receiving organizations from calendar year 2011 were collected. By speaking to organizations that received grants more than a year prior to this research, this
allowed more time to receive the grants and implement programs compared to organizations that more recently received support during the 2012-13 season. This arguably gave me a better opportunity to understand the impact of the grant giving. Additionally, I identified nonprofit organizations that appeared to benefit from major events or initiatives highlighted on team websites. For example, each team took part in or hosted special events to support local hospitals or nonprofits that support cancer-related causes. Although these nonprofit organizations may not have received grants, their relationships with the teams appeared to be well established.

In total, 97 organizations were identified as having received grants or support during the 2011-2012 seasons. Of the identified organizations, 13 were based in counties outside the greater metropolitan area of interest and were removed from the final list of nonprofits. Among the remaining nonprofits, some received grants or support from more than one team or program. Combining grant recipients from the 2011-12 season with organizations that received support or funding through additional programs yielded a final list of 100 nonprofits.

To identify potential participants, I visited the websites for each nonprofit to collect contact information for individuals that were likely to be familiar with the relationship between their organization and the sport organizations. Because of the topical nature of this study, it was particularly important for me to find interviewees with specific knowledge about my subject of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As such, I gathered contact information for executive directors, development directors, communication specialists, and executive assistants. In many cases, communication specialists were not available, so development and executive directors seemed to be most familiar with the sport organization relationships.

To recruit participants, nonprofits were contacted in two rounds. First, I reached out to potential participants at 30 organizations that had received grants. So the sample would resemble
the geographic distribution of nonprofits on the list, a random, proportional sample of organizations were chosen from each county represented. The list of organizations was randomized in Excel and I chose the first ones from each county in the order in which they appeared. Of the 30 organizations I originally contacted, 20 participants confirmed interviews. I reached out to a second round of nonprofits two weeks after reaching out to the first group. For the second group of potential participants, I maintained the same proportions for contacting nonprofits by county. However, I purposefully reached out to 16 organizations that received grants but were of varying and complementary size compared to organizations I had already spoken with. I also contacted 11 nonprofits that were specifically recommended to me by other participants or were organizations that appeared to receive funding and support through means other than grants. In the second round, I confirmed interviews with participants from 8 different nonprofits. Of the 27 nonprofits represented, one had multiple practitioners that agreed to participate in the study. This yielded 29 long interviews.

In both recruitment rounds, decision-makers such as executive directors, development directors, communication specialists, and executive assistants were contacted either to participate personally or to share my interview request with individuals who had working knowledge of the nonprofit-team relationships. Participants were initially approached via email (see Appendix C) that explained the nature of the study and how the organization was identified via team websites. Confidentiality and anonymity were briefly explained, as was the fact that teams were not aware of this study. By contacting organizations that were publicly supported and by not alerting teams to this research, I hoped to instill confidence among potential participants that they would be able to speak freely about this topic. Finally, an IRB disclaimer was included in the recruitment email. When potential participants contacted me, I informed them of the potential length of each
interview—lasting up to 1.5 hours—and coordinated to meet with those who agreed to speak with me. Additionally, I sent a single follow-up email to participants who did not respond to the initial interview request (Appendix D).

**Achieving Saturation**

Because long interviews do not yield generalizability, random or representative samples are not necessary or appropriate (McCracken, 1988). Instead, I sought interviews with participants who could speak specifically to the topic of interest and lend personal insight into the phenomenon being studied (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To lend credibility to this approach, and because qualitative analysis is concerned with gathering descriptive information about the experiences of a few people, attempts were made to achieve saturation. Specifically, I gathered enough data to accurately portray and understand participant experiences (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). I believed this meant gathering enough data to represent both participant experiences and the experiences of variously sized nonprofits. Early in the study I learned that I was speaking with nonprofits that varied significantly in operational size and experiences with teams. Some were small nonprofits run on tight budgets that had no full-time employees and received a single grant from one team. Other nonprofits were large, well-established organizations that received multiple types of support from more than one sport organization. I spoke with participants from as many different types of nonprofits as possible based on factors including size of the nonprofit and level of support from teams. Then, I attempted to represent at least two or three nonprofits that compared closely on each of those factors. Eventually I chose not to reach out to a third group of potential participants because toward the end of my second group of interviews I did not appear to learn new information about the sport-nonprofit
relationship, was not encountering any new types of organizations based on nonprofit size and team support, and felt confident that each type of nonprofit was represented multiple times.

**Conducting Interviews**

Interviews were held during a 6-week period between June and July, 2013. Out of 29 interviews, 28 were conducted during that period. The final interview was held via telephone three weeks after the other interviews took place. All except the final interview were conducted in-person either at the nonprofit office location or in public spaces such as Panera Bread or Starbucks. Of the 28 interviews, 22 were held at the nonprofit offices. The remaining six interviews were conducted in public locations for reasons including ease of access, convenience to the participant, and the nonprofit operating from a protected location. Responsive interviewing techniques suggest that researchers “remain flexible, arranging what [they] do around the interviewees’ availability and need for privacy” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 8). To achieve this, I attempted to accommodate participants, meeting where and when they preferred in an effort to respect their time and to help make the interviews more relaxed, convenient, and enjoyable.

Interviews ran between 31:39 and 1:58:03, lasting approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes on average. Only one interview lasted less than 42 minutes and 18 of the interviews lasted at least 1 hour.

I started each interview by confirming permission to record, at which point I attempted to set the recorder in an inconspicuous location to reduce the feeling of an overly formalized interview. It should be noted that Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest recorders should be kept in plain sight because helping participants forget they are being interviewed can become a form of deception. However, my personal interviewing style leads me to feel that moving the recorder to a discrete location helps make the interview more conversational both for myself and the
participant. After starting the recorder, I confirmed how much time each participant had to speak with me both to keep track of the interview and to respect participant availability. I also referred back to my initial email to reiterate my desire to keep participation confidential and anonymous. I explained that while I knew who I was interviewing, I would achieve anonymity by concealing the city where the research was done and by describing organizations broadly. Once I confirmed that participants had no questions about the interview process, I opened with the grand tour question regarding each participant’s daily job with the organization. In addition to teaching me about the context of each person’s job and responsibilities, this allowed me to set a more conversational tone (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Additionally, I was able to show that I valued each interviewee not as a source of information, but as an individual with unique experiences.

Although I entered each interview with a question schedule, the interviews were semi-structured (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By paying close attention to the topics and directions of conversation, I attempted to ask questions that flowed with each participant’s responses. Responsive interviewing, for example, emphasizes that “the interviewer does not have to stick to a given set of questions or ask them in a given order” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 29). Because participants naturally provided information about topics I planned to address, I attempted to keep the questions contextually relevant. For example, when participants gave me tours of the nonprofit facilities I was able to gather rich information about the organization, but this also meant that after the tour I had to adjust my question order and remember to discuss anonymity and confidentiality.

During each interview I tried asking as many questions as possible, adjusting the questions I asked based on participant experiences, opinions, and time availability. Accommodating for differences between participants is expected in responsive interviewing, as
the researcher should consciously “customize each interview to focus on what the individual interviewees are expected to know” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 38). For example, if a participant clearly had no working relationship with sport organizations beyond applying for and receiving a grant, I did not ask for details regarding player or coach support—instead, I simply confirmed whether such support had occurred. However, regardless of the nature of the relationship between the nonprofit and sport organizations, I always attempted to learn participant opinions about whether teams should be required to give back to the community, why they believed some teams were harder to reach than others, and beliefs about the contributions teams made to the community. I believed these questions were important to understand caring relationships and felt they could be answered regardless of the support a nonprofit received. However, if participants had limited time to speak with me, I emphasized questions that could illuminate the nature of the relationships with sport organizations.

Toward the end of each interview I asked or reminded participants about providing documents that could help me learn more about the organization and what it has done with support from sport organizations. Many of the participating nonprofits did not have documents with such specific information, so I was provided annual reports when available. I closed each interview by asking participants to review my transcripts for feedback and elaboration (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This was done so I could confirm that each participant felt their anonymity was protected and so I could be confident that my interpretations were fair and correct. More about this and other data analysis procedures are discussed in the next section.

Data Analysis Procedures

McCracken’s (1988) fourth and final step involves data analysis. Because analyzing qualitative data is challenging, a framework was established to approach data analysis
Qualitative research can yield troves of insightful data, but intense textual analysis is required to comprehend what has been collected. Not only can data be interpreted multiple ways, but also the researcher is charged with making sure participant thoughts are accurately represented. Additionally, the findings must be worthwhile to the academic community, parsed out and translated in a way that contributes to theory building. This section outlines the qualitative data analysis method I used and how this approach helped me meet the challenges of doing qualitative research.

Using a postpositivist approach to data analysis, I employed a structured, step-driven method to analyze long interview data. This allowed thorough analysis based on principles and steps that can be re-traced and re-analyzed. Most importantly, it presents the type of structure and straightforwardness that McCracken (1988) suggests is necessary for establishing qualitative methods as appropriate and applicable in a social science context. In particular, McCracken (1988) suggests a five-stage process that moves analysis from general to refined inquiry. However, data analysis for this study followed Lindlof and Taylor’s (2011) approach to analysis and interpretation.

Although analysis and interpretation arguably takes place simultaneously, analysis is defined as “the process of labeling and breaking down (or decontextualizing) raw data and then reconstituting them into categories, patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 243). Both inductive and deductive approaches are used to guide interpretation, which requires a careful comparison of findings to analytic and cultural categories that were established in the development stage of the research process (McCracken, 1988). I used an inductive approach to data analysis, allowing constructs, codes, and themes to emerge within the context of my research questions. In addition to building a picture of how relationships with
sport organizations are established by nonprofits, I wanted to understand the positive and negative components of these relationships. I also wanted to learn what unique benefits or challenges nonprofits yield from partnering with sport organizations. Finally, I wanted to explore whether ethics of care manifests in professional sport CSR. To maintain rigor in my approach, I employed Lindlof and Taylor’s (2011) three-stage process of data analysis involving data management, data reduction, and conceptual development.

Data Management

Data management begins, in part, with data organization. In addition to recording interviews and producing transcripts, I used memos to collect my thoughts following interviews. Many participants also gave me documents that described their organizations, the services they offer, and the programs they run.

I started the data analysis process by transcribing each interview verbatim (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; McCracken, 1988). Eight of the interviews were partially transcribed by an assistant who was unfamiliar with the topic of interest. To ensure participant anonymity the assistant transcribed interviews that did not contain participant names; to preserve confidentiality, I thoroughly explained the implications of and necessity for confidentiality. I transcribed the remaining 21 interviews using dictation software, and revisited and edited each transcript for various errors (e.g., punctuation, spelling, misinterpreted phrases, etc.). Editing the transcripts involved listening to each interview recording a second time, thus beginning the data immersion process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). When editing was completed, the transcripts were shared with individual participants. This was done to respect participants, ensuring they felt comfortable with what they said and allowing them an opportunity to amend information or take specific quotes off the record. Additionally, by creating research memos following many of the
interviews, I was about to record immediate impressions of each interview and make notes about emerging concepts and themes I wanted to explore.

NVivo computer software was used to manage data. Although this program is marketed as qualitative analysis software (QSR International, 2012), it also serves as a data repository. In addition to storing all analysis files—particularly interview transcripts—it allows users to create accessible categories and groupings, or nodes, to “hold” data. When coding data, information from the stored files can be shown as highlighted text within the original document or clips of data can be reviewed within the defined nodes. This mimics the concept of data reduction and serves as a point in which data analysis and interpretation begin to overlap (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The NVivo nodes and references platform allowed me to approach conceptual development in a concise, thorough manner. As will be discussed in the context of data reduction, when themes and categories emerged from the data, conceptual stems were developed to establish categories and sub-categories of information.

**Data Reduction**

The data reduction process is an important step because it begins narrowing data into meaningful codes and categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In an effort to preserve potentially informative data, I began reducing my transcripts and participant observations into positive, negative, and neutral categories. Positive comments were defined as statements that reflected a practice or experience as good or supportive, as something helpful, or as something that was verbally appreciated. Negative comments were defined as statements about experiences that seemed like they could have been more positive, involved a lack of support or presence of difficulty in relationships, or were overtly identified as negative. Finally, neutral comments were defined as statements that provided basic detail or information about participant experiences
without providing an opinion about whether those experiences were good or bad. In some cases, neutral statements contained both positive and negative sentiments such that the overall tone of the comments indicated a more neutral attitude toward an experience. This step of the coding process was important because it provided the foundation for the remaining coding steps.

In addition to reducing data into positive, negative, and neutral categories, I also coded data by the teams being discussed and according to major, over-arching themes of interest. First, coding and identifying fact-based information about organizational practices allowed me to grasp the type of work each team was doing within the community. Second, information was coded based on major categories of interest that were pre-identified as important to understanding the sport-nonprofit organization relationships from a public relations perspective. These categories were based on subjects that participants were overtly asked to discuss, particularly organizational needs and nonprofit communication practices. Third, as I began thoroughly reading the transcripts and memos during the transcription process, I took notes in the form of asides and commentaries. This led to my first set of emergent categories. These categories included beliefs about sports organization support leading to community support, information about corporate partners, information about attitudes toward teams doing more in the community, and information about how relationships were established. Table 1 (next page) outlines the initial emergent coding categories used for data reduction, definitions for those categories, and sample quotes to illustrate how information was coded. Finally, the iterative process of data reduction led to deeper conceptual development.

**Conceptual Development**

The third phase of qualitative data analysis involves conceptual development, the point at which themes and categories are refined and reduced to well-defined, easily-identifiable concepts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive, supportive, verbally appreciative</td>
<td>“Um, if you look at their annual report, it’s just amazing, and they don’t get nearly enough recognition for what they do, but they really do a lot.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative, unsupportive, verbally disapproving</td>
<td>“I, I don’t apply for the… uh, oh… I even forget what it is now, but there was an annual application that you could put in and I see it go out and I just ignore it because it’s worthless as far as I’m concerned.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Detailed, factual statements</td>
<td>“Nah. We’re looking, we’re looking out another three to five years and we’d like them to stay and that’s what we’re, you know—so we’re not, but we’re not putting all of our eggs in one basket. It’s just we’d never do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teams</td>
<td>Individual Teams</td>
<td>Information pertaining to organizational philanthropic practices</td>
<td>“Um, they continue to do that and actually that has increased the um, players and their, and the mascot comes in to visit, brighten the day of our patients.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-established Categories of interest</td>
<td>Organizational Needs</td>
<td>Perceived greatest organizational needs, by nonprofit</td>
<td>“Funds and awareness… Programs and facilities and things we’re doing here, it definitely gets people’s attention…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Practices</td>
<td>Identified nonprofit communication practices, including internal and external</td>
<td>“The newsletter um, our website we also use the um, electronic platform now, Facebook. And um, you know, word-of-mouth. That’s still pretty powerful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Themes</td>
<td>Community Support</td>
<td>Participant perceptions about whether being affiliated with sports organizations leads to community support</td>
<td>“So um, I don't think we've seen the return on that um, but there hasn't been, not necessarily a way to measure, but there hasn't been a concerted effort to do that. But I don't think we've received the, a big return on you know, getting these kind of accolades or being on TV or whatever, that, that I wish we would see.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Partners</td>
<td>Any mention of corporate partners, regardless of association with sports teams or participating nonprofits</td>
<td>“Well, that came through (gas company). (Company) um, was one of their major sponsors, and if you go to game you’ll see the big (company) signs. So (company) asked the (team) if they would choose a nonprofit to give $150,000 to and to make a difference in their organization.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teams Doing More</td>
<td>Participant beliefs about whether teams can or should be doing more in the community</td>
<td>“… you know, I would hate say that they could even do more, but it's almost like they could even do more just with the accessibility and the opportunities in various communities that they're not in already.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing Relationships</td>
<td>Participant explanations of how relationships were established between nonprofits and sports organizations</td>
<td>“… we’re not officially reaching out to the (team), but we have a donor that reaches out who is affiliated with the (team) and I’m sure he's probably a big donor to the (team) and I think… He just talks with the (team) and says ‘Hey, would you be willing to do this?’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A reflective, comparison-based process was employed to identify and explicate emergent themes and insights. First, I considered concepts that exist in CSR and CRM literature, particularly in the context of professional sport. Second, I reflexively considered the varying emergent themes while revisiting the positive, negative, and neutral comments coded during the data reduction stage.

After coding transcripts for positive, negative, and neutral insights, I began by immersing myself in the neutrally coded data. I started by labeling individual comments for their overall themes; for example, noting when a participant seemingly discussed awareness or described working relationships with team employees. This open-coding approach allowed me to discover new categories and identify themes that exist in CSR literature. Because I anticipated changing and re-defining my categories as I collected and analyzed data, this approach was useful for adding, deleting, and merging categories as they appeared more or less frequently in the transcripts. As I approached the open coding exercise I also wrote in-process memos to collect my thoughts and start making theoretical connections, particularly in the context of my research questions. This helped me create emergent coding categories based on both theoretical assumptions and interview themes, and allowed me to begin exploring and interpreting data from a perspective that meets the needs of the communication research community, one which simultaneously builds communication theory.

After coding approximately one-third of the neutral comments, I started noticing that my themes had reached a point of saturation. All comments being coded fit into categories and themes that emerged via my open-coding strategy. As such, I revisited both the coding categories and the transcripts to evaluate the passages and insights coded to that point. NVivo was useful at this stage, as it offered a platform for clearly marking, separating, and comparing codes and
categories. Additionally, I began to more precisely consider how my emergent codes were beginning to answer my research questions. This was a particularly important part of the data analysis process, as it helped me see “how the categories are differentiated from each other, how they interrelate, and how full (or empty) of compelling evidence they are” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 251). I took care to differentiate categories (e.g., awareness versus visibility), and began grouping codes into themes and categories that could both answer my research questions and explain the phenomena of interest in precise ways. For example, when re-reading the data coded for awareness, visibility, credibility, reach, and celebrity, it was clear that these themes fit under the umbrella describing the benefits yielded by working with sport organizations.

At this juncture of the data analysis process, I created an initial codebook to “catalogue the category definitions, the codes used for identifying each category, [and] examples of text” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 251). This helped me start grasping the data in a structured way that moved my analysis to the point of integrating and dimensionalizing data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I coded the remaining data into my existing categories, moving data from the neutral, positive, and negative coding schemes into the more refined codes. I simultaneously created axial codes to theoretically connect categories and dimensions, allowing me to explore the nuances within established categories. For example, this involved defining “level of relationships” at three discrete dimensions: connection, relationship, and partnership. At each of these steps, I used a circular coding strategy in which I examined, coded, and re-examined the data for categorical fit and appropriateness to overall theory building. After multiple iterations, a final codebook was established (Appendix E). Finally, I used the created categories and codes to approach the interpretation phase. After explicating my coding categories, I revisited existing
literature to explore and compare theoretical links and connections with emergent relationships and concepts.

By following the steps outlined in this chapter, my goal was to establish trustworthy research that accurately reflects participant experiences while successfully building upon and informing theory. By using structured data collection and analysis approaches, I aimed to both show the value of qualitative research and conduct research in an accessible, rigorous manner. I embraced the benefits of qualitative research—particularly the long interview—by conducting research that privileges lived experiences and seeks to explore an understudied group in an established organizational relationship. This analytical approach allowed me to establish respect for participant voices within my study and served to illuminate themes that were important to the participants. The following chapter presents the characteristics of the participants, nonprofits, and sport organizations represented in this study.
Chapter 4

Actors and Roles

This chapter describes the participants and various organizations central to this study. By presenting a detailed description of the represented groups, the results can be better contextualized. This is particularly important because this study was conducted in a single metropolitan area and because it serves as the first known exploration of the nonprofit perspective of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in professional sport. Because the relationships and experiences between nonprofits and professional sport teams may vary depending on location, the context within which these CSR practices occur is imperative to understanding and privileging participant experiences.

To achieve this, the chapter presents an overview of the participants, nonprofits, and sports organizations represented in this study. First, I describe participant characteristics, including participants’ professional, educational, and cause-related backgrounds. Because the goal of this study is to understand a relationship between organizations—professional sport teams and the nonprofits they support—the personal demographic information for participants is considered unnecessary. This information also justifies that participants are qualified to speak on behalf of their organization about the relationships in question. Next, I broadly describe the characteristics of the nonprofits represented in this study. In addition to describing the types of causes supported by the nonprofits, I also detail some of the programs and initiatives run by the organizations. I include details about organizational size and rating information before describing the publics served by the nonprofits then conclude this section with an overview of perceived organizational needs, as described by participants.
Finally, I describe the various ways that sport organizations represented in this study give back to their communities. In addition to describing general sport CSR practices, I briefly detail how active engagement with nonprofits occurs throughout different employment levels within these sports organizations. This section includes a table detailing how each team supports nonprofits.

**Participant Characteristics**

**Job Titles and Responsibilities**

Conversing with participants who had a keen level of familiarity with their nonprofits’ experiences working with sport organizations was key to learning from the nonprofit perspective. A broad range of professionals participated in this study, primarily upper-level nonprofit managers and executives. Three participants founded their nonprofits, and nearly half of the participants were executive directors. Another five participants were chief executive officers, two of which also held a president title, and foundation presidents and vice presidents were represented. Additionally, members of development departments were important contributors to this study, as I spoke with one vice president and three directors of development. Directors and managers of advancement, marketing, and media relations were also represented, as were public relations, resource, and donor relations coordinators. As most participants were at the level of vice president or higher, this speaks to the potential decision-making capabilities these individuals have within their organizations in general, not just in the context of relationships with sport organizations.

Participants in this study were responsible for various tasks within their respective nonprofits. They were primarily involved in nonprofit outreach and fundraising efforts as well as what I might term “doing everything at once.” Those with multi-faceted jobs were often
executive directors who generally had responsibilities ranging from establishing community relationships to developing programs to managing daily operations. Most worked with or responded to a board of directors, and in many cases these individuals coordinated staffs of varying size. Meeting the budget was a primary concern for executive directors, who were typically responsible for budgeting and fundraising. These participants were often actively involved in the programs their nonprofits were developing or maintaining, and regularly served as key relationship-builders, meeting with and reaching out to potential donors and community partners. They frequently serve as key point-people for their boards and the various committees that may be associated with their nonprofits, and in lean times, these participants also stepped into roles that were vacated or not being met within their organizations. For example, some executive directors had to cut back positions to maintain funding for specific programs—this meant they assumed the duties typically assigned to communication or marketing managers.

Next to balancing multiple responsibilities, nonprofit professionals I interviewed most frequently practiced outreach. Development specialists primarily practiced fundraising, which is often done through donor appeals, fundraising events, and grant writing. In some cases, participants specifically focused on establishing, enhancing, or building relationships with major donors. One participant described “working with the top 10% of the donors who give 90% of the resources” while another established that they spent “about half my time doing major mega-gift fundraising of $100,000 or more.” Other job responsibilities included event management, campaign development, goods and donations coordination, and public relations and media management.

**Professional and Educational Backgrounds**

The time that participants worked at their nonprofits ranged from 1.5 to 28 years, although most had been at their organizations for less than 10 years. This only scraps the
surface of their overall experience, as most participants had worked professionally for at least 15 years. At least two participants had 35 years of nonprofit or cause-oriented experience; however, their professional experience varied widely. Although some participants had been at their respective nonprofits almost their entire careers (in one case, 28 years), others had little to no nonprofit experience prior to joining their organizations. A handful of participants previously held corporate jobs, working in marketing and advertising and holding senior-level positions. Many participants worked in relationship- and service-based professions, with leadership positions in the hospitality and restaurant management industries. Some participants spent decades working as professionals in the fields that their nonprofits serve. For example, one participant worked as a nurse for nearly 28 years before moving into a communications position within the same organization. Another former case worker shifted her focus to lead a nonprofit that served the same youth populations she primarily helped as a professional. In some cases, participants had experience as business owners, while others had careers in higher education, banking, technology, and school administration. Some participants felt their work experience enhanced their ability to do their current work. One participant who worked a corporate job suggested that the experience “really prepared me to, you know, run an organization… I had a $22 million budget when I was there… So a lot of those skills that I developed there really apply to helping me here.” Another suggested that her former job serving as a school administrator became cumbersome, but helped her realize she “wanted to work and dedicate the rest of my life work, you know, my career, to helping children… who live in adversity.”

Participants’ educational backgrounds also widely varied. Most of the undergraduate degrees that participants earned were in business and social science disciplines. Numerous participants had degrees in psychology and sociology, while others had degrees in advertising,
public relations, marketing, business management, economics, and international affairs. Five participants had master’s degrees, most of reflected disciplines directly related to nonprofit support. These included master’s degrees in applied behavioral science, public administration, social work, and international relations. One participant had a doctorate, while others participated in leadership programs or earned continuing education certificates. One executive is a certified fundraising executive, while others have graduate certificates in nonprofit administration and nonprofit management. As such, while undergraduate education may not serve as an indicator of the positions held by the participants, it seems that continuing and graduate-level education has been dedicated to enhancing participant ability to perform current jobs regardless of previous work or educational experience.

It is worth noting that most participants had worked in the nonprofit sector their entire careers, had long-term volunteer experience, or had personal connections to the causes they serve. Although a few participants spent their entire careers in nonprofit, participants generally expressed a sincere passion for their line of work. Recounting her experiences trying to find her career path after college, one participant described how her first job with a Habitat for Humanity affiliate “really opened up the, the world of nonprofit and now I can’t see myself anywhere else.” In other cases, participants used volunteer experiences as a stepping stone into their current positions. For example, a small handful of participants put their careers on hold to raise families or travel, but continued volunteering as a way to stay active in their communities. One such participant volunteered as the chair for numerous boards and major charity events before being asked by her current organization to apply for the CEO position when it became available. Similarly, two participants joined their organizations to temporarily fill executive-level positions that had been vacated, only to find themselves still in those positions many years later. Other
participants simply volunteered for their nonprofits before being offered jobs. One woman volunteered for 20 years before joining the organization’s board and eventually moving into a part-time job, while another practiced fundraising for large nonprofits while volunteering at her current organization. Finally, some participants supported their nonprofits because of personal life experiences. One participant came to support autism-based causes in part because of her own experience having a child with the disorder. Another participant works for a nonprofit designed to provide transportation services because of her own experiences making ends meet without proper access to transportation.

Combined, the years of experience, areas of expertise, professional and educational backgrounds, cause-related knowledge, and current job positions merge to form a well-rounded, informed, and highly passionate group of participants for this study. Not only are these individuals informed about the relationships that their nonprofits have with professional sport organizations, but also they are highly qualified to discuss issues related to their nonprofits. In general, their backgrounds make them keenly aware of challenges facing nonprofits, and their current positions make them important representatives for the nonprofits where they work. To provide context for this study, both personal and organizational details for individual participants are presented in Table 2 (next two pages). Personal details focus on professional and educational background, involvement with the specific cause, and size of organization represented. When precise information is not available, the section is left empty. The next section describes the nonprofits represented in this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>Years at Nonprofit</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Cause Involvement</th>
<th>Cause Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Technology Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Director of Development</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Nonprofit Organization Characteristics

One of this study’s goals is to represent a variety of nonprofits. In addition to exploring the different types of causes supported by professional sport organizations, I wanted nonprofits of varying sizes included in the sample. This meant reaching out to small, lesser-known nonprofits as well as large, well-known nonprofits. This section describes characteristics for the nonprofits in this study including general cause and organizational size, information about populations served, and a review of perceived organizational needs. In an effort to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, only general information about causes and programs is provided.

Nonprofit Causes and Organizational Size

Although the nonprofits described in this study are a mere fraction of the organizations supported by sport teams in this region, the array of causes represented is impressive although youth-centric causes receive the lion’s share of support from sport organizations. Youth health causes were represented by professionals from two children’s hospitals and one cancer research foundation. The second most common cause represented in this study is foster care, with three organizations serving the community through foster care services, foster care advocacy, and resources for youth aging out of foster care. Other youth-focused efforts supported by sport organizations include youth mentoring, clothing and necessities for children, technology education, health and nutrition education, financial literacy education, after-school programming for at-risk youth, and youth outreach through sport. Other nonprofit causes included independent wish-granting, professional training for youth on the autism spectrum, services for families with hospitalized children, and volunteer coordination for local public schools. Outside the realm of youth-focused causes, numerous organizations served specific social needs. These organizations
offer emergency and trauma services, domestic violence recovery services, low-cost and free food assistance, holistic community outreach services for individuals and families in need, assistive services for the blind, resources for the homeless, transportation services, and hospital and health services. Finally, one organization supported environmental services.

**Programming**

Many nonprofits in this study have established multiple programs to serve their causes, in some cases establishing social enterprises to help create funding opportunities. As described by participants, social enterprises are for-profit organizations established by nonprofits to create a revenue stream to support nonprofit programs and initiatives. As one participant described, the social enterprise: “… supports a cause. And it’s really geared towards revenue producing. And so uh, the goal is to, whatever we do, to start off with the goal of being self-sufficient.” While two nonprofits had social enterprises that offered food services, another established an ambulance company to help support its other emergency health service programs.

Although implemented programs vary across organizations, many share similarities. Multiple nonprofits in this study provide on-site housing or housing support for families or publics in need. A number of programs are designed to serve school-age children through interactive initiatives. One such program teaches students about health and nutrition through gardens planted in schools, while another teaches financial literacy through in-school volunteer programs and a site where storefronts are used to teach students how to run a business. One program engages youth in sports programming to teach life skills like teamwork, character development, and goal achievement. While this nonprofit describes its cause as helping lower income kids “reach their academic and life potential through sports,” this goal of embracing
academic and life potential is visible across the sample of initiatives represented. In more material ways, programs provide gently used clothes and uniforms to students in need.

Beyond the scope of school-aged children, nonprofits support programs ranging from environmental to health initiatives. Across the numerous hospitals and health organizations represented in this study, the primary similarity is that programs and initiatives typically focus on improving child care or overall health services through research and new medical technologies that can streamline and improve treatment. Other programs act as central locations for the publics they serve. For example, one nonprofit helps youth aging out of foster care, offering a safe, central location for this population to receive services ranging from tutoring to mentorship, to employment and social service assistances. A similar nonprofit serves as an expanded community outreach program for homeless adults and families in need, providing services such as housing, food, and employment assistance. Families can live on property, or may visit the nonprofit to participate in family care and assistance programs. Other prevention and outreach services are also available, and the organization simultaneously runs a kitchen that can serve upwards of 10,000 meals per day throughout the region. Although these are examples of programs initiated by the nonprofits in this study, it gives an idea of the scope of work being done in this particular community.

**Revenues and Ratings**

To establish the size of the nonprofits represented in this study, I collected financial and rating information. using Charity Navigator (CN), a nonprofit organization that aims to help potential donors make decisions about where to donate. To create their ratings, CN evaluates nonprofits based on two primary criteria: financial health and accountability and transparency (“Mission,” 2014). CN was used for rating information because participants regularly referenced
the organization. One participant pointed to their four-star rating as a sign of credibility for interested donors, while another suggested that recently receiving a four-star rating “was a big deal” and it was “nice to be able to have that distinction.” Almost half of the nonprofits represented in this study were rated by the organization, and the site collates and presents IRS data for each organization, making it a useful site for gathering revenue information. Data was available for all but two organizations.

Using revenue as a sign of organizational size, nonprofits in this study reported revenues between approximately $127,000 and $21 million. Eight nonprofits had revenues of less than $1 mil, while three had revenues of more than $10 million. Five earned the highest four-star rating and another five earned a three-star rating. It is worth noting that most of the organizations not rated by CN simply failed to meet required rating guidelines. For example, CN only rates organizations that rely on support from individuals, are required to submit an IRS Form-990, and earn at least $1 million in revenues (“What Kind of,” 2014). Additionally, they do not rate hospitals. As such, from financial, industry, and cause diversity perspectives, I believe a diverse sample of nonprofits are represented in this study.

**Populations Served**

Scholars suggest that youth-related causes are a good fit for professional sport CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), and the primary publics served by the nonprofits in this study reflect this line of thinking. More than other publics, school-age disadvantaged youth appear to benefit most from philanthropic sport efforts. As mentioned, three organizations were dedicated to assisting foster kids, often considered disadvantaged because of the challenges they face due to their circumstances and issues within the foster system. Organizations providing mentoring and educational services were focused on reaching out to at-risk children and, in some cases—such
as with the financial literacy and health and nutrition organizations—educational programs targeted Title 1 schools. Individually, meeting the free and reduced lunch guidelines often made children eligible for support from the nonprofits, including the ones dedicated to financial literacy, clothing distribution, and outreach through sports. As one participant explained: “We mostly focus on [kids who]… meet the, the Federal free and reduced lunch guidelines. So there’s sort of a poverty index there. That we try to work with kids who ordinarily wouldn't have the opportunity either because of finances or other challenges.” In other cases—such as with the youth mentoring, after-school education and technology training programs—guidelines were not necessary to receive support, but the stated nonprofit missions were to serve disadvantaged youth. In the nonprofit that hosts after-school programming, the primary focus is providing a safe, and education-focused environment for students that come from “poverty or abuse” and “have a lot of trauma in their backgrounds.” And, while not as common, two organizations provided programming to youths coming out of the juvenile justice system. Outside the realm of disadvantaged youth, organizations primarily served children suffering from illness. Giving of this kind was done through cancer research foundations, children’s hospitals, and wish-granting organizations.

Other publics identified by nonprofits varied depending on the nonprofit cause with at-risk adults most frequently served. Two organizations reached out to at-risk adults and families by providing shelter and services designed to alleviate the stresses of homelessness. In these cases, the primary goal was to help those living in poverty. Similarly, two organizations served those who have suffered physical abuse or trauma. One organization supports both children and adults who have been abused or raped while also providing services for those who are at risk for or know someone who is at risk for suicide. Similarly, the other organization provides shelter
and services for victims of domestic violence. Finally, one nonprofit partners with all these different nonprofits to help working adults secure transportation. A self-described “last piece for most social service agencies,” this nonprofit has a singular goal of helping individuals become self sufficient through car ownership. These individuals are typically at risk of losing their jobs—thus putting them at risk for losing control of other aspects of their lives—without proper transportation.

Outside of serving at-risk adults, non-profits provided support for specific populations. One organization that provides food assistance typically serves “anyone who is homebound and/or elderly.” Although this organization serves populations such as young adults and the disabled, their recipients tend to be older adults. Two other nonprofits serve specific publics such as legally blind adults and individuals with autism.

Organizational Needs

Running the described programs and serving the noted populations requires various types of donor, corporate, and government support. Because a goal of this project is to understand how ethics of care can inform CSR practices, thus understanding whether sport organizations take an active interest in meeting nonprofit needs, it was important to learn about each nonprofit’s perceived needs. By knowing what these organizations need most, I believe I can better understand whether the support they receive is impactful in a meaningful way. To gain this knowledge, I simply asked participants to describe their organization’s greatest needs. Overwhelmingly, the response was funding.

Among the participants who were asked about perceived organizational needs, financial support was almost unanimously recognized as most important. In some cases, funding was important because the entire mission of the nonprofit involved funding specific programs. For
example, one nonprofit that helps support clinical trials for cancer research puts all its money directly into those research programs. Similarly, one of the hospital foundations relies on money because:

“… that’s what we do… we don’t create the programs. The health system creates the programs, we just fund them. So basically, our sole role is fundraising.”

For the wish-granting foundation, funding is the “most pressing need” because on average, each wish costs roughly $4,000. Another nonprofit that specializes in after-school programming needs funding because acquiring and keeping specifically trained staffers and updating curriculum is costly.

Interestingly, only two participants did not suggest funding as a need, although this makes sense contextually. The organization with the smallest budget is dedicated to providing clothes to children in need. This nonprofit is run by volunteers (even the executive director is only a part-time employee) and relies most heavily on clothing donations, only buying items such as uniforms, shoes, socks, and underwear. For this nonprofit, the primary need is volunteers, followed closely by donations. The second organization that did not mention funding is dedicated to foster care advocacy. Because this organization represents children in the foster care system, their primary need is volunteers who will represent youth and embrace the training and time dedication necessary to be a volunteer.

Although most participants pointed to money as a key organizational need, they simultaneously acknowledged that “any nonprofit person is gonna tell you it’s funding.” As such, many participants also described secondary needs that extended beyond the scope of funding. At this secondary level, needs were more varied, focusing more on in-kind donations, awareness, and volunteerism. For example, some organizations relied on donated consumable items to help keep their housing services running smoothly:
“We, we do 35 loads of laundry a day. We can go through 40 gallons of milk in a week. Those kinds of consumable things that we just keep, that comes out of our budget whenever I have to go buy trash bags.”

Another organization that provides housing and support services similarly seeks donated consumable goods such as food, clothing, and diapers to help support its clients.

Next, awareness was considered an important organizational need. For one hospital, awareness involved drawing attention to key health issues and educational prevention messages. For the organization that supports financial literacy initiatives, word-of-mouth was considered important because of its potential to lead to other organizational needs: money and volunteers. For one foster care group, awareness was an important way to help people understand the challenges faced by youth in foster care, and this was seen as having the potential to open avenues toward creating changes in the foster care system.

More than in-kind donations and awareness, volunteers were overwhelmingly the second most important organizational need. Across the board, volunteers were required in numerous capacities. For organizations with education or mentoring initiatives, volunteers were important because they are key components to running those programs. Some nonprofits elevated the importance of volunteers in part because of the training required to participate in their programs. In foster care advocacy, volunteers need to be specially trained to handle specific issues and situations. Because these people serve minors, they also need to go through rigorous background checks, making it difficult for nonprofits to recruit the help they need to run their programs. In a nonprofit that supports homeless populations, upward of 14 volunteers are needed per day to keep all available services running. These services include everything from operating a soup kitchen to helping clients renew food stamps. Further, this organization offers physician and dentist services, meaning that volunteers for this organization need to have a varying and
sometimes highly specialized range of skills. Other nonprofits need volunteers, but with fewer specialized skills. For example, two organizations that have environmentally-based missions often need volunteers to help construct the apparatuses needed for their programs. Meanwhile, food assistance nonprofit needs volunteers to help deliver and serve food, while one of the clothing distribution organizations simply requires help accepting, sorting, and storing donated goods.

In short, although funding is the most important need for nonprofits, secondary needs such as volunteers, awareness, and in-kind donations are additional resources that nonprofits need to leverage in order to sustain programming. Table 3 (next page) provides a snapshot of the nonprofits represented in this study, detailing characteristics such as the organization’s cause, revenues, and ratings; primary stakeholders and organizational needs; and number of teams that have supported the nonprofit. When information is not available, it is noted via the term “n/a.” With these details in mind, an investigation is required of the types of support provided by the organizations that are giving. The next section reviews the giving practices implemented by the professional sports team represented in this study.

**Professional Sport Organization Giving Practices**

In professional sport numerous parties can be involved in giving practices: owners, team executives, coaching staffs, players, broadcasters, employees, cheerleading and mascot teams, and even player wives and girlfriends. Teams can provide direct support to nonprofits, or they can leverage sponsorship deals with corporate partners to establish CRM programs. Although some giving practices are common across teams—such as grant programs and player appearances—other initiatives are unique to organizations. To understand how CSR is practiced by the teams represented in this study, this section outlines CSR efforts in two ways. First, I
Table 3: Nonprofit Characteristics

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<td>Transportation Services</td>
<td>500 k +</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>At-Risk Adults</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Space</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

describe general giving and program initiatives as they are practiced by the teams in the region, providing examples of how different levels of sport organizations become involved in their giving practices and initiatives. Next, I provide a table describing how each team gives back to
nonprofits. This will both provide an idea of the extent to which each team practices CSR and will help contextualize each team’s practices.

**Primary Sport Giving Practices**

Giving in professional sport happens in numerous ways, although some practices are more common than others. Participants described four primary ways that teams support nonprofits: through grant programs, player appearances, game tickets, and memorabilia. To generate this support, teams establish programs, initiatives, and practices aimed at providing nonprofits with funding, in-kind donations, and sport-related experiences.

Funding is generally provided through competitive grant programs. All three teams in this study have a history of offering grant programs that provide varying levels of support to nonprofits. Grants have been offered in the range of $5,000-$150,000, and teams typically have one or two grant cycles per season. Grants are usually awarded in ceremonies, sometimes hosted during games and other times during special luncheons. Although it is difficult to know how many grants are awarded annually, participant reports suggest anywhere from 10-42 grants are awarded each season or grant cycle. Although some teams have established specific foci for their grant programs—for example, requiring that nonprofits serve child education or health causes—others award grants to various causes by recognizing nonprofit volunteers.

Involving players in nonprofit causes is another popular way that teams become active in their communities. Player involvement depends on factors including type of team initiative, type of team event, and personal preferences. For example, players are often associated with sections of seats at games, and tickets for those seats are provided to nonprofits and the players typically meet those in attendance. Additionally, programs are established to give players volunteer opportunities. Rookies for a team may be grouped together to do community outreach, visiting
various charities to meet clients, give them autographs, take pictures, and perhaps bring them tickets, merchandise, or memorabilia. Player appearances often include visits to local hospitals and less frequently occur at schools and education-related functions. If a player is assigned as a spokesperson for a particular nonprofit, their appearances are often related to that particular nonprofit and its activities. Another way players are involved in sport CSR is through team events. Teams sponsor events such as golf tournaments, involving the players by having them participate in the tournament and other related events. During grant presentation functions, players may also be invited to attend the luncheon and meet with grant recipients. Fashion shows are also a popular player-related event hosted by teams and nonprofits, and often feature players walking the runway, sometimes doing so with children from the nonprofits being supported.

Player involvement also emerges when players feel strongly about a cause for personal reasons or because of personal experience, and thus they actively support a particular cause. In this city, some current and retired players are lauded for their outreach efforts. By providing tickets to games and becoming active in their preferred causes, they have become spokespeople for the nonprofits they support. One player has lived with a specific disease his whole life and now uses his position in the community to advocate for his cause while engaging in activities to help him meet with and educate children who have the same disease.

Beyond financial and player support, in-kind donations such as memorabilia and game tickets are the third most common form of giving seen across teams. Memorabilia such as autographed items are regularly provided to nonprofits for auctions and events, although teams have different approaches to providing memorabilia. Some organizations collect merchandise at the beginning of the season and, during training camps, have players sign all the items. Nonprofits can reach out to these teams for items during the course of the season, but if a team
has run out of particular items before the end of the year, they no longer give. Other organizations simply have players sign memorabilia or provide items as they are requested. Tickets are also a popular in-kind donation, which teams give both on request and unsolicited, and which can be used in various ways. For example, some nonprofits receive blocks of 25-30 tickets per game, while others receive 250 or more tickets to use during the season. Some teams provide nonprofits access to suites to host partners and events, or bring staff to games for planning and board meetings and staff appreciation days.

**Additional Nonprofit Support Practices**

Outside of tickets, memorabilia, player appearances, and grants, teams give to nonprofits through specific programs and initiatives. Funding can come from sponsorship opportunities such as achievement-related programs that establish a donation each time an in-game accomplishment occurs. These achievements can include baseball players getting strikeouts, hockey players scoring goals, or football players successfully kicking field goals. These programs are often connected to a corporate sponsor that supports the program. Teams can also act as sponsors, for example, by financially supporting a nonprofit fundraiser such as a golf tournament or hosting themed game nights in which specific causes or organizations are highlighted and a check is presented. Additionally, holistic relationships are established between sport and nonprofit organizations wherein the team provides both funding (e.g., $10,000 per year) and support through activities such as PSA development or the establishment of a team spokesperson.

Game-related and on-field experiences are also common, although they vary depending on the sport. For example, teams will invite nonprofit representatives and clients on to the field to throw pitches or enjoy warm ups. Other teams will make their arenas available for nonprofit
events; one organization launched a new fundraising campaign at a large on-field event. Finally, participants report that they’ve brought children to the stadia for special fan days that include events and player meetings.

Additionally, in-kind donation programs result in numerous area children receiving backpacks, stuffed bears, and shoes. Team host food and toy drives for nonprofits, often offering discounted game tickets to fans who donate an item. When approached by nonprofits, teams will also offer giveaway items such as cups and bobbleheads for gift packs or backpacks for kids. Teams will also donate excess merchandise or office equipment, if available.

Finally, general programs exist to support nonprofits and their publics directly. Nonprofits have been invited to bring youth to job shadow days to learn more about business and professional careers. One team works with a local school to establish a safe-route program in its neighborhood, while another has invited nonprofits to their arena for an event designed to introduce nonprofit practitioners and help make between-group connections. Finally, educational initiatives supported by teams include reading and math programs.

**Internal Team Involvement**

Per participant experiences, nonprofit support comes from multiple levels of sport organizations. Owners are known to establish personally funded grant programs or provide financial support for public buildings. Team executives get involved in nonprofit work by serving on boards and attending fundraising events. Coaching staffs are known to support causes much the same way as players, by actively participating in and promoting events. And while various player support has already been outlined, player involvement extends to alumni who remain active in their communities by maintaining private foundations or retaining close ties with their former teams. Alumni often continue visiting hospitals and those in need and also
make special appearances and help with fundraising efforts at team-hosted event. The most active sport organization members appear to be employees. Entertainers such as cheerleaders and mascots are visible at events, and are known to visit nonprofits to promote causes or volunteer. Broadcasters are also active, running educational programs and serving as spokespeople for different nonprofits. Teams also establish programs to allow and encourage employees to volunteer, giving them time off work so they can engage in activities such as mentoring, teaching, building gardens, or delivering food. Finally, even player wives and girlfriends are actively involved in giving back to the communities in which their families play. These family members visit nonprofit organizations and often group together to plan and host fundraising events. To fully contextualize how sport organizations in this study practice CSR, Table 4 (next page) details giving practices by individual teams current at the time of data collection. For each team, the type of foundation, primary causes supported, and implemented programs are broadly described. Next, for each team I provide examples of varying types of support: funding, in-kind donations, player involvement, sponsorships, and partnerships.

Table 4: Team Giving Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Type</th>
<th>Foundation Type</th>
<th>Primary Causes Supported</th>
<th>Primary Programs</th>
<th>Funding Programs</th>
<th>In-Kind Donations</th>
<th>Player Appearances</th>
<th>Corporate Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major League Baseball</td>
<td>Team Youth</td>
<td>Education and Health</td>
<td>Grant Program, Community Corner</td>
<td>Grant Program</td>
<td>Tickets, Memorabilia</td>
<td>Nonprofit Request, Year-round</td>
<td>Broadcast, In-Game, Player Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Football League</td>
<td>Family Youth</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Sponsorships</td>
<td>Ticket, Memorabilia, Merchandise</td>
<td>Limited, In-Season, Team Approaches</td>
<td>Nonprofit Limited, Unreported by participants</td>
<td>Broadcast, In-Game, Player Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Hockey League</td>
<td>Team Youth</td>
<td>Health, Various</td>
<td>Grant Program</td>
<td>Tickets, Memorabilia, Merchandise</td>
<td>Broadcast, In-Game, Player Achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

130
Major League Baseball

The first team described here is one that focuses on supporting causes that serve youth and education. This is done in a few different ways including through grants, programming, and getting out in the community. For example, in addition to supporting a grant program, this team seemingly gives additional support to nonprofits that receive those grants. Each year the organization offers two opportunities to apply for $5,000 grants. An estimated 20 nonprofits receive grants during each grant cycle, and they are awarded the grants either during an on-field presentation or a luncheon. For numerous organizations, grants are not the end of the team’s support. Some organizations have had team staff come out to volunteer, while others have been part of sponsored events, public service announcements (PSAs), and mascot, player, and broadcaster involvement.

This team has also established a number of programs with nonprofits. In one case they support a mentoring program as a sponsor, creating PSAs, establishing a player as a spokesperson, providing tickets to the nonprofit, and more. Two other organizations receive a donations every time something specific happens during the game—for example, when a player hits a home run. The team is also involved in a fashion show for children battling illness, and has a program to help support a hunger relief charity. The organization also works closely with a local school, helping establish safe routes for the kids, while also dedicating man hours to volunteering for its programs.

Part of how the team supports nonprofits is by getting out into the community. Players are encouraged to support youth causes, visiting children’s hospitals, and making appearances for financial literacy, youth sports, and health and nutrition programs. Other members of the
organization that do visible work in the community include executives, coaches, broadcasters, wives and girlfriends, and the mascot.

**National Football League**

Philanthropic efforts by the NFL team focus primarily on in-kind donations and player appearances, although they also provide limited funding and other forms of support to nonprofits.

In-kind donations from this team are varied and often a result of team-established programs. Many participants in this study reported receiving game tickets and were aware of a special Players’ Zone ticket program. Each game, a section of tickets is set aside for specific players who choose the charities they wish to support by bringing them to games. Other initiatives by this team include a program that donates hundreds of teddy bears to pediatric hospital patients and a backpack program that provides back-to-school supplies to nonprofits that support at-risk youth. They are also known for doing major events around the holidays, such as bringing children to buy toys at Christmas. This team has also donated apparel and computers, as well as conducted food and toy drives to encourage giving from fans. Participants report being able to acquire signed memorabilia to help with fundraisers.

This team also tends to support nonprofits through various player and staff appearances. Players on the team have one day off per week during the season, and that day is often used for these appearance. These visits tend to take players to local hospitals, although they have also done appearances at a local shelter. A club for the team rookies has also been established to promote community outreach. Beyond players, cheerleaders are also active in the community. This team’s cheerleaders adopt an organization for the season, then visit the nonprofit once per month to participate in service projects.
Few participants report receiving funding from the NFL team, but grants have been available in the past. In previous years, participants’ organizations have received grants for $2,500 and $5,000. One nonprofit in the study received a $150,000 season-long grant through a program put together by a team and one of its major sponsors. With this grant, the nonprofit received a full season of in-stadium coverage as well as support for numerous on-site projects.

**National Hockey League**

As the third and final team in this discussion, the NHL team primarily supports nonprofits through its grant program and volunteering. The team also provides in-kind donations upon request.

Most participants in this study reported receiving support from this team through its grant program, which is designed to recognize volunteers and awards large grants that can be distributed to the person’s organizations of choice. As a follow-up, the team has hosted an event for grant recipients to encourage networking and collaboration among those groups. Additionally, both players and alumni have made sizeable donations to nonprofits of their choice.

Volunteering is also a big part of this organization’s culture. In addition to having executives that serve on nonprofit boards, staff members are given paid time off to volunteer for local nonprofits. Broadcasters from the team are also involved in community education, participating in local reading and math programs at grade-level schools. Players also participate in initiatives to support nonprofits, for example unloading donations at a holiday drop-off center, participating in a street hockey event, and escorting cancer patients down the runway during a local fashion show. Players have also served as spokespeople for local nonprofits.
Outside of funding and volunteering, this team provides in-kind donations primarily in the form of game tickets and memorabilia. Each year they hold holiday food drives, and they are known for supporting specific causes and nonprofits by dedicating game nights to spreading awareness about those causes.

**Conclusion**

A review of CSR practices by professional sport organizations in this study shows that teams contribute to nonprofits in various ways. By providing support through funding, in-kind donations, volunteerism, and additional programming, the teams reach numerous nonprofits whose work touches the lives of many people in the region. Although the teams in this study primarily support youth-centric causes, they also reach out to and support organizations that help at-risk adults and families in need. This work is carried out by passionate nonprofit practitioners who bring a wide range of professional experience to their positions. Many of these people are keenly dedicated to their organizations, often identifying closely with the causes they support and the publics they serve.

By describing the practitioners and nonprofits represented in this study, as well as the types of giving done by professional sport teams, I provide the necessary context for understanding how nonprofit practitioners perceive CSR efforts in professional sport. The next chapter addresses the research questions posed in this study.
Chapter 5

Results

To provide the context for this study, the previous chapter described both the participant and nonprofit characteristics, arguably establishing participant credibility and creating a detailed account of the nonprofits represented in this study. Sport organization giving, as described by the participants, was then elaborated to build an understanding of sport corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices from the nonprofit practitioner perspective. By describing the participants, nonprofits, and sport-based giving practices being assessed, I can better answer the research questions guiding this study. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interviews I conducted with nonprofit practitioners who are familiar with their organizations’ relationships with local sport organizations.

This chapter is organized by the research questions guiding this research. Each question is presented then explicated based on the themes and patterns that emerged during data analysis, and verbatim quotes illustrate the themes presented. The research questions are as follows:

**RQ1:** How are the relationships between nonprofits and sport organizations established from the perspective of nonprofit organizations?

**RQ2:** What do nonprofits perceive as the positive and negative components of their relationships with sport organizations?

**RQ3:** What unique benefits and challenges do nonprofit organizations believe they yield from partnering with professional sport organizations?

**RQ4:** How does ethics of care manifest in nonprofit and professional sport organization relationships?
Research Question 1: Establishing Relationships

To understand how nonprofits become associated with professional sport organizations, I wanted to learn how the relationships are established. This meant understanding which parties initiate contact and which organizational figures are important in making those connections. Participant responses suggest that relationships are established in three ways: through grant applications, by nonprofits reaching out to teams, and by teams reaching out to nonprofits. Direct connections between teams and nonprofits are frequently the result of nonprofits leveraging existing relationships. For example, board members often establish connections, and nonprofit professionals use pre-existing relationships to contact teams. Participants also discussed how connections are established with different individuals and departments within the sports organizations.

Grant Applications

Applying for grants appeared to be the most straightforward way nonprofits established relationships with sport organizations. In these cases, nonprofits typically learn about or seek out grant applications, which are submitted online via team or team foundation websites. After the grants are reviewed, participants are recognized at events and awarded the funding to complete proposed projects. Upon completing these projects, required reporting involved letting teams know how received money was used in short, informal reports describing how grant requirements were met. Grant requirements for these teams seemed relatively simple, such as mentioning the team and the grant via nonprofit collateral and web communication. Although one team hosted an event to bring together recipient nonprofits, grant-related communication typically ends after the outlined requirements have been met.
Many of the nonprofits in this study received grants after going through the relatively straightforward application process. As one participant described, “every one of these groups has a foundation” and the first thing she does is search online for their programs. Another explained, “I’ve essentially just gone online, identified the fact that there’s programs out there.” Typically, nonprofits apply for grants with specific projects in mind, then carry out those projects upon receiving funding, reporting on what they did when the project is complete. The process can be so straightforward that contact with the organization prior to follow-up reporting is not required unless the nonprofit chooses to reach out. In some cases, nonprofits may even receive money without applying directly for the grant. One team’s program focuses on providing grants to nominated volunteers that have had a positive impact in the community, meaning nonprofits can potentially receive funds from awardees that other organizations have nominated. After grants are awarded, nonprofits provide follow-up information about how the money was used.

Notably, even nonprofits with unsuccessful grant applications considered the process a way to connect with teams. One participant explained that teams encourage nonprofits to keep applying, providing an opportunity to stay in touch:

“So they always encourage you, ‘don't give up.’ Apply, you know, our hope is someday you'll get it, but keep doing it. … any time I have questions or need help or say, ‘is this kind of what you’re thinking?’ they're always available and ready to answer.”

For this participant, these conversations kept a line of communication open and established opportunities for other connections to be made: “You just keep ways to stay in touch. You know, the money may not be there yet, but there are still other things out there.”

**Nonprofits Reaching Out**

In addition to applying for grants, nonprofits most frequently reach out to sport organizations for varying levels of support. As will be discussed, teams rarely reach out to
nonprofits, instead waiting to receive requests. As one participant suggested: “I’ve never had anybody try to chase me down to give me any… money. [laughing] I’ll put it that way! So we always reach out to them.” That said, the three primary reasons nonprofits reach out is to request in-kind donations, to get teams involved in programs, and to maintain and establish relationships.

First, most participants reported requesting and receiving in-kind donations including tickets and memorabilia. One participant reported: “As far as the organization itself goes, if I ever ask for an auction item or anything like that, I get it right away.”

Next, participants reach out to involve teams in their cause or work with them on programs. Two participants invited team employees for tours of their facilities to show them the work they do. Although this arguably falls under the umbrella of relationship building (because part of the goal was to establish relationships), in this context the action is a form of involvement because of the nonprofit desire to show their work first-hand. Participants also reported that they request player appearances: “like, if we’re having an event at the (nonprofit) we, we might have been the first to reach out to a team and said, ‘Hey, why don’t you send some of the players?’”

Some nonprofits also get teams involved in programs by writing formal proposals that call for both funding and assistance.

Finally, nonprofits also reach out merely to establish and maintain relationships. One participant believed that in order to establish connections the nonprofit is required to make the call:

“… I know that my boss didn’t fall asleep and then one morning, I know his phone didn’t ring and it was the (team) … going, ‘Hey, we want to help you out!’ You know, you have to keep pushing toward something if you really want it…”

One well-known nonprofit has built its reputation in part by having a founder that has established personal connections in the community for more than 30 years. This nonprofit’s mission
embraces a culture in which the nonprofit reaches out to individuals who they believe will identify with the cause. One coach in particular was approached “through his personal assistant and community relations” department in a personal way:

“We initiated a relationship with an invitation to him, a personal letter about what we thought about his leadership and invited him to visit the (nonprofit) and we pursued him, because we really felt like he would being a good fit, since he’s a man of faith and things we've read and heard about him in other communities. So we did our research on the coach, too, and targeted our approach. And we worked with his community relations team to get him his own speaker, to have him come volunteer here, you know, to develop that relationship.”

Although this approach seems rare among nonprofits in this study, it echoes the sentiments of other practitioners, regardless of the nonprofit size or the strength of the relationship with the team. For example, one practitioner at a smaller nonprofit explained, “And so, every organization I’ve been at, I’ve reached out to them [the teams], because, you know, you always want to follow your contacts—it’s all about relationships.”

Despite best efforts by these nonprofits, attempts to make contact are not always successful. For example, one nonprofit invited team representatives to attend a special event designed to recognize the support the team gave to the organization. Because of conflicting commitments, the team was not able to send a representative to the event. The participant describing this event felt it “would’ve been nice to be able to have done that, but that just never came through.” In follow-up discussion, the participant emphasized this was not a negative experience—they were pleased with the event and recognized the team’s availability simply did not work out at the time.

**Teams Reaching Out**

The least common way relationships are established between nonprofit and sport organizations is via the teams reaching out. Infrequently, teams may contact nonprofits to plan
player appearances or offer in-kind donations. Only one team was reported as reaching out to schedule player appearances, typically contacting hospitals to schedule visits:

“… there might be new players to a team that that organization is looking to promote in the community, and they will call us and say, ‘Hey, listen, you know, our new catcher could come and visit your hospital next Tuesday.’”

Similarly, one participant reported that when a player group wanted to visit their hospital, the team called to schedule the appearance.

Teams also reach out to offer in-kind donations. All teams reportedly offer tickets to nonprofits, and one organization contacts nonprofits to provide goods for children. One nonprofit that serves at-risk families is invited annually to bring children on a shopping trip during the holidays. Additionally, hospitals that receive bears from the team report that “once you’ve been in contact with them, they typically say, ‘what do you want next year?’”

In addition to offering player appearances and donations, teams also reach out to serve on boards and create programs. A participant from a large, well-known nonprofit reported that they “get great calls from people that want to be a part of us,” and mentioned that the owner of one team “wanted to be on our board.” Another organization was contacted by a team when one of its broadcasters wanted to start a reading program for elementary school children. Soon after, another broadcaster asked to start a math program, showing that individuals within the sport organizations are sometimes responsible for reaching out to nonprofits.

**Leveraging Relationships**

Networking and maintaining relationships with individuals at different organizations is seemingly key to creating connections in the nonprofit community. To learn how relationships are established, it it became important to understand how nonprofits leverage existing
relationships to make connections with sport organizations. Leveraging relationships emerged as an important component of establishing connections with sport organizations, and it appeared to occur two ways: through both board member and personal relationships.

**Board Member Connections**

Board members emerged as important figures for creating and maintaining relationships between nonprofits and sport organizations. Notably, these connections sometimes blurred the line between whether a nonprofit or team was reaching out, in part because sport organization representatives often serve on nonprofit boards. The two types of board members that create sports-related connections for nonprofits are board members who work for teams and board members who know individuals that work for teams.

Board members who work for teams were presented as individuals who help make things happen within sport organizations. Although participants did not describe how board members joined their boards, they did describe how team representatives appoint co-workers to take over their seats, thus creating relationship continuity. Ultimately, these connections allow nonprofits to remain in contact with teams. For example, board members create support inside their organizations by serving as a “voice” and influencing action. One participant described having a board member who helped get a decision made about a pending proposal, explaining: “And we’ll start with a person that’s on our board who also works for the (team), and he’ll be able to take it to make, to have some decisions made. Um, if that’s the case, then we’ll get a—so the decision’s made: yes or no, we’ll do it.” When describing a relationship with a different team, the same participant referred to a key board member who has rallied people within his organization around their cause:
“Their GM is on our board and that’s very helpful to us, because he is our, you know, one of the voices within the organization who can really help us. And um, we’re not his only charity, but we are one that he really cares about.”

Another participant described how his nonprofit received grants regularly when a team representative was on the board, “So all of that started happening simultaneous to each other, and uh, I think we received a grant in 2005 as I recall. … I know it went for three years in a row that we got, that we got grants. And um, and it’s all about relationships.” In this case, the board member from a team essentially established the relationship between the nonprofit and sports organization such that the relationship was weakened when he no longer served on the board.

Another way nonprofits establish connections with teams is via personal relationships that board members have with people in sport organizations. In these situations, the board member often reaches out to the person they know to request support for the nonprofit. One participant explained:

“… we’re not officially reaching out to the (team), but we have a donor that reaches out who is affiliated with the (team) and I'm sure he's probably a big donor to the (team). … He just talks with the (team) and says ‘Hey, would you be willing to do this?’”

In general, how these relationships are established varies. In some cases, the board member was a major sponsor for the sport organization, thus having a professional and financial relationship that opens opportunities to request support. Other board members simply have personal connections they leverage; for example, one board chair was described as being connected to an influential executive at a local sport organization because they graduated from the same university. Another participant described a board member who knows a team announcer that also serves as an “emeritus public relations guy with the (team),” showing that connections can be made at different employment levels. Other board members were described
as being connected to teams because they were “savvy” and “big sports” people who were simply willing to reach out to teams and ask for support.

**Personal Connections**

In addition to board members building bridges for nonprofits, the power of personal relationships also emerged as valuable to creating organizational connections. This occurred in two ways: in addition to nonprofit professionals leveraging their own relationships, people with a passion for the cause or nonprofit introduced others to the organization.

Most participants worked other jobs both in and out of the nonprofit sector prior to their current positions, and many described carrying over relationships from previous work experiences. Although these connections do not appear to be close working relationships, enough familiarity remains so that participants can stay in touch with those individuals. As one participant described: “… that’s how that’s worked is, is knowing (person) from kind of a previous life and then staying in touch with her as things have gone on.” Another participant described a relationship that spanned multiple jobs for both people involved: “… I mean my one with the (team)… really started like three, four organizations ago that I was working with… the community relations director there now—who's been there close, 8 to 10 years—was with another organization…” Another participant simply knew a team receptionist because they worked together at another job.

Unfortunately, having personal connections with team staff does not guarantee the nonprofit-sport relationship will come to fruition or be stable. For example, one participant described having a contact that was setting up a meeting with a team executive, but the connection had not been made because the meeting had yet to take place. Also, one of team had a community relations manager who left their position, and it was apparent this person served as a
key figure for nonprofits. A handful of participants both mentioned the manager and discussed her leaving the team. Some participants felt they no longer had a contact with the organization upon her departure: “… I know (person), I’ve lost my contact there, she doesn’t work there anymore. And I knew her.” In one case, the departure shifted the relationship so that the team started working with another entity associated with the nonprofit. Similarly, when one participant recounted another case of a director leaving a team foundation, he felt less confident that he would receive the same support as he had in prior years. To him, that point of contact in the relationship “makes it more stable.”

Finally, relationships are also established by people who associate with nonprofits or are passionate about a cause. One participant described how her nonprofit always approaches the teams, but felt it was easier, in part, because the relationships were influenced by supporters:

“You know, it's been easier than you would expect. I think both of [the teams] have been introduced to us through other supporters, so it's always helpful to be able to call and say that so-and-so wanted us to give you a call and we would be delighted. So um, the connection in the community helps a lot.”

Additionally, two participants described volunteers who helped build relationships because they had contacts within sport organizations. One prime example is of a child who was born with a disability and has subsequently dedicated an immense amount of time to fundraising for and supporting the children’s hospital that treats her. Because of her personality and general passion, she has developed relationships—particularly with athletes—that end up benefitting the hospital:

“And since she’s been very small, like three or four, she’s extremely articulate and warm… and she reaches out. And so her parents have taken these opportunities to have her meet with sports people and others to make them connect with us. And there then, when they connect with the overall hospital, things happen on a different level, like with those teams. ‘Cause then there’s a willingness from the team when they know that that individual um, player is very involved with us.”
In short, although personal relationships do not appear to have the strength of relationships buoyed by board members, they may still have a significant impact for nonprofits.

**Connecting with the Team**

Working with people who care about and support individual causes seemingly creates various relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations. When examining how these relationships are established, it becomes important to understand who nonprofit communicates with when contacting the teams. Points of contact can be conceptualized in two ways: first, by the employment rank of people who serve as contacts, and second, by the departments with which the nonprofit primarily works.

**Employee Ranks**

Who nonprofits communicate with in sport organizations varies from interns to CEOs. Participants primarily communicate with community relations and foundation directors, depending upon the sport organization. One team has a vice president of philanthropy while others have foundation and community relations directors. Individuals in the sport organizations serve numerous roles depending on the nonprofit needs. For example, one participant talks to different people depending on what they need assistance with:

“If you’re writing a grant with the Foundation, they have a person … it really does. So you’ve got the grant person, the Foundation person, and then if you are looking for just tickets or something, that’s one of the interns and that’s, I don’t know—they, they’re always listed as ‘intern,’ ‘Intern, (Team).’ Um, community outreach is probably one of their bigger people.”

One participant was assigned a “relationship manager” when her organization developed a close working relationship with a team. This manager helped coordinate activities such as player connections and event coordination. Unfortunately, the pace of the interview prevented me from learning the position or department of the manager being described, but the example still shows
how individuals guide contact within teams. This was highlighted by another participant who described event coordination:

“And then we get someone within the organization that will be our direct contact. So it probably won’t be the CEO um, or the president. For sure, not the owner! It’ll be somebody that’ll execute and work with us to make it a, a great special event or night, or you know, who’s gonna be involved in the organization, who’s gonna ask the players, all that kind of stuff.”

Who nonprofit practitioners contact also depends on how closely they work with a team. One nonprofit whose nonprofit has multifaceted relationships with sport organizations described how their organization balances communication:

“And how we've managed those relationships is our president and our CEO tend to talk with the owner and the, you know, the GM and president at this level. You know, the highest level. And then it'll come down to somebody like me and the community relations folks, or the events folks, who carry everything out. So, me, we position the folks at the same level with the same people. At the (team) it's (Team) Foundation, and we work with (contact) and then her team of folks underneath her, right? … And (nonprofit president) is talking to (team CEO), so our president is talking, you know, to their, the same level of folks.”

Beyond these more formal connections, participants also described communication with CEO and owner assistants, a senior vice president of marketing, community relations managers and directors, a corporate director of sales, and senior front office staff members. Notably, some organizations—particularly those who have only received grants—do not have defined contacts within the organizations. As such, although teams have employees who appear to be dedicated to community relations and foundation work, nonprofits still maintain contacts throughout sport organizations. Even so, these contacts primarily work in community relations departments or team foundations.

**Team Departments**

Participants most frequently described communicating with employees from communication relationships departments. Participants explained that the community relations
department does everything from scheduling player visits, to organizing events, to coordinating media. Even nonprofits with minimal team connections reported contacting the community relations department when they had questions about grants.

Team foundations were also contacted frequently for similar reasons. For example, the baseball team runs its grant program through its foundation, making that the department to contact for application and follow-up communication. One participant explained that for both teams and other corporations, “they have, a lot of times, a separate arm which is their foundation,” and if the nonprofit need is “dollars, you go through the foundation.”

Beyond community relations departments and team foundations, two participants described having relationships with the marketing departments, but those relationships were not elaborated beyond expressing they existed. Another participant described contacting ticketing when she hoped to get tickets for the children her nonprofit serves.

In general, relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations are developed in numerous ways and at varying organizational levels. First, relationships are formed by one of three primary contact methods: when nonprofits apply for grants, when nonprofits reach out to teams, and when teams reach out to the nonprofits. Next, who makes those connections is important to understanding the strength of the relationships. Board members, especially those from teams, appear to establish the strongest connections with sport organizations, although having personal relationships with team contacts can also help establish relationships for nonprofits. Finally, communication happens at two organizational levels including employee rank and department. Fittingly, nonprofits predominantly contact individuals based in community relations departments and team foundations. To build on these ideas, the next section describes the perceived positive and negative components of these relationships.
Research Question 2: Positive and Negative Components

In addition to learning how relationships with sport organizations are established by nonprofits, I wanted to understand how these relationships are perceived. Specifically, this research question aims to explore which components of these relationships are perceived positively or negatively. Although participants did not always explicitly state positive or negative opinions, they often framed comments in ways that made it possible to interpret whether their experiences and recollections were good or bad.

Emergent themes suggest that positive and negative reflections can be grouped into two categories: relationship dynamics and relationship impacts. In this context, relationship dynamics are positive or negative reflections about the interactions participants describe having with professional sport organizations. Relationship impacts are the perceived positive and negative outcomes of being in relationships with teams.

Participants generally described having positive interactions with sport organizations. In the context of relationship dynamics, sports organizations were described as supportive, friendly, and responsive. Conversely, the overwhelming criticism directed at teams was it was frustrating and discouraging being unable to reach the teams. In regard to impacts, nonprofits seemed highly appreciative of the support they received, and felt the impact on nonprofit stakeholders highlighted the good that comes from these relationships. However, some participants reported isolated, negative incidents with one particular team.

Relationship Dynamics

Recalling their experiences with professional sport teams, participants generally felt their interactions were positive. Participants described the teams and their employees in various ways, referring to them as friendly, warm, supportive, appreciative, responsive, genuine, helpful,
gracious, cordial, kind, considerate, and generous. The use of these positive adjectives is noteworthy, if only because participants did not describe their experiences in any opposing negative terms. As one participant suggested, he was “really happy about” the relationship his nonprofit had with a local team. Most frequently, participants described the teams as responsive, respectful and friendly. Conversely, participants did not have many negative comments about their experiences with sports teams, but poor communication practices and an inability to reach the teams seemingly frustrated participants.

**Responsive, Respectful, and Friendly Relationships**

Numerous participants identified the teams as “responsive.” Based on the context of the comments made, being responsive meant the teams were easy to communicate with, worked with nonprofits to meet their needs, and offered alternative forms of support if a nonprofit’s request could not be met. Participants described how teams were “open and communicative to us” and that “anytime we have a special need, whether it’s an auction for an event or a player visit or, you know, we’ve got a child that’s not doing well, really needs a… boost, they’re very responsive.” Another felt a team was “very responsive” because they provided tickets and items when asked. Yet another participant felt being responsive simply meant that a high-ranking employee “answers my calls.”

Teams were considered both responsive and respectful when they offered alternatives to nonprofit suggestions. A number of participants who described this as teams saying, “no, but…” were extremely appreciative of the respect and honesty it showed. One participant stated: “So, you know what, you took my dream and went from here to here, but I’ll meet you in the middle. That’s still awesome.” Another described how, because of her relationship with a team, she could openly send them proposals. Although this does not give her “carte blanche,” she knows
that her requests will at least receive counter proposals. A different participant explained: “… even if the answer to what you’re asking is ‘no,’ you know somebody’s gonna get back to you. Um, and they’re going to get back to you having given whatever it was that you asked some, some thought… They’re gonna have a rationale if they can’t do it.” This seemingly respectful relationship approach was extended when teams hosted nonprofits and their clients at games or events. Teams were described as being very accommodating, with one participant describing her time at a game as “a first-class experience.”

Finally, team employees were perceived as friendly because they are helpful, supportive, and easy to communicate with. As one participant explained through a counter-example:

“(Employee’s) working with me, she communicates with me, she gets back to me. Not everybody does that with me. Let me tell you. You need a thick, an extra layer of skin to do my job, because people don’t call you back. They don’t, you know…. She doesn’t have to be as nice to me as she is. She’s really awesome. So, so everyone at the organization that I’ve encountered has been wonderful.”

In general, participants greatly valued those connections that felt friendly, laid back, and easy-going. They appreciated having open conversations with team contacts and enjoyed having relaxed relationships with the teams:

“So you know, we feel sort of friendly. … It’s a nice, easy-going relaxed relationship. We don’t feel a lot of pressure, we don’t feel like they’re tangling anything up of ours.”

Notably, one team was perceived as having a “more personal” approach to communicating with nonprofits. Compared to other teams and experiences, their communication approach to relationship-building appeared to be perceived as the most respectful and appreciated.

**Poor Communication**

Although some participants felt the teams were responsive and easy to communicate with, being unable to reach teams and their employees emerged as one of the more frustrating—
and seemingly negative—aspects of working with sport teams. The reasons for their frustrations were often contextual, but ultimately resulted in shared negative feelings.

One participant lamented that she did not have consistent contacts within an organization, explaining: “I work with a different intern almost every time. I wish, I wish it was just one person, but that’s their program for the interns, so I have to be flexible that way. But I kind of wish I had a better relationship with just one or two people there.” Although she described her inability to reach the teams as discouraging, the participant simultaneously suggested the volume of calls they likely receive hinders their ability to respond to everyone:

“It’s discouraging. ‘Cause you can leave messages and not get called back, but I still, I still think it’s because they are so hard-hit up. I don’t think that they do it because they don’t care. I don’t think they mean not to return calls. I think they’re probably fielding many, many, many calls a day.”

Another participant did not explicitly describe their experience as frustrating, but believed not having a single contact results in nonprofits being ignored: “Sometimes you, you can’t… get to who you want. Yeah, sometimes that happens; or they put you off, or if they don’t want to work with you on that, you know, they push you away sometimes.”

When teams failed to communicate in a timely fashion, the communication lapses created “iffy” situations for participants. One executive director who was left waiting to hear about the status of a grant explained:

“It’s relationship building. But, it just is not, the time spent and then not to get it … and they say oh, it’s, if you don’t get the first round the person will roll over to the second round. But that puts me in such an awkward position. Am I supposed to sit and wait and hope?”

The feeling of being forced to wait was echoed by another participant who had been promised a player appearance at an event. Because of the time it took for the team to confirm which players would participate, the nonprofit was unable to promote the event the way they would have liked.
to had they been afforded more time. This participant expressed about teams in general:

“Well, I think they don’t, they don’t understand the, the reality of what organizations like ours would go through to try to reach them. And what we’re trying to do and um… I don’t think they realize how impactful they can be even in small doses, you know? … we spin our wheels enough with funding and everything else and they make it more difficult. So, it frustrates me (laughing), obviously, when they put up too many barriers or whatever.”

Further illustrating these frustrations, one team was perceived as particularly harder to communicate with. One participant explained: “… For some reason, we’ve never been able to 100% connect. In fact, I, I don’t really think they get it.” He went on to explain that his nonprofit no longer applies for the team’s grants because “you don’t hear anything back, you don’t get a, you know, a letter that they even received it or anything like that.” Other participants reported similar feelings about this team, with one stating: “I don’t even bother with them because it’s like, I already have enough. I’m gonna go where the doors are open.” Another explained that although they were in contact with the team, their efforts to discuss having a player representative were unsatisfying:

“Um, I’ve tried to get in with them and get… some players involved in (nonprofit) and it’s just kind of come to a, the same you know, we’ll talk to you later, we’ll talk to you later, we’ll talk to you later. And it’s, you know, they… kind of always put up a stalemate with me and… I’m not like that. But um, so they kind of rubbed me the wrong way there a little bit.”

Similarly, a participant whose nonprofit had been involved in a major grant program found that the team significantly reduced contact when it came time to reapply for support. Although the team’s choice to support a different nonprofit was considered rational and acceptable, she questioned whether the team could have communicated more during the process:

“As you expect with all personal communications, you expect something back timely and it wasn’t that time, you know?” Although she emphasized this was a “one time” experience, the behavior appeared to be a pattern for this organization.
Relationship Impacts

In addition to reflecting on relationship dynamics, participants often discussed the impacts created by sport organizations. They had particularly favorable opinions of team giving efforts, which were expressed two ways: First, they appreciated the teams’ general CSR practices; second, they were particularly pleased when they felt that team giving positive impacted their clients. Criticisms of team giving impacts were isolated to individual, negative experiences with a single team. In rare cases, the team simply failed to meet the expectations they created.

Positive Impacts

In addition to valuing positive interactions with the teams, nonprofit practitioners were highly appreciative of the financial support and extended support they received. Two participants that boasted partnerships with multiple teams described themselves as lucky to have those relationships. While one simply stated her nonprofit was “lucky to have as many of the teams as we do,” another elaborated her feelings:

“So, they are a big part and we are lucky, lucky, lucky to have the relationship that we have with all of them. Um, and now many people can say that they have, you know, they might’ve gotten a jersey from all of them or stick, a football, but to have had a relationship like we’ve had um, it’s, it’s amazing.”

Numerous participants also described team support as “huge” to indicate positive perceptions of team giving impacts. When describing the financial support their nonprofit received, one participant explained: “Huge—like I said, I have to raise 1.5 million, you can do the math there.” Other instances of support being described as “huge” were related to the nonprofits securing financial support. For one nonprofit, the funding was positive because it both directly helped the organization, and was seen as opening doors to the team:
“I know the board was ecstatic when we finally did get that funding, because it only strengthened our relationship with them and gave us more direct communication with them. And you know, we invite them to things and, and I think it’s a positive. It’s, there’s no negative.”

For others, funding was appreciated in conjunction with other experiences. One participant described the honor of being recognized at a game where she was awarded a grant, stating: “… The funds were amazing. I mean, so it was incredible, and the experience was incredible. You know, to be honored at the game, it was just one of those moments that will forever be here.” When she said the word “here” she pointed to her heart to show her level of appreciation. Others described sitting in suites and felt being honored at games was “very positive” particularly because it gave nonprofits an opportunity to network: “… It’s just a great night to bring exposure and then they have a box for us to go to. So it, it allows for a lot of networking among all of us, you know, to talk about things and, and how to work better together.”

In addition to being honored at games, extended support in the form of fundraising was considered a positive outcome of sport giving. One participant whose nonprofit co-hosts a major fundraising event with a team explained: “Well, first of all you can, can just imagine what the (team) are doing for us by doing a fundraiser? They don’t do that for everybody. It’s huge.” She went explained that a team employee referred to her nonprofit as a “partner charity,” and expressed: “That’s a big deal, you know? That’s a really big deal for us.”

Beyond funding support, networking events and volunteering was appreciated. One person felt a team-hosted networking event was “brilliant,” while another described it as “sort of an uplifting experience to be in a room with so many individuals who are so tied to doing good things in our community and to know that we are being supported by the sports team.” Finally,
volunteering was appreciated by participants who described volunteers as “breaking their backs for us” or energetic and caring such that nonprofit employees “really enjoy being with them.”

**Impacting Clients**

One nuanced theme that emerged as a positive impact was the perceived direct impact on clients. Participants whose nonprofits served children described the joy those children experienced when they received in-kind donations. One nonprofit was able to provide backpacks to its clients, exciting the young children who were “just thrilled” with the gifts. Although children may not understand these are in-kind donations, they still benefit from the team support. Similarly, a participant explained how the youth they serve received donated apparel they might not otherwise be able to purchase: “You know, I mean, you’ve got to, you got to put yourself in their shoes, because that’s, that’s the demographic that we’re serving.” To this participant, the novelty of receiving sports apparel was only a secondary benefit for the children who cannot afford clothes in general. Getting sports apparel was something extra to feel good about. Similarly, youth who met athletes were described as awed by their presence, and seeing players in the classroom was perceived as being “the coolest thing in the world!” Additionally, one team hires youth connected to a foster care nonprofit, something the participant believed had obvious, positive impacts for a population that struggles to find employment opportunities. In short, the relationships established with sport teams were considered positive because they help those served by nonprofits. As one participant expressed about the local teams:

“I think that they do enhance the quality of life in the area. Um, and I think especially when they do take on causes that are publicly, publicly take on causes, that it helps everybody. I think sports teams are very positive for culture.”
Poor experiences

Although most participants could not recount examples of teams creating negative impacts, one team was noted for creating a couple of unfavorable experiences. Although these experiences were limited to one team and were not positioned as negative experiences, it is worth reporting them because of the types of negative impressions they created. For example, one nonprofit reported that when they visited the team to pick up a donation, “it ended up being really trash.” The participant felt even untrained professionals would recognize the donated items were in extremely poor shape:

“Nobody would’ve thought that this was any kind of thing that was gonna be usable to anybody. They just kind of in one sense used us to pick up their trash. And then, so we, you know, that kind of left a bad taste in our mouth.”

Another nonprofit had a comparable experience in which the team hosted a donation drive during a game. Although the participant described this only as “not a real positive,” it illustrates a disappointing—but not wholly negative—experience with the team. The participant explained that their nonprofit was invited to join the donation drive the team had already planned. Because the nonprofit was added after the event had been established, their participation was poorly advertised and few donations came in. In the meanwhile, the team strongly suggested the nonprofit needed to rent box trucks to retrieve the donated goods, but only three large boxes of donations came in. Arguably, the effort required by the nonprofit extended their capacity beyond what might be considered reasonable based on the returns. Although these direct negative experiences were rare, other participants perceived this team’s efforts as less exciting or impactful than the team might like the public to perceive. I believe these reflections most closely resembled unfavorable giving impacts because they illustrate how expectations generated by a team are not met if practices are poorly executed or misrepresented.
Despite these few negative opinions, most participants felt their relationships with sport organizations are marked by positive dynamics and favorable impacts. In the next question, I explore whether working with sport organizations results in specific benefits or challenges that can help explain the nature of the impacts.

**Research Question 3: Benefits and Challenges of Working with Teams**

One goal of this study is to explore whether nonprofit perceptions of sport CSR benefits align with the perceptions presented by sport organization executives and sport CSR scholars (i.e., Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, 2013). Scholars argue that sport organizations are uniquely situated to practice CSR, but little work also examines the challenges or downsides of receiving that support. As such, this third research question examines both the benefits and challenges yielded by nonprofits that receive support from sport organizations. This research question is divided into two overarching sections detailing those perceived benefits and challenges, and each section is explored via emergent themes. Specifically, two types of benefits (direct and indirect) and challenges (internal and external) are elaborated.

**Benefits**

Sport CSR scholarship positions the sport industry as being capable of creating social change via four unique industry characteristics including fan passion, economics, transparency, and stakeholder management (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, 2013; Godfrey, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walters, 2009). Emergent themes suggest nonprofit practitioners perceive these benefits somewhat differently than sports executives. Four themes emerged as perceived benefits of working with sport organizations, including awareness, reach, credibility, and visibility.
Arguably, these themes fit into two categories reflecting direct and indirect benefits. In this context, direct benefits are defined as characteristics possessed by sport organizations that can be transferred to other partners such as nonprofits. Emergent direct benefits include awareness, reach, and credibility. Next, indirect benefits are characteristics that cannot be transferred to other organizations, but align with and can enhance direct benefits. The indirect benefit that emerged is visibility, which is derived from team recognizability and celebrity.

**Awareness**

The ability for sport organizations to raise awareness about causes and nonprofits emerged as one of the most addressed topics in this study. Based on participant responses, awareness—and creating awareness—is the perceived ability for teams to help raise awareness of an organization, brand, mission, or cause. More than other corporate partners, teams were seen as having a unique ability to create awareness. As one participant suggested, although the financial support is important, teams truly have the ability to share messages. Explaining that he receives “larger amounts” of funding from other places, he believed “the real leverage that they provide is that communication piece.” As such, this section explores how awareness is perceived by nonprofit practitioners. First, I describe how awareness is generated—teams primarily create awareness using in-game messaging and presentations, and they are viewed as being uniquely positioned to create issue awareness and name and brand recognition. Next, I describe the perceived limitations of these practices. Notably, participants highlighted issues related to in-game messaging, messaging impacts, and audience attention.

**Creating Awareness**

In-game messaging was most frequently identified as the way teams create awareness for nonprofits. Specifically, in-game presentations typically occur when nonprofits receive grants.
Although each team awards grants differently, the practice generally involves acknowledging recipients during games. Based on participant descriptions, one team invites all grant recipients to a specific game in which community giving is highlighted. Another team acknowledges grant recipients each game with an accompanying team-produced video that highlights recipients on the Jumbotron. This was considered a benefit of being supported by teams because “other organizations don’t really have that capability to, to announce it at a game.” Some participants described hearing from friends after they were shown during games, and one recalled being approached by someone who recognized them out in the community. This participant felt this shows that people pay attention to these efforts, and believed it opens opportunities to describe nonprofit causes:

“So it's like, you never know who's looking or who's watching and it's nice to see that, you know, they are paying attention. And again, it's encouraging because… oh, I saw you on TV, or oh, I saw you at the [game], did you get that community grant? How much was that again? And, you know, so then it kind of opens up the levels of talking about your mission and what they have done and what they will help with…”

In terms of raising specific types of awareness, teams were seen as being able to create issue awareness. To participants, this involves educating audiences about specific causes and issues. One person believed that “[brining] awareness to a lot of different issues in our community” was one way that teams give back to their community. Raising awareness is a “tremendous” benefit because “awareness lets other people know what we’re doing.”

Additionally, the teams are deemed as capable of communicating about multiple causes, even those that are not sports related. One participant highlighted the NFL’s efforts to support breast cancer awareness, describing the “pink ribbon campaign” and how the players “were all wearing their pink shoes.” Other participants believed how team support can raise awareness about issues like food insecurity and local environmental concerns.
Finally, teams were viewed as providing a vehicle for nonprofits to establish “great brand recognition, name recognition.” One participant felt that partnering with a sport organization was great for her nonprofit because they do not enjoy the name recognition of a national nonprofit that serves the same cause. Explaining that “people always think that’s who we are,” she said that being connected to a team helped strengthen her nonprofit’s name and brand: “So, it’s great for us to get the brand out and let people know what we’re doing and who we are.” Another participant from a nonprofit located toward the edge of the metropolitan area believed that receiving a grant helped raise awareness for the organization simply by letting people know they are nearby:

“… it’s impacted on letting the community know that we’re here. You know, we’re kind of in a sleepy little area of (city), and people are like, “Where is (city)?” They don’t realize… we’re closer than they expect. So, obviously, being able to get out in front of their fan base has, has certainly helped in, in not only in gaining more volunteers, but also the general awareness of (nonprofit).”

Similarly, participants felt that getting “that mention” during games helped people become curious about nonprofits and their causes. One nonprofit had recently launched a major marketing campaign, and the awareness created by receiving a grant was perceived as creating a “piggyback” effect that enhanced the campaign’s effectiveness through added brand recognition. This sentiment was echoed by others who believed this exposure essentially creates “an opportunity to just bump it up a bit as far as name recognition.” Although audiences may get the nonprofits “mixed up sometimes,” the key for these organizations is that people are “beginning to know your name.”

**Awareness Limitations**

Although teams were touted for their ability to create awareness, some participants questioned the true impact and effectiveness of team approaches for creating nonprofit and cause
awareness. One participant felt in-game presentations did not do “much for us” because they focus on volunteer recipients. Others explained that while grant presentations are nice, they happens so quickly that there is probably little impact. As one participant explained:

“Well, and it’s pretty fast. I mean, you know, you’re sitting there at a game and it’s a, a two minute promo on the Jumbotron. It’s not like you actually understand exactly what they do, you sort of hear a piece of it.”

Another participant elaborated this idea by explaining that grant presentations are a good moment for the nonprofit, but one that primarily attracts the nonprofit’s existing stakeholders. Additionally, she felt the long-term impact is negligible because generating long-term impacts requires more involvement from the teams:

“So for the people in the crowd who know about (the nonprofit), who happened to be in the crowd that day and they see (the nonprofit’s), you know, logo flash up and then we’ve gotten the award. It, it was a good thing. It was a good PR moment. But it’s a flash in the pan sort of PR moment. So… it’s an immediate high, but it’s not a long, it’s not a lingering … You know. And it could be. It depends on the level of engagement, again.”

Similarly, although participants discussed awareness as a key benefit of working with sport organizations, opinions were mixed on whether fans—the primary audience receiving the messages about issues and organizations—are truly processing those messages. Some people believed that “fans love” team and player efforts to give back to the community and they “would jump on board for anything that their sports team endorses” because they are “generally excited” to learn about team giving efforts. However, many participants believed that fans do not actively process messages about nonprofits. One participant felt fans are “saturated” with CSR messages, while another bluntly suggested “some of them, I don’t think, care.” Multiple participants believed fans are often too preoccupied to notice award and check presentations, exemplified by one participant’s experiences:
“… and it was a big one of those things before [the game], and everyone was staring their beers and all that. And our name showed up on the, on the big screen. And I don’t think anybody notices.”

Finally, another participant reported that when her nonprofit was invited to showcase a major project at a game “it wasn’t really hugely received” in part because no one “stopped by or really even cared” and “attendance at the games is always an issue.” In short, participants questioned whether awareness is truly generated if fans are not processing team messages. Despite these perceptions, one participant felt that fully engaged fan attention was not necessary to get positive messages across. To him, simply being in front of the message is enough to potentially spark awareness:

“And if you’re sitting there and you got everything going on around, you see it and you’re like, ‘okay.’ Even if you’re not paying attention you’re, you’re still getting it if you know it or not. So um, I think that’s one thing that you know, that stands out as opposed to other partners.”

Reach

Another perceived direct benefit of being supported by sport organizations is reach, which is the ability for teams to communicate with large, potentially geographically extended audiences. Participants felt the ability teams have to communicate on a large scale is unmatched by other partners, and this was illustrated in three ways. Participants discussed how teams reach large audiences in single locations, have special media access, and have players who can communicate with fans.

Most frequently, participants pointed to fan-filled arenas as a unique opportunity to reach large audiences. This ability to communicate with multiple people in one location was a key component of creating awareness:

 “…I mean they have bodies that fill up stadiums that no other corporation has. So you can reach a very core group of high-end rollers all the way to 30,000 people that fill a stadium… with you on the (jumbo)tron. I mean they have a, they have an instant event
many times a year that allows you to get your name out there. So they have value beyond.”

The impact of reaching 15-18,000 people in an arena and having a nonprofit featured during games was also valuable because similar opportunities are rarely free:

“… you get that extra, extra something with the signs, with the signage. With the recognition, you know, the Jumbotron stuff. Getting your name out there. That’s the stuff that you can get there—it’s free—that you can’t get anywhere else without paying for it.”

The perception that sport organizations reach broader audiences was evident in comments about media relationships. Because the teams have “a bigger in with” news agencies, participants felt teams could better distribute messages about nonprofits and causes. Teams generally attract media at larger events and often bring their own photographers and media relations personnel.

One participant believed media coverage of her nonprofit’s events “would be less likely to happen” if teams were not involved. Although she felt their events attract interest without team involvement, she believed teams create interesting and attractive story opportunities:

“So while they might not just come out and cover our back-to-school party for homeless kids—because everybody's going back to school—but they’ll come if the (team players) are dancing with the kids at (nonprofit) and they’re having a party for school. … I mean, at the holidays, too. We get great holiday coverage, ‘cause our holiday tent is like a community sign of hope. … It's great to see um, players in their jerseys unloading donations, you know, or shopping with a client. That’s good, that's good stuff that the media like and they'll do it for us, for just about anybody, but they are more apt when there’s some celebrity involved.”

Another participant described the media following the team as a “frenzy” and suggested some teams “don’t even realize how powerful they are.” Some suggested this media coverage is because teams are “more proactive on the PR side.” One participant believed that “they want their fans to know what they are… doing active philanthropic projects within the community, so they’re gonna make sure that they promote it out, and they have much further reach… than we do.” Sport media coverage was also viewed as something “that doesn’t always happen in the
corporate community or [with] education partners or regular donors”; teams bring media “in buckets” in ways that other corporations do not.

The reach that teams enjoy is also due in part to player reach. Players were noted for being able to reach numerous people quickly, particularly via social media where they sometimes have thousands of followers. One participant felt it meant “a lot to the organization to get our name out to all those people” and believed that player support helps spread the word about nonprofit missions. Some participants described how players Tweet at each other about nonprofit experiences, thus increasing the number of people they reach. Even coaches can reach large audiences with nonprofit messages, as one participant explained:

“If you have a coach or you have a person in the administration that really comes forward to help you—or a player—um, the word gets out pretty quickly. And now with social media, the word really gets out. … It goes all over the place.”

In some cases, the impact of player support via social media is noticeable. One participant described how players receive positive fan feedback when they post on Facebook. Another described how 50 to 100 people showed up on short notice to a toy drive at a local hospital because a player Tweeted that he would sign autographs for people who brought donations. Although this participant simultaneously questioned whether this “creates any true relationship with our organization,” she still believed it shows the reach of individual athletes. Finally, two nonprofits described receiving national and international coverage when players significantly supported their organizations. When one player attended a ceremony honoring a well-known volunteer, the story “went out all across MLB.com [and] all the sports editors picked that up.”

Countering these positive perspectives, some participants questioned whether these media opportunities are unique to sport. One participant suggested that “when they’re associated with everybody, it starts to lose some of the value, because then you see them everywhere.” Similarly,
another participant suggested that some local CEOs also have the pull necessary to generate
interest in nonprofit events. Some participants also believed the reach enjoyed by teams is due, in
part, to teams being more focused on their internal desire to promote CSR efforts. The perception
is that teams want to reach widespread audiences more for their benefit than that of nonprofits.
As one participant stated:

“I would say most of the sports, at least in my experience, the uh, professional sports
teams, charitable contributions are very marketing driven. And uh, they tend to make the
presentations like at halftime or during the game when everybody sees them. They time
’em right, they get them on TV.”

Despite these counter-examples, participants generally felt that teams and players are able to
reach larger, more dispersed audiences than other corporate partners.

**Credibility**

The final direct benefit of working with sport organizations is credibility. Based on
participant insights, credibility is an evaluation of how audiences assess the organizations of
interest. This theme emerged as a two-dimensional concept: credibility is the clout (externalized
credibility) enjoyed by sport organizations and the validation (internalized credibility) team
support lends to nonprofits. Credibility was also perceived as a direct benefit because having
team support created opportunities to establish relationships with other community partners.

**Clout**

Participants were very proud that they received support from teams, even considering it
a badge of honor:

“… if you ask me who my supporters are and I can say, ‘It’s (local law firm)” you’re like,
‘Oh, OK.’ And then, the (football team). Everybody knows them. … Everybody watches
the (team) play, so you see they support (other nonprofit), they support, you know, foster
children, or disabled vets… But it is a point of pride to be able to say, ‘Yeah, we’re
supported by these teams.’ They’re, they’re our heroes! You know, they really are, when
you think about the sports, the way people look at sports teams. So that’s, that’s an honor
in a way.”
Teams were a perceived source of credibility primarily because participants believed that their clout reflects positively on nonprofit organizations. In this context, clout was external to the nonprofits, presented as the reputation and positive perceptions of sport teams. Arguably, if people have favorable opinions of the teams, those opinions can carry over to the nonprofits being supported. Numerous participants referenced team clout and felt that the credibility brought to their relationships was worth more than the funding they received. When asked to describe whether working with a sport organization is different than working with other corporate partners, one participant expressed:

“I mean, really, from our perspective both the cash infusion—which was great—but just the media and the ability to use that for communication, and the profile that that gives us. And the sort of credibility that it gives us, um, is worth more than the money that they gave us.”

Another participant believed that team support gives nonprofits an opportunity to benefit from their reputations, thus building the nonprofits’ standing in the community:

“I think that if you communicate that you, you’ve got the support of these groups, I think the public says, ‘Hey, good. That’s good. That’s a good thing.’ And we’re not big, we don’t need to be big. But it does have that relationship that’s kind of like, we’re riding on their coattails in a way. … it’s a very good thing.”

One participant suggested that “anybody would tell you in the nonprofit world, if you have any kind of relationship with a team, you’re privileged.” Additionally, participants explained that they promote these relationships in their promotional materials because it establishes “credibility for what we’re doing.”

Validation

Team clout was important in part because it was perceived as simultaneously validating nonprofits. In this context, validation was a type of internal credibility that suggests being supported by sport organizations indicates a nonprofit is serving a worthy cause and doing good
work. Participant expressed that getting support from teams “just validate[s] your program,” and felt that having a relationship with a team was legitimizing:

“Again, the name recognition and the awareness of our mission has been really great to spread the word about what we do… there’s that association between (the nonprofit) and the (team). Um, it legitimizes the organization in many ways to have a professional sporting team like that want to partner with us. So it makes us look more legit in people’s eyes if they don’t know about us.”

Part of why support from sport organization is is because of the perception that teams have “limited give-ability” and support is “hard to get to.” As one participant explained, receiving support from a team “give[s] credibility to your organization because the vetting system and grants… every single one of the sports teams has quite a good, solid way of finding out if you’re the real deal.”

**Establishing New Relationships**

Being vetted and enjoying the clout and validation that comes with being supported by a sport organization helped nonprofits establish additional relationships. Many participants mentioned that being connected to teams led to new or strengthened existing relationships. One participant described how his organization was growing, so when the teams “[lend] us credibility… it’s a lever… that plays into a whole lot of other things.” The relationship helped this participant position his organization to start a major capital campaign and helped establish his credibility with potential board members. Similarly, another participant reportedly met with a group who was “asking us in a somewhat direct or indirect way, are we legit?” During this exchange, the potential funder asked if the participant had heard about one of the team grants, suggesting that program is legitimizing to other nonprofit partners. Some participants with team employees on their boards believed their presence attracted other board members “because when you have an organization and you’re sitting there with the second in command with the (baseball
team) and the (football team) and, and bank presidents, that’s a very valuable group of people to help move your motivations.”

Finally, sport organization credibility contributes to diversifying nonprofit funding portfolios. Numerous participants explained that the funding process involves showing potential funders that the nonprofit is capable of establishing relationships with multiple organizations and donors. Although sport organizations are just a piece of the overall funding puzzle, nonprofits that receive matching funds from other organizations benefit from team support because it shows that a nonprofit is attracting diverse, credible sources. One participant explained:

“So I think it shows that we are reaching out. We are trying to build as many partnerships as we can. … So, I think it just shows that we’re trying to be as open about who we are, as open to partnering and trying to just you, know, leverage everyone working together for the common good.”

In short, working with sports organizations yields distinct direct benefits. In addition to the credibility they bring to relationships, teams can create issue and organizational awareness using their reach.

Visibility

The ability to create awareness, leverage reach, and enhance credibility is seemingly tied to sport organization visibility. When contextualizing visibility, participants appeared to differentiate it from awareness and reach; if awareness is the ability to communicate messages and reach is the ability to communicate with large audiences, visibility was the perceived recognizability sport organizations have both locally and nationally. Arguably, sport organization visibility occurs because of the public nature of the industry. As one participant explained, “there’s definitely a, a public element in sports and, and athletes that is not always present in other giving types.” Because this concept did not occur exclusively from the direct benefits described, I believe visibility creates indirect benefits for nonprofits. That is to say that while
sport organizations can not transfer their visibility to nonprofits, the benefits yielded because of team visibility can be leveraged by nonprofits. Specifically, visibility is marked by two characteristics: team recognizability and team-related celebrity.

**Team Recognizability**

In general, teams were considered visible because they were recognizable, well-known, and stood out because of their high-profile industry. Because they are regularly seen within their communities—for example via media or having naming rights on large building—that visibility seemingly strengthens their reputation and credibility and gives them increased opportunities to communicate with large audiences. One participant highlighted how this indirect benefit strengthens other direct benefits:

“Um, just, you know, like for, for funding. And for, for ways that they can partner with us you know to, to raise more money, bring more awareness to the organization… and I think that, when you have the visibility of a name like a sports team… and you partner with [sport] organizations, people that may not have known you before will now know you because they have partnered with you.”

One participant highlighted the importance of team recognizability, explaining that getting a grant from a sport organization is different than receiving support from less well-known individuals or companies:

“You know, ‘cause even when you get a grant from… an organization, let’s say that’s not that well-known. … if you say, ‘Hey, you know, we got this grant from (individual),’ again, not maybe widely recognized. Well gosh, sports organizations are so widely recognized. It’s, you know, not just here locally, but you know, really nationally.”

In this context, visibility is differentiated from direct benefits like awareness, reach, and credibility because sport organizations are well-known, high-profile entities that people will recognize regardless of whether the organization enjoys a positive reputation or shares resources with local nonprofits. Arguably, the same can be said for individual players.
**Team-Related Celebrity**

The celebrity status of athletes was one aspect of visibility that was deemed a benefit of working with sport organizations. Conceptualizing athletes as highly regarded, well-known individuals, some participants believed that players have a bigger impact than teams when it comes to generating awareness, reach, and credibility. In fact, the potential for player involvement and access was considered one of the primary perceived benefits of working with sport organizations.

Regardless of whether they had experiences working with players, participants were inclined to discuss the impact athletes can have. Some participants believed athletes were the sole factor differentiating sport CSR from that of other corporate entities. Discussed positively for their “collectability” and “image,” athletes were described as having a “celebrity factor” that cannot be matched by standard corporate employees or CEOs. As one participant explained:

“Well, the players—that’s the big, huge advantage. I mean, everybody knows Bank of America and everything. But of course everybody knows the (baseball team), and everybody knows the (hockey team), and everybody knows the (football team) as well. So, you know, Bank of America, if we don’t all know... who the CEO is of Bank of America, I’m sure if he would kind of show up and support us he, he would bring a following—there’s no doubt about it. But, but everybody knows these sports guys [participant snaps finger] off the top of their heads. So, you know, there’s a lot more notoriety with these sports guys…”

Another participant even expressed, while laughing, that memorabilia is something she can only get from sports organizations because:

“I don’t really care about something signed by the CEO of (corporation)! [participant laughing] But I’ll take a (player) baseball any day! Um, they have personas, they have celebrity… There’s something just about professional sports that normal corporations don’t have to give you.”

Players were also seen as being potential catalysts for gaining interest within the community. In one case, players visited a school to help with a nonprofit program. The attending
players were described as “the big lightning rod” for bringing awareness to the nonprofit cause, and when doing presentations about his nonprofit and its mission, this participant now makes that event “part of our story” because of the “big cheer” reactions he gets—something that does not occur when highlighting corporate support.

Some believed athlete celebrity status leads to increased nonprofit support. Although participants did not have data to support their assertions, they provided anecdotal evidence that player support leads to increased support from and awareness within the community. Some participants described how players and coaches supporting their mission increased the number of community members who support their nonprofit. Another participant described how her mentoring program saw an increase in volunteers, and she believed the PSA featuring a star player created that noticeable “return on the investment.” In other cases, participants described having “conversations with people,” receiving notes, seeing notations on checks, and receiving Web-based comments to suggest that people supported the nonprofit mission because it was supported by a player. As one participant described:

“That people who go to the games, who are just avid fans that may not necessarily have big dollars to give away, but they feel a connection to (player) and they’re proud of what their star is doing. And so um, it caused people to get it involved in some of his fundraising initiatives, but then also to make contributions… in the $10, $25, $100 amounts, because people could, felt like they were supporting him and supporting [our] program.”

Some argued, however, that the draw of celebrity status is only as strong as the player support. One participant suggested although “there’s a lot of power around celebrity… I don’t know how much it generates unless your cause becomes the one they passionately support.” This was echoed by another participant who felt the people who showed up for an impromptu toy drive were connecting with the player as opposed to the cause:
“So we had, you know, I don’t know, 50, 100 people show up at 2 o’clock um, because they follow him on Twitter. So I think that they could have Tweeted out, you know, bring a plastic bag to the beach… so that the volunteers can pick up garbage and you get an autograph. They would’ve done that. So I don’t know that, you know, it creates any true relationship with our organization… they came because he was there, and they could get an autograph. But, on the other hand um, we were happy to have them.”

Beyond creating awareness and generating widespread support, players were framed as being role models, particularly to children. Arguably, it is the celebrity status assigned to players that leads to them being perceived as role models. This was considered a unique benefit of sport CSR, as exemplified by one participants’ observation: “But I just feel like sports draws so much bigger, they want autographs… they want to engage with those individuals, they look up to them. So, and that’s different from, they’re not looking up to other organizations that way.” Another participant suggested that players are “unique” because “they can inspire our kids and connect with kids,” while another suggested you “can’t put a price… on the lift that they give” when they visit sick children. Because of their visibility, athletes were also seen as being vehicles to teach life skills like sportsmanship, leadership, and camaraderie.

This role model stature contributes to players being more recognizable or visible than the teams and organizations they play for. One participant believed that children do not even notice the organizations, but instead focus on the “sports stars” because “these are their heroes.” As he explained, “They’re not thinking of the organization themselves—they’re more looking right through the organization, seeing those players.” In some cases, even the participants were awed by their celebrity, with one describing how, as a life-long baseball fan, he is “still awestruck” by the players. And while some suggested athletes “just do something completely different than what we do for living” and that the “way we put them up on a pedestal… is neither here nor there,” it seemed undeniable that athletes were visible celebrities who help differentiate sport CSR from other types of corporate giving.
Notably, most of the participant comments expressing concern about working with teams were hypothetical worries about athletes. When explicitly asked how working with sport organizations might be a bad fit for a nonprofit, half of the participants suggested that poor athlete behavior is a potential negative issue. Some participants specifically believed that aligning with an athlete may be the only potential negative aspect of working with a team “because they could get in trouble.” Because of their celebrity status, any negative publicity simply has the potential to be scrutinized differently than standard corporate employees.

Despite these concerns, the overarching sentiment among participants is that team recognizability and athlete celebrity contribute to the overall visibility of these high-profile entities. It is because of that celebrity and recognizability that teams can enhance their ability to create awareness, generate reach, and boast both local and national credibility. Although nonprofits cannot attain the same stature as sport organizations by being associated with them (an indirect benefit), teams and athletes can harness their visibility to enhance the direct benefits that nonprofits enjoy when they are supported by teams. However, the benefits of working with sport organizations are also met with challenges, as will be discussed in the next section.

**Challenges**

To build a fuller picture of the nonprofit perspective of CSR relationships presented in this study, this section details the perceived challenges of receiving support from sport organizations. Emergent themes suggest that challenges exist for nonprofits at two levels. First, internal challenges are the potential issues and limits that come from within nonprofits. Second, external challenges are the potential issues and limits that originate within sport organizations.
Internal Challenges

Some of the challenges nonprofits faced when working with sport organizations came from within the nonprofits. Specifically, participants perceived these issues as either being within their nonprofits control or these were challenges that were not related to the sport organizations. The primary internal challenges that emerged for nonprofits were capacity, distance, and client safety.

Capacity

Capacity was the most frequently discussed internal challenge, and it highlighted participant concerns about nonprofit resources. In this context, capacity was related to nonprofit size, funding, and staffing issues. Specifically, participants from smaller nonprofits felt they unable to match sport organization capacity, had to temper expectations when receiving grants, and had to consider staffing issues when managing relationships. Notably, only smaller nonprofits and nonprofits with less involved relationships expressed concerns about internal challenges. Conversely, one larger nonprofit with strong sport organization relationships was described as using its capacity to meet client needs:

“If it’s not win-win, I need to know what you want—and it’s okay to be selfish—you need to tell me what you want, I need to tell you whether I can accomplish it. If you say to me that you want more visibility with clients and you need a base to, to network, I am going to help you accomplish that.”

For nonprofits that were self-identified as smaller organizations, capacity was considered a barrier to working with sports organizations. When one participant considered hypothetically what it would mean to get extended support from sport organizations, the response was one of concern. She worried that the phone would be “ringing off the hook” and people would be “coming in here who want to volunteer,” and while they “want the support, [and] want to be advertised as a good entity… we can’t handle what they want to do.” This reaction related to
concerns about being a small organization was echoed by numerous participants. One participant worried that if teams yield too much support or goods, the nonprofit would “get left picking up the details.” She felt her nonprofit simply does not have the capacity to handle detailed requests or process large donations. Another participant suggested that before entering relationships with teams, nonprofits need to assess whether they can handle both sides of the relationship:

“You have to look at the size of the organization, the nonprofit, and you have to make sure that what the sports team is asking or the partnership or whatever is not too much for the nonprofit organization. Because the nonprofit organization may not be able to meet the expectations of the sports teams.”

Similarly, another participant felt the visibility and credibility that teams boast is a lot for small nonprofits to handle, so entering a relationship with a team requires careful thought and planning: “So, it’s what we wanted, but yes, one should be aware that they are moving into a different universe in many ways. And that a small organization that wants to stay small is going to have to manage that carefully.”

Another capacity challenge nonprofits faced was the ability to manage expectations about financial support from sport organization. Funding was an important internal concern for nonprofits, as evidenced by the fact that almost all organizations cited financial support as a primary need. The flip side, however, was that some participants considered large-scale funding a challenge. This was due, in part, to the perceived stature of the organizations providing support. One participant described having to tell volunteers that receiving a grant did not mean their money problems were automatically solved. She explained that receiving money meant “managing expectations” and people needed to remember “we still have other needs throughout the year that this money has to serve us.” Another participant described how he posted a picture of his organization receiving a check from a team, but the dollar amount on the check was the total amount being distributed to numerous nonprofits. People unfamiliar with how the money
was distributed thought the organization had received a large lump sum of money and
misperceived the impact it had on fundraising efforts. This participant did not anticipate the
impact of being associated with a sport organization or having to “manage our success.”
Exemplifying the need for nonprofits to evaluate their size and consider whether they have the
capacity to accept large funding, the nonprofit with the least annual revenue overtly suggested
that the large-scale grants were “sort of inappropriate” for her organization. The smaller, $5,000
grants were “more… our size,” in part because receiving a $50,000 grant would cover half of
their annual budget, thus forcing them consider growing the organization. For this small
nonprofit run by one part-time employee and a team of volunteers, receiving too much funding
would have been “overwhelming.”

Finally, capacity issues were often related to having a small or untrained staff. In some
cases, participants felt their organization could not manage bigger relationships with sport
organizations because their employees were extended doing their existing jobs. One participant
described how her employees take care of children all day, so they cannot take time to work
events with corporate partners. Other participants expressed that they would like to strengthen
their relationships with teams, but simply do not have the manpower to do so. One suggested she
failed to get a grant because the nonprofit “could’ve been more proactive,” but she
simultaneously acknowledged that her nonprofit is “a small team” and is focused on building
programming instead of strengthening specific relationships. Two other participants described
being unable to promote the support they received to their personal standards because they are
“not the best marketing company.” In other cases, nonprofits simply did not have the staff to
meet specific goals. Two executive directors had to downsize their staffs, losing the employees
who created newsletters and other communication materials. Similarly, other nonprofits had been
without development and fundraising personnel, thus limiting their ability to establish and maintain relationships with high-profile entities such as sport teams.

**Distance**

Distance was a perceived challenge to working with sport organizations, particularly in this geographically dispersed metropolitan area. In this context, distance was how far removed a nonprofit was, physically, from team headquarters. For example, one participant described how teams that hold events at their facilities can “tie” a nonprofit’s hands because it forces the organization to travel when that may not be a viable option for their clients. In such cases, distance creates simple logistical issues; some nonprofits support children that cannot legally leave specific regions or the nonprofit does not have the means to travel from their offices to team headquarters. Other participants felt they were too far away from the teams to strengthen their relationships and that being separated by distance dissuaded teams from becoming more involved with their nonprofits. One participant believed if they were closer to specific teams, “we’d be working with them just as much.” Another expressed that “if we were closer to the teams… the players would, would actually come in and interact with kids, you know, help with youth programs.” Conversely, nonprofits that were located close to teams believed their proximity helped their relationships. One participant explained, “It’s just easier when it’s right in your own community,” while another believed “we have probably a little bit more of a relationship with the football team because they’re our neighbors.”

**Client Safety**

A final, if very rarely acknowledged, internal challenge was an inability to establish stronger relationships with high profile clients because of the need to prioritize client safety. Some nonprofits in this study represented youth and adult clients that were in protective custody,
illustrating how specific circumstances can change the ability for nonprofits to participate in certain relationships. For example, the nonprofits concerned with client safety could not easily bring volunteers and photographers on property, common occurrences when working with sport organizations, because taking pictures featuring children involves careful, strategic planning. From a “risk management” perspective, it is imperative that teams and employees do not reveal nonprofit locations. It should be noted that this need for safety applies to any organization those nonprofits work with, but because of the perceived reach and visibility of sport organizations, this was considered a specific type of challenge. As one participant explained:

“So if a corporate group comes on-site, everyone signs a confidentiality waiver saying they’re not going to reveal the location. So, if someone inadvertently from a corporate group forgets and they have their phone and they check in and, and even though it won’t pop up when you check-in—we can’t be pinned because we’re blocked that way—but if they check in and it says the coordinates and then they say, ‘Hey, I’m at (nonprofit)…” typically, Joe Schmoe corporate worker’s reach is small. If (player) shows up to do something at (nonprofit) and he Tweets or, you know, posts or something, he might have a reach that’s you know, 5 million. Who knows? So, I mean, your risk increases um for, for us because confidentiality of our participants is so crucial… there’s greater risk with the celebrity—that would be true of not just a sports athlete, but any celebrity. So if a celebrity comes to our shelter, you know, if they, they forget or they just stop thinking and they do something that, you know, the risk increases, because their reach is gonna be very different.”

**External Challenges**

Although nonprofits face internal challenges when working with sport organizations, many of the challenges reported in this study were issues and limitations that can be managed by the teams. External challenges were perceived as being out of nonprofit control. In addition to believing the sport organizations make controlled operational decisions, some participants felt teams could alter the nature of these challenging experiences. Four external challenges emerged including access, cause appeals, over-extension, and restrictions.
**Access**

Access emerged as a theme through which participants described their ability to easily communicate with teams and their employees. Although some participants—particularly those in strong relationships—reported contacting team employees with ease, many others considered communication a challenge. Specifically, they believed sport organizations were harder to communicate with than other corporate partners:

“It’s more of a grant… process with the sports teams versus a large corporation. You know, typically you have a contact at a large corporation who is your voice. … with the sports teams, it’s more systematic. It’s more paper pushing, if you will, versus the one-on-one relationships that you have with the people that work at those businesses.”

Access challenges emerged on two levels: First, participants felt it was difficult communicating with the teams and employees at the organizations; second, they perceived players as a group that is guarded by organizational barriers to communication.

Starting with teams, some participants reported having general difficulty contacting team employees. One participant described how she deals primarily with interns, employees that change each sport season. Another explained that through a mutual contact, his nonprofit had started conversations about creating a stronger working relationship with a team, but “we just haven’t been able to sit down any further,” and he did not know whether he should follow up with the team. Even owners accessible to the public were considered hard to reach, although communicating directly with people at that level was rare. One participant described attending a major event with an owner and highlighted how meaningful their presence was to nonprofit representatives:

“And the other thing I got out of it, is I got to personally shake (owner and owner’s wife) hands. That’s what everybody in the room wanted. Access to (owner and owner’s wife).”
More than anything, though, participants seemed disappointed by a general inability to engage with team employees on more personal bases. One participant felt that having a personal conversation with one team helped her nonprofit get a grant; conversely, she believed she has been unsuccessful getting grants from other teams because she has not been able to tell her story. In another case, a participant from a small nonprofit that received part of a team grant described going to a large event honoring grant recipients; even being at the event did not guarantee contact with team employees: “There were probably 200 people there. So it wasn’t like I had direct interaction with anybody from the program there, either.” When one participant expressed frustration about teams not identifying with her cause because it did not focus on youth-related issues, I asked “Yeah, and have you expressed these kinds of things to the organization?” She simply responded: “I haven’t had the opportunity, that’s the problem. You can’t just call and say ‘I want to talk to you.’”

Notably, some participants argue that this perspective is an internal challenge and nonprofits have more control to contact teams than they realize. One participant questioned whether “people are afraid or, or they kind of go, it’s a big dog… I can’t deal with something like that” and wondered whether nonprofit practitioners are “afraid about what’s going to happen or of being declined, which I don’t understand that, either.” Similarly, another participant felt that teams in this city were unusually accessible. He questioned whether this was a “small market” and pointed out that unlike nonprofits in other cities, he felt like he could “pick up the phone and call right now.” This same participant, however, also noted that he was “just happy to be in the door,” and eventually pointed out, “the other thing, too, which I think is interesting, is that because these teams are so accessible, you don’t want to go back to the well too many
times.” As such, even though this participant felt he had open access to the teams, he still tempered his expectations and limited the amount of contact he made with them.

Beyond accessing the teams and their employees, some participants felt they faced numerous barriers and lacked opportunities to communicate with players. For example, some believed players might be interested in supporting their cause if they could explain their missions. Notably, player access was a challenge faced by all organizations, but organizations with limited player access had slightly different perspectives about the communication barriers than those without access. For nonprofits that enjoyed player support—through appearances, PSAs, etc.—accessing players through the team was the practiced norm. Participants described coordinating player appearances through community relations departments and team contacts, or gaining player interest in their cause through organizational leaders. However, there was no expectation they could contact players directly to coordinate appearances: “…suppose the (team) had 20 community partners, and if every community partner wanted to have access to the players, it gets burdensome. So we honor what they give us, a relationship manager, and we work through them.” Another pointed out that they do not contact players or coaches because those individuals are rarely in town, so they coordinate player efforts through a team’s “second in command.”

Although there was no frustration expressed in these cases, one participant who had limited player access had experiences similar to nonprofits with no player access. Not only did he question whether he could garner more player support if there were fewer organizational barriers, but also he described coordinating player appearances as a somewhat frustrating experience. Specifically, when a team was slow to follow up with him about a player appearance
he described feeling he had “no control” over how the situation was handled and had to wait for a final decision:

“So yeah, it's, it's frustrating ‘cause it’s out of your control… you kind of have to manage your relationship because I don't want, I don't want to do anything to jeopardize my relationship with the (baseball team) or the (hockey team) because there's a lot more to it than my request right then and there, you know. ‘Cause there’s a financial tie or there's some other partnerships or other things that we want to be doing with them.”

This example is noteworthy because it extends player access into a relationship management challenge even for a participant who believes the teams are generally easy to access.

For nonprofits with no player access, general perceptions about why players were hard to access went beyond the team creating barriers. One participant suggested that while players are “very generous… they don’t have it in their entity to really be out and shaking hands; that’s not what they do.” In another case, a participant felt that he has “not been able to crack through the organization to get to the players,” because “tapping into the agents” may be the key to accessing players. A strategy such as this would altogether avoid communication with the teams, an indicator of the extent to which access is perceived as a problem.

**Cause Appeals**

In addition to limited access, many participants felt that cause appeals created challenges in sport and nonprofit relationships. Cause appeals were perceived as team preferences to align with specific causes or issues. Participants generally believed that teams more actively support youth-related missions in part because children are more relatable and because they yield better public relations opportunities. More than simply supporting youth causes, however, participants believed that teams favor nonprofits focused on pediatric health. While this frustrated some participants, others believed it is a natural, competitive part of nonprofit partnerships. Finally, although sport organizations are primarily portrayed as driving these decisions, some participants
clearly embraced their power to make decisions about whether teams or partners were a good fit for their nonprofits.

In general, sport organizations were perceived as being most interested in supporting nonprofits that specialize in pediatric health and treatment. Although teams were noted for doing “auctions of autographed things that benefit various charities,” they were perceived as most actively supporting causes that were “almost always child related.” This tendency seems due, in part, to the personal connections that can be made with the children being served. For example, one participant from a children’s hospital believed teams “initially connect with our organization ‘cause they know we do wonderful, specialty care for children,” but end up becoming more deeply involved because of the clients: “I think they want to associate with the hospital, but then it’s the individual kids that warm their heart and make them want to be a bigger part of it, once they meet them.”

However, participants simultaneous believed that teams support pediatric causes both to expand their visibility and generate publicity. One hospital representative suggested that teams “can’t afford to marry up with one hospital, or with one children’s organization, because they need to be universally admired throughout the region.” Another participant pointedly discussed publicity efforts, establishing cause-fit as a primary component of creating visible, newsworthy moments:

“I think a big piece of it, one, it gets big publicity … I mean, there is an altruistic goal, but in practical terms, if you’re going to do it, where can you get the most bang for your buck? Probably children’s programs. Tons of people’s heartstrings, warm and fuzzy, a little kid’s out there throwing out a ball or throwing a football or trying to kick a field goal, or, you know… in the newspaper, television media, players go to children’s hospitals and visit children, have a huge impact on those kids and really make a difference.”
The perceived preference for pediatric health initiatives was frustrating to some participants who believed their causes were worthy of more consistent support and recognition. One participant who supports technology education recalled approaching a team for support and being told “that we just don’t fit their… mission of what they’re trying to do.” Another participant who supports at-risk adults seemed particularly frustrated by teams supporting youth causes, questioning why her nonprofit did not qualify for grants more consistently. She believed that without the foster care aspect of her program or a grant nomination from an outside party, she would not have received any team support:

“We got one [grant], we got turned down the next cycle, the next year, and now we’re trying to go back. So we don’t know why we got turned down. They didn’t tell us. It’s not like we didn’t do what we were supposed to. But we were there from a lot of people, so maybe they like to alternate who they assist, I don’t know. If you’re not one of their major programs, because we’re not a kid program. One of the things, if you noticed, most of the sports organizations support children’s programs on the bigger things. So we, like with the (team), had we not done the foster care piece, they probably wouldn’t have assisted us, okay?… and the (team) turned us down and we feel that’s why, because we didn’t have a kids program and that’s really what they were focusing on.”

Notably, one team’s grant program was noted for being unique because it supports more than the standard children’s causes by recognizing various community volunteers. One participant believed this team’s efforts to reach smaller, less known, and more diversified groups shows that the owner and team “are a different breed in that they go across the spectrum.” In this sense, homogenous support practices are essentially positioned as the standard, expected practice. From the nonprofit perspective, this also means acknowledging that establishing relationships with sport organizations—like other corporations—is not easy if the cause does not match a team’s philanthropic mission. As one participant explained, “I wouldn’t say we’re more important than a hospital, but that’s what they do.” Another elaborated this point by describing
how competition between causes is a natural, particularly because nonprofits compete for limited 
funding and often have narrow foci:

“… in nonprofit work there’s sort of this ‘Olympics of Pain.’ You know, like whose 
cause is more worthy and all that sort of stuff. And it's very, it's a big deal in the, in the 
sense of we’re competing against thousands of other charities and causes and all that kind 
of stuff. …you always have to kind of prove your case and whatnot, which I understand. 
But we don’t… we’re not solving cancer here, we’re not premature babies. We’re not this 
and that. So sometimes I think groups, whether it's a sport teams or the general public, 
you know, they kind of weigh…well kind of who needs it more, kind of thing. Which is 
understandable. Because there's only limited resources out there.”

In that vein, sport organizations were perceived as being expected to have narrow cause-fit 
pREFERENCES That serve team needs for promotion and volunteer satisfaction. This made sense to 
many participants who saw the natural connections between athletes and youth causes:

“But I think it’s, it has some public relations value, and I think it’s also a comfortable um, 
venue for players themselves, when you want them to do appearances. So I think it’s just 
a, just a great match. I mean, when was the last time you saw an athlete in a nursing home 
or you know, just, with Alzheimer's patients, or whatever? I think it’s just a good match 
and kids are fascinated and empowered by their athletic heroes, so I think that makes a 
difference, too. …I think it’s kind of a win-win for everybody.”

Nonprofit Cause-Fit Decisions

Despite these challenges, some participants eschewed the notion that sport organizations 
drive cause-fit decisions, showing that they also control decisions about whether partners or 
programs are a good fit for their cause. One participant explained that some leagues have 
“programs that are in place,” so the nonprofit has to determine whether a partnership will be a 
“good match for you and your nonprofit… then you have to decide if it makes sense for that 
partnership to be there.” In these cases, this meant potentially adopting league-developed 
programming in addition to supporting existing nonprofit programs. Others pointed out issues 
with existing league sponsorships, questioning whether it makes sense to connect leagues and 
corporate sponsors to specific causes. For example, the NFL is sponsored by multiple beer
manufacturers, so tying those sponsorships to youth causes can create conflicts of interest while leaving audiences confused about the appropriateness of those connections. Finally, the violence in some sports gives pause to nonprofits that support issues related to supporting victims of and preventing abuse and violence. As one participant explained, even the messaging that drives awareness efforts can create issues for nonprofits that support these causes. Arguably, this is one way sport organizations are a bad fit for nonprofits:

“… I think sports culture—and there’s some sports that are more violent than others—so I do think depending on what your charity is and how much, you know, violence plays into it, I think there’s some things that you have the consider. So like, for example… hockey’s known for its fights and they’ve got the ‘fight against cancer,’ and that’s lovely framing it as, you know, violent terms. Um… I would think long and hard about having a domestic violence campaign… with a sports team built on, you know, ‘Fight!’ ‘Stamp it out!’ Even though we still use that language, even advocates. I use it. I mean, it permeates our culture that language of, of violence. Um, but it’s one thing to use it in conversation, because we all do, it’s another thing to have it be like a campaign that’s created. So I think there’s some things around, for my particular cause, around issue-cause and alignment with the police, or what would work with a sports team.”

As such, although cause-fit is often perceived to be controlled by teams, nonprofit also actively decide whether relationships are a good fit for their organization. Even so, supporting causes that align with team interests and missions is a perceived barrier to partnering with sport organizations.

*Over-Extension*

Because of their general visibility and stature, teams were perceived to be targeted by nonprofits more frequently than other corporations. In this context, over-extension is the notion that sport organizations are more likely to field larger numbers of requests and spread the wealth thinner and wider than other types of corporations. One participant believed the teams “do an amazing job supporting a large number of organizations” and felt they did “a great job spreading… themselves throughout the community” by supporting various types of causes. In
general, however, participants described the challenges sport organizations face because of community-wide expectations.

Participants generally believed that “demand on [sports organizations] are much, much different” because “they have so many people wanting things from them, whether it’s financially or for kids or in-kind stuff, and then player appearances… they’re saturated with that stuff.” This emerged, in part, from a perceived expectation that sport teams should give back to their communities. As one participant explained:

“Whereas you go to a sports team and you go, ‘What? I’m a fan! And you’re in our community, and you’re everywhere, and you sell all these tickets, and you’ve got so much money and why aren’t you giving back?’ So I think the expectations are probably far higher on a sports team to give back. And you can’t—nobody can meet every need. Um, so I would say… similar approach, but higher expectations for a sports team. Not from me personally, but I think for the community, you know, probably the expectations are higher.”

It seemed as though participants appreciated that sport organizations can not give endlessly, however. One participant pointed out: “They can’t give [grants] to everybody that applies, you just can’t do that. You wouldn’t have any money, so they have to be selective as to who they fund and when they fund them.”

Sport organizations were specifically recognized for their unique approach to giving, which typically involves giving less money to more organizations: “… sports tend to give smaller grants. You know… because they’re trying to reach a lot of folks.” Because “there are so many organizations with their hands out” and “they are being pulled on by so many people,” it appears teams meet the challenges of over-extension by encouraging players to support individual causes and establishing grant programs that serve a more diverse array of nonprofits. This approach had both positive and negative aspects. Many participants appreciated these efforts because they recognized that “everybody wants a piece of them” and felt this was a reasonable way for them
to address cause-fit challenges and the numerous requests they receive. Yet others believed they had a harder time communicating with the sport organizations because they “are over-extended.” One participant believed “unlike corporations, they are constantly hit up on by other… charities” and felt this explained why her calls were not always returned. Because of the structure implemented by teams to handle the large number of requests, “the doors do not seem to be wide open for partnership” and there is a feeling that it is easier to directly reach personnel at other types of corporations. This also explains, in part, team efforts to minimize the scope of the causes and nonprofits they serve most actively. One participant suggested, “I think some of these other teams probably have their core group that they work with, but don’t make it as accessible, because they get hit up probably by tons of organizations.” Another participant described the practice of giving less to more as a “scattered shotgun approach” that is “making some impact, but maybe not necessarily significant impact, because they are stretched.” Overwhelmingly, participants recognized and appreciated that teams have limited resources and cannot support every nonprofit that makes a request. If anything, being supported by a sport organization made participants feel that much more “lucky” for having gotten in the door.

**Restrictions**

Organization-based restrictions were the final challenge of working with teams. Restrictions varied greatly, but were generally conceptualized as regulations or policies that teams use to more tightly manage their relationships with outside organizations. For example, teams were more likely to invite nonprofits to their facilities than they were to travel to nonprofit facilities. This means inviting larger groups to single events, allowing teams to give back to more nonprofits simultaneously. Similarly, all teams were described as being very careful when planning player appearances. Because of tight scheduling—sometimes playing daily, as is the
case with professional baseball—teams rarely scheduled random appearances. One team, for example, is noted for having a weekly “off day” that is used for appearances and events. Additionally, as previously described, coordinating player appearances means respecting specified channels of communication that do not always yield immediate responses. This need for scheduling also extends to the team employees who keep the organizations running smoothly. One participant described how team employees volunteer at a specific type of event “to get their hours in” during a single day, as opposed to volunteering numerous times.

Other restrictions emerged in more subtle ways. One nonprofit that focuses on providing educational programming found that working with one team was challenging because they offered programming developed at the league level. This meant the team had little control over the available programming option, other than serving as a vehicle for implementing a league-wide program. Media planning is also restricted by teams. One participant who has strong working relationships with numerous teams described creating press releases and material, but having to wait for team approval before distributing the information. Similarly, an organization that was in a major sponsorship program had to work on the team’s schedule to produce videos and provide resources. Although this program was vetted by the nonprofit, and the time put into it was considered “worthwhile… because of the amount of awareness,” it still exemplified how team requirements guided the nature of the relationship.

As with other challenges such as over-extension and cause-fit, restrictions were considered appropriate and expected. In general, participant perceptions of the benefits and challenges of working with teams were met with an appreciation for the amount of work teams do and the benefits yielded by nonprofit organizations. Although both internal and external challenges existed within these relationships, the benefits—particularly awareness, reach, and
credibility—seemingly added more value to the relationships than the challenges could detract. Both positive and negative perceptions of the benefits and challenges existed, however, confirming the nuances of creating and maintaining philanthropic relationships.

**Research Question 4: Ethics of Care**

The final research question in this study explores whether ethics of care manifests in nonprofit relationships with sport organizations. Ethicists conceptualize care as a normative framework that privileges human flourishing and mutual benefit in relationships (Held, 2006). By conceiving care as a relational ethic, rather than an individualized character-based ethic (Held, 2006), there is an opportunity to extend conceptualizations of care to social and economic settings (Robinson, 1999; Ruddick, 1995). In this vein, I consider how corporate entities—particularly sport organizations—can embrace responsibilities to elevate and support community members such as nonprofit organizations.

Because this is the first known research-based exploration of care in CSR research, I relied on the conceptualizations of care forwarded by Held (2006) and Robinson (1999) to organize and collect data. In line with Robinson (1999), I believe care can be practiced and valued at an institutional level. While this counters Held’s (2006) argument that for-profit institutions cannot engage in caring practices, her vision of care guides this research.

Held (2006) conceptualizes care as both a practice and a value. In practice, care can be conceived as three dimensions including building trust, showing mutual concern, and promoting human flourishing among the less powerful. Additionally, Robinson’s (1999) conceptualization of care suggests moral practices should be guided by relationship contexts and should involve cooperation and coordination among those in caring relationships. As a value, care embraces caring attitudes (e.g., trust, mutual consideration, and responsiveness to needs). In the context of
multiple organizations practicing social responsibility, I believe it is difficult to establish whether a singular attitude toward a partner can exist. As such, I believe organizational motivations for being social responsible are an appropriate indicator of caring values. Regardless of this context-based distinction, I embrace Held’s (2006) notion that both caring practices and values are fostered over time.

Findings for this research question are presented in two sections focusing on caring practices and caring values. To explore how nonprofits perceive sport organizations practices, I present both their beliefs about ongoing practices and their beliefs about potential practices. When discussing beliefs about current practices, I highlight praise and criticism for individual team practices, exploring how perceptions of trust, consideration, and promotion of human flourishing differed between teams that were considered nonphilanthropic and philanthropic. I conclude the section about caring practices by exploring how participants feel teams, collectively, can improve giving practices. When describing how teams could improve giving practices, participants generally discussed sport giving in general instead of categorizing practices by team. In the second part of this section, I consider how caring values are expressed and perceived by participants. I describe how participants’ caring values are expressed by exploring both what values they believe teams should have and how they show caring attitudes in their relationships with teams. Then, I explore perceived team values, first by describing perceived motivations for giving, and second by conceptualizing perceived benefits yielded by giving practices.

**Caring Social Responsibility Practices**

Using a two-pronged approach to exploring caring practices in sport CSR, I tried to understand how participants felt about team giving practices and wanted to learn how
participants felt teams could improve CSR practices. To do this, the section is separated into three sections that describe perceptions about nonphilanthropic practices, philanthropic practices, and how sports organizations can do more.

As a note, I sometimes refer to participants as making non-positive comments. The distinction here is intended to be simple: In some cases, participants did not make overtly negative or critical comments such as suggesting something is bad or wrong; however, they made points by illustrating how something might not be considered positive. In other cases, the context and tone of conversation led me to believe participants perceived something as dissatisfying. In an effort not to presume the meaning of participant comments, I use the term “non-positive” to suggest that something is not necessarily positive or praiseworthy, but also is not overtly identified as negative or criticized.

Non-Philanthropic Giving

Of the three teams featured in this study, one team was highlighted as being a visible, but non-philanthropic community partner. Many non-positive comments were made about this team’s giving practices, and only participants with working relationships with the team provided positive team feedback. Arguably, participant perceptions aligned with notions of caring practices such as being trustworthy, showing mutual concern, and encouraging flourishing among others, suggesting that it is unfavorable not to meet these characteristics in practice.

Briefly, numerous participants described this team in non-positive terms, suggesting they were “not viewed as community philanthropic” as other teams. They were described as “not big givers,” “a big disappointment to most nonprofits,” and apt to “have their favorites.” Participants suggested this is recognized within the community: “just from talking to people in the community, they all say the same thing.” One participant who seemed less apt to provide
outright opinion throughout their interview even suggested, “I don’t know that the reputation that they enjoy is unfair.” These sentiments speak to the importance of establishing trust because they illustrate how this organization’s actions—or inactions—foster the perception that they cannot be counted on to support the community. Although caring practices should be established over time, this team appears to have accomplished the opposite, garnering a reputation for inconsistently supporting nonprofits.

Additionally, participants believed it is simply not in the organization’s culture or philosophy to be philanthropic, leading to a lack of mutual concern in their giving efforts. The team was perceived as not being interested in meeting the needs of others; even though the team has “great resources” it’s just “not their philosophy” to give a lot. The organizational culture was perceived as tailored to supporting very specific causes that do not necessarily solve regional social issues. Additionally, the team is known for creating its own programming as opposed to supporting existing nonprofit programs:

“… the culture there is again, very kind of like, we’re going to do our thing and, and if you fit, that’s good, but we’re not gonna chase you down or whatever. We’re gonna put up a lot of bars for you to work with us… and we’ll still have some pet projects or whatever.”

Others suggested the team seems unaware of or uninterested in the potential impact they can have. One participant used a counterexample by describing how another team’s grant program is “emotional” and “wonderful.” Suggesting, “I think the fans love it,” she then considered, “why the (team) don’t see that, I don’t know.” Another participant stated, “I don’t really think they get it” and explained that he never received feedback when applying for team programs. Because of this, he altogether stopped contacting the organization. This lack of communication seemed to indicate a lack of mutual concern and respect for potential partners. One executive director
believed the team does not realize “we spin our wheels enough with funding and everything else and they make it more difficult.”

More broadly, the team was perceived as practicing highly visible, but less impactful CSR. In the context of flourishing, the team seems willing to give back, but not necessarily in ways that elevate community members. For example, numerous participants discussed how the team has put their name on a well-known building in the region. Participants generally believed that this created a situation where “you’ve seen the product of their community work” and can recognize “they’re giving something back to the community,” but this was not considered philanthropic because it was viewed as them doing “their own thing” and creating a visible, high-profile effort that ends in little more than a major donation and naming rights. Similar to the team securing naming rights, one participant felt like they “kind of jump on the coattails of different organizations” when sponsoring events. The team was described as sending players, coaches, or their mascot to pre-existing events, getting their logo on material so “it looks like it’s sponsored by them, but it really isn’t.” Yet another participant described a program in which volunteers run concession stands and keep the profits earned during the game. Almost angrily she explained, “They get free labor. How is that philanthropic?”

These examples do not fully describe this team, however, as some participants who worked with the team felt their efforts are positive. One participant described how this team donates high-quality items and can be relied upon to participate in an annual holiday event for children. That participant’s partner explained that “any time we have a special need, whether it’s an auction for an event or a player visit or, you know, we’ve got a child that’s not doing well… really needs a boost, they’re very responsive.” This participant explained that she could not “think of any negative experiences over the years” and their efforts have “always been amazing.”
Similarly, another participant explained how the team fully decorated a hospital room with team paraphernalia and partnered with this nonprofit for an entire season. Despite these examples, one participant still described the team as non-givers, but made it clear that, “They’re nice people, they’re not givers” Held (2006) argues that being nice is not enough to be caring, because “care is not the same as benevolence… since it is more than characterization of a social relation than the description of an individual disposition, and social relations are not reducible to individual states” (p. 42). While another participant suggested the team has “probably done more than people give them credit for,” because their giving efforts are not always local, that still leaves nonprofits feeling as though the support they receive is not caring.

**Philanthropic Giving**

The other sport organizations in the study were upheld as exemplars for how sport CSR should be practiced. These teams primarily received positive comments, with few participants expressing non-positive feedback about their efforts. However, participants described the two teams differently. One team was lauded for its less visible, but far-reaching efforts when giving back to the community. The other team was deemed the standard for what sport giving should look like because of how giving permeates the organization. This team was highlighted both for its grant program and for the efforts made by individuals who run the program. Broadly, the teams were praised for practices that indicate trustworthiness, mutual concern, and elevation. I refer to Teams 1 and 2 in this section to clarify how team practices diverged.

Although Team 1 was highlighted for its quiet giving practices, participants thought “very highly of the organization” and believed they fostered long-term, “deep connections.” They were described as “very welcoming” and “very responsive,” with one participant suggesting she was “not quite sure how to judge the relationship because there’s not anything
really quite like it.” Similarly, Team 2 was praised as “the gold standard” because of their “fantastic program.” Some participants described being “blown away” by the team’s efforts, and one participant claimed the team is “an example of how every sports team in America should operate” because of their “philanthropy” and “because they’re just amazing.”

Teams appeared to earn participant trust because perceptions of their history of giving practices. Team 1 inspired considerable trust among participants who felt the team developed consistent relationships in the community over time. Team 2 was similarly praised for their practices, but less for their longevity than because they were viewed as establishing and following through with major commitments to the community. This is notable, because the Team 2 owner has had less time than the Team 1 owner to establish a presence in the community. When describing Team 2’s giving practices, some participants felt the organizational commitment to giving was exemplified through a long-term program and the owner’s personal commitment to provide the core start-up funding for the program. The early work done by this owner has led to a sense of community trust, such that he is viewed as someone who is welcomed on major development projects. As one participant explained, “he has demonstrated such open-hearted generosity that we are willing to hand him any project he wants in this community, ‘cause he has developed so much trust.”

Showing mutual concern in relationships, both teams received praise for fostering positive, collaborative environments. Team 1 was praised for being “very, very open” and “very easy to work with.” As one participant explained, “if they can do something, they’ll do it.” With Team 2, building trust and showing mutual concern for community partners has emerged via specific individuals who were regularly highlighted for their professional efforts. While the owner was called a “nonprofit rock star” by one participant, the core of the team’s is guided by a
specific team executive who is designated as a contact for nonprofits. This person was described as “very warm and wonderful,” friendly, and easy to contact. This executive has accepted invitations to speak at community events and tour nonprofit facilities, and their efforts are perceived as “going above and beyond.” Through this executive’s collaborations with the owner, participants believe the team can take “sports philanthropy to a whole new level.” Arguably, these insights illustrate how teams show mutual concern for others. Mechanisms are in place to streamline communication and established giving practices lead participants to feel like they are involved in collaborative and responsive relationships.

Both teams also established programs and give back to the community in such a way that participants felt as though they help the community flourish. Team 1 was described as a “favorite partner” because “they go above and beyond over any um, professional sports teams in the area.” Participants who were familiar with the team and its giving efforts generally described the organization as being more active in the community than people realize, in part because they give back quietly. They felt that instead of giving a lot to just a few organizations, they gave a little to many nonprofits. One participant familiar with the organization praised them by explaining:

“But the (team) give, but in a much quieter way, but they probably are impacting… oh my gosh… I would, I would say probably in one (sport) season at least 500 charities are being impacted from the (team), and you don’t hear about it. Um, everywhere from their grants—where they’re putting money into (playing surfaces)—to um, giving away memorabilia or tickets. Um, if you look at their annual report, it’s just amazing, and they don’t get nearly enough recognition for what they do, but they really do a lot.”

This illustrates that, in practice, Team 1 is perceived as creating significant, widespread changes in the community. Based on participant descriptions, this team is particularly interested in implementing programs that address social issues and have both large and small impacts in the community, thus encouraging human flourishing and elevation. Similarly, Team 2 was perceived
favorably in part because of their grant program. One participant believed the program was
designed to attract philanthropic funding from sponsors, and believed it is a “far-sighted” and
“lovely way to do” sport CSR. Another suggested that the team was “a different breed in that
they go across the spectrum” and support causes that are not routinely supported by sport
organizations. Additionally, team efforts to encourage nonprofit collaboration were viewed as
directly impacting nonprofits by helping “seed the soil and grow more crop.”

Although most participants seemed to wholly embrace the giving program established by
Team 2, one felt the program is “kind of convoluted.” To this participant, the issue is that the
high-profile program essentially insulates the owner from having to field the numerous requests
that sport organizations routinely receive. This participant felt the program was worthwhile
because of how it operates, and appreciated that smaller nonprofits—“the ones who always
struggle”—were “on equal footing” with the nonprofits that typically receive support from sport
organizations. However, she also questioned the program motives, wondering whether it was
true philanthropy if it protected the team from requests and maximized publicity and exposure:

“So, I thought that was kind of an interesting way to do what he’s doing. The flipside of
that is, is he made this commitment… and as a result I believe has kind of insulated
himself from being asked to give. … See what I mean? … So he gave a lot of money
personally, which is outstanding. Giving it through the team promotes the team, promotes
the organization. It’s awarded at the game… somebody in his position would be asked for
money all the time. He’s kind of done. He’s committed (money) to the community, what
more do you want the guy to do? So, he’s created a situation where he’s given a lot of
money, it benefits his organization, and he has made himself not a target.”

Arguably, this participant challenged whether this program truly shows mutual concern for
others. If an owner establishes a program that essentially protects him from having to
communicate with nonprofits, one has to wonder whether the program encourages cooperation,
collaboration, and caring. Although no other participant presented this argument, it shows the
importance of perception and provides a worthwhile argument to consider within conversations that otherwise expressed nothing but glowing support for the team’s philanthropic efforts.

**How Sport Organizations Can Do More**

In addition to understanding how participants perceived current giving practices among sport organizations, I wanted to learn more about the team practices participants would like to see. Posing a hypothetical question, I asked whether teams could do more to support their communities and framed the question to explore how, if there were no limits, teams could change their practices to improve their relationships with nonprofits and increase their community impacts. I asked for ideals in part because both myself and the participants seemed keenly aware of the various limiting factors, both from the nonprofit and sport organization perspectives, that exist to change and dictate the nature of these relationships. The numerous suggestions ranged from increased player involvement to sharing organizational expertise and resources to hosting special game-day events for nonprofits. Notably, participant suggestions for improved practices can be categorized based on care’s call to create trust, show mutual concern, and encouraging flourishing in relationships.

More than anything, participants expressed a desire to see more player and team involvement in the community. Ideas for how this could be accomplished varied widely. In general, participants believed that having teams “be more visible in the community” would create positive perceptions for both the sport and nonprofit organizations while “showing [the players are] willing to get involved themselves, personally.” Some participants simply suggested that players can be “more hands on” by doing more autograph signings and public appearances. Participants felt this would make them seem more approachable and it would help children see their role models up close “rather than just somebody that they see on TV, who’s playing a sport
and making a lot of money.” This approach was perceived as creating an opportunity for kids to “recognize maybe that the role of a professional athlete isn’t just to play the sport, but is really to provide and to give back to his community.” Arguably, these suggestions are a call to increase practices that evoke trust. By being more involved in the community, teams and players can show they are invested in local issues.

Next, participants suggested ideas that could help teams address mutual concerns. Teams could share resources and expertise that help build awareness and bridge gaps in nonprofit capacity. One idea was to have teams leverage their reach by distributing messages for nonprofits via press releases, team web and social media sites, and pre-paid ad space such as billboards and television commercials. Although one participant acknowledged “I’m sure we get more out of it than they do,” he also believed that “if a sports team is willing to put our logo on their website to promote our mission, that really elevates, you know, our mission.” Similarly, another participant felt that teams could distribute press releases for events they were sponsoring, giving the events significant and impactful exposure: “But if the (team) send it out… I’m guaranteeing that’ll probably generate more interest and attendance than probably just me sending it out, you know, to random people.” The idea that teams could raise awareness for causes and nonprofits was particularly enticing to smaller organizations whose “biggest problem” was the lack of a public relations or marketing budget. Beyond sharing messages about nonprofits, some participants felt that sport organizations could also share their technical expertise and resources to help nonprofits improve their own communication abilities. These suggestions included teams making available printing and digital media resources, such as video production tools and software. One participant suggested that sport organizations could offer
business lunches to teach nonprofits how to maximize their messaging and operational practices, and team employees could share communication strategies and business expertise:

“God, coming in and telling a nonprofit, ‘here’s some of the things you can do,’ you know? Or ‘here’s some of the things we can help you do.’ or PR, or whether it’s financial, or whether it’s social media, you know, whatever their expertise is that they built up, and maybe have the capacity to then support other groups. There’s a real need for that. … But it really is more about, how can you share your corporate business expertise with those nonprofits that are like us—small—two person or whatever, that really is what they need. They need some assistance in those areas.”

Sharing expertise and resources is arguably an example of addressing mutual concerns and respecting nonprofit needs. Teams have the capacity and resources available to meet their own promotional needs, and assisting with these nonprofit concerns can be an effective way of giving back to the community. In line with sharing expertise and resources, participants also felt that sport organizations could increase networking opportunities because they have the ability to connect nonprofits to corporate partners. Although participants appreciated luncheons and game-night gatherings hosted by teams, they believed the impact of these events could be increased by inviting community members and corporate sponsors to meet nonprofit representatives. For example, one participant whose nonprofit has locations around the country felt that sport organizations could introduce nonprofit partners to teams in other markets.

Finally, teams were conceptualized as being able to raise awareness about social issues. Providing ideas that tap into improving giving impacts arguably encourages behavior that enhances community flourishing and elevation. To illustrate how sport organizations can encourage flourishing, two participants felt sport organizations can become more connected to the communities surrounding their stadiums, particularly by focusing on issues related to violence and poverty. One participant described how teams could partner with local nonprofits, police, and government agencies to help spread messages about gun and gang violence and other
community issues. Others described the teams as capable of increasing awareness about issues such as homelessness, troubled youth, and domestic violence. One participant believed that if a single league “had a massive coordinated effort” with their teams to support a particular cause, teams could actually “change the story” around that issue. As another participant suggested, however, one should not presume that teams can fix these issues or that they should be responsible for them. However, they can be a vehicle for raising awareness by using their reach and credibility:

“You know, I think sports teams can be used as a tool. They are not going to conduct a community needs assessment that (city) needs more vaccinations for younger children, and carry that out. That’s not what they’re here to do. That’s not their expertise, that’s not their purpose. However, could you use the (team), some funding from the (team), some celebrities from the (team) to carry that message about vaccinating children to the community? And be more—because you have them be involved—be more effective? Maybe. But do I think that that’s what the (team) are supposed to do in creating change in the, in the community? No.”

Caring Social Responsibility Values

Held (2006) suggests that engaging in caring practices means embracing caring values. She argues that caring values are the attitudes cultivated in relationships. For example, she suggests that relations can be “trusting and mutually considerate or hostile and vindictive” (Held, 2006, p. 42). However, it is arguable whether an organization can have a singular attitude. Because numerous individuals make up organizations, no single person or set of interactions with an individual can truly represent the attitude of an organization. However, because care is conceptualized as being driven by context, I believe a better indicator of corporate “attitude” is corporate culture. In this context, a company’s policies, standards, and values can be assessed much like attitude might be perceived among individuals.

Because this study explores nonprofit perceptions of CSR relationships with sport organizations, team values cannot be evaluated directly. Participants can only theorize about team
values, making it important to recognize that this section is partially a reflection of how sport organizations values are perceived and interpreted based on participant understanding of team giving practices. To account for the inability to concretely address caring values in sport organizations, this section is separated into two parts. First, I explore participants’ personal values, examining whether participants believe teams are required to give back to their communities and discussing how participants want to recognize teams for their giving efforts. Next, I explore participants perceptions about team motivations for and benefits of practicing CSR.

**Participant Values**

To understand whether caring values manifest in nonprofit and sport organization relationships, I explored participant attitudes toward social responsibility efforts. Two themes that emerged illuminated participant beliefs about both sport and nonprofit cultures. First, examining whether participants believe sport organizations should be required to provide community support taps into perceptions about which caring values participants like to see in giving organizations. Second, I describe how participants want to recognize teams for their efforts, showing the types of caring values displayed by participants and their nonprofits.

**Required Giving**

To learn about the extent to which participants believe teams should be philanthropic, I overtly asked whether sport organizations should be required to give back to their communities. Although participants overwhelmingly believed that teams should give back to and support their communities, they did not believe giving practices should be required. Participants who believed giving was required pointed to tax payer support as justification for their arguments.
Although numerous participants suggested teams “should” give back to their communities, many simultaneously expressed a concern about suggesting that giving should be required. In general, sport CSR was seen as a way for teams to connect with their community while meeting public expectations. One participant who previously worked for a team suggested: “You can’t be a bystander if you work for sports. You can’t watch the world go by, not try to help, because you have the ability to, to really help.” Another participant believed teams “have to endear themselves,” while others made it clear that teams are not obligated to give back: “I don’t think they feel it’s their obligation. It’s not their job to take care of the community, and some people feel that way, and some don’t.” Some participants felt that giving should be “about representing who they are” and “should be out of a desire versus a requirement.” Teams should be “only responsible for as much as, as they want to be” and “philanthropy has to be voluntary.”

These opinions suggest that the desire to give should be at the discretion of the organization, thus allowing the teams to establish their own attitude—or corporate culture—toward philanthropy.

While most participants felt the choice to support the community should be left to each team, they also established that sports organizations should embrace philanthropic attitudes. Participants did not believe teams were free from community-based obligations, and there was an “expectation that sports teams will be philanthropic to nonprofits” because of their stature in the community: “Because of the high-profile that they are, I think they even have another layer of expectation on them to be a good, you know, community partner.” As such, while not required to be philanthropic, doing so meets an “expectation… that you’ll be a good community partner and you’ll give back to the community that’s supporting you.” Some participants believed that the expectation is cultural. One suggested that “our American culture says philanthropy is very important” while another likened it to a “monkey-see, monkey-do effect” in which we simply
expect sport organizations to give back, and it is frowned upon when they do not. Knowing how much money teams make also led people to suggest philanthropic expectations are created: “Um, I don’t think that it’s necessarily required of them, but I think that it’s expected. … I mean, everybody knows that if a team is going to pay millions of dollars for someone to play on it, then they have the money there available to also do good in their communities.” Arguably, these insights suggest that teams should give back to their communities as a way to establish themselves as responsible community members and partners. This implies that teams should embrace an attitude of respect toward their community, giving back because they think it is the right thing to do and because it shows the community that they recognize their privileged standing.

Part of the expectation for team philanthropy came from the notion that sport organizations are widely supported by their communities. As one participant explained: “I would not use the word ‘required’; I think it’s their choice. … I would hope that they would be motivated to recognize that the community is the one who is bringing them here.” The community was perceived as supporting teams in various ways, primarily financially. One participant suggested “we are their ticket sales, we are their vendor sales, we are their food sales… we help make them who they are.” Echoing this sentiment, another participant felt teams should support their communities “for a number of reasons: Because it’s good business sense, because they want people in the stands, because they need to have a connection to community.” This participant felt “they owe it to the community” because “they have fans and they have people who support them.” It was also perceived that “communities like to support teams that also give back to the community and become part of the community” so giving back, while not required, is “something every team should do.”
Some participants overtly believed that teams should be required to give back to their communities. Whenever sport giving was deemed a requirement, participants pointed to the same justification for their argument: sport teams receive tax payer assistance that supports their operations. Because they “are making so much money out of the public,” some participants felt that it is “appropriate for them to give back into the community who is supporting them.” While some believed sport giving is required because of how much people spend to attend games and support teams, others felt it was required because local governments provide infrastructural support that allows athletic events to take place. On participant explained that social responsibility is required in part because it makes business sense, but also because teams require public support to exist and operate:

 “… social responsibility is, is not just a kind of soft, warm and fuzzy feeling thing. But there’s real economics there. So there’s an infrastructure: there’s a parking lot, there’s police, there are roads, there’s a whole lot that comes from public dollars. Public dollars is your… local, state and national. And so I think every corporation—I think corporations ignore the amount of aid that they get from just the sheer public support that’s out there, that it’s irresponsible for them to not [give back]. And I think ball teams are the same. … that’s just an obligation.”

Another participant felt “if they’re gonna get my money regardless of whether I want to give it to them or not, there ought to be something that then they ought to have to do.” This participant suggested that teams should be required to give back similarly to how banks are required “to have a philanthropic arm.” Although this participant argued that required giving is not altruistic, he also acknowledged that “business is business” and “all these things cannot exist unless there’s profit.” In short, if teams are committing back to the community some of the taxpayer assistance they have received, then a circle of community support can exist to benefit more people.

Arguably, the opinions about required team giving illustrate how sport philanthropy can be perceived as more than an altruistic or caring organizational practice because if teams are
required to give, this would arguably remove the need for caring values, positive attitudes toward giving, or supportive attitudes toward communities because giving would be an obligation instead of a choice.

**Recognition**

Without prompting, participants often mentioned a desire to recognize teams for their efforts, hoping to let them know the support they received was appreciated. This emerged as a caring value because it illustrates a nonprofit culture of expressing gratitude and recognizing support. Often, participants indicated that they wished they had the capacity to give teams greater recognizing, both because they believed it was the right thing to do and because they were genuinely thankful on behalf of the nonprofit and its clients. Unfortunately, because of capacity limits, nonprofits could not always recognize teams they way they wanted to. As one participant explained, “I’d love to do a lot more, but I think we try as much as we can given our capacity issue…” Another participant lamented that “everything has to be a two-way street, so we try to figure out, you know, what can we do for them.” These participants would be happy to sell tickets, speak on behalf of the team, or simply figure out ways to enhance team visibility and reputation. Some hoped that “we give [the teams] an excuse to promote themselves.”

One of the most common ways that nonprofits thanked teams was via notes of thanks and pictures showing team contributions being used. After receiving grants or program support, numerous participants reported sending “personal letters” to team owners and executives. Some participants included pictures with their letters to show the impact of giving practices. Two participants shared pictures of their youth clients wearing team shirts or holding team-donated backpacks. Others sent pictures of kids who were platying sports in a team-supported program or enjoying gifts donated to help them get through medical treatments. As one participant
explained, “if you show them your gratitude and you take some pictures… you reinforce the relationship and recognize that they’re giving it to you.” In some cases, notes included information about the impact of a gift or grant; participants shared how many students were reached by a program and used stewardship reports to provide the number of media impressions they yielded, making “it a point to let them know what value we got out of that grant.”

Nonprofits also took to social media and the web and used press releases and announcements to sing team praises. One participant explained that they frequently post about a team partner because: “… we let everybody know what they’re doing… we want everybody to know they’re giving back. We think that’s good—it’s good for us, but it’s good for them, too.” Another participant takes pictures at team events and posts them on social media because “if we have the chance or ability we’ll, we’ll recognize and say thanks on Facebook more than anything.” Some participants explained that while they are asked to recognize grants in newsletters and publications, they do whether required or not. Some participants highlight teams on their websites, particularly on sponsor pages that are designed to provide in-depth looks at major partners. Others used their databases to reach the nonprofit supporters; one participant explained, “we have a 10,000 person database of donors and supporters, and so they are constantly getting messages from us.”

When capacity issues prevented participants from acknowledging teams to their liking, they came up with creative ways and put in extra effort to show their appreciation. Some nonprofits thanked sport organizations through dedication plaques, positive word of mouth, speaking on behalf of the teams, promoting ticket sales, and holding staff development meetings at games. One participant makes it a point to travel to the arena to pick up tickets or in-kind donations, particularly so she could “shake their hands” and thank them. As she explained,
“They probably give away thousands of tickets and they might not even remember me, but I always feel that I’m the face of these kids, and so I’ll make a big deal about it.” In another case, an organization that trains dogs named two puppies after a team. Finally, one participant explained that she has tried getting one team a local award for their efforts because “they don’t get nearly enough recognition for what they do.” Describing a luncheon that is hosted on National Philanthropy Day, she explained that she has nominated this team three times because “people can be very cynical about sports today and how they have so much, and that’s why it bothers me that the (team) don’t get more recognition for what they’re doing, because they give back, too, but they don’t give” large sums of money. As such, she will “keep on nominating, because I say, somewhere along the line, they’re gonna get recognized.”

Ultimately, acknowledging teams was important even when a nonprofit did not receive support because to thank teams for their time helps build positive relationships:

“… my philosophy is you thank them for what they do in the community and if it doesn’t match what we do, so be it. But I think, you know, I think one of the big mistakes that charities make is it’s sort of, here’s what we need and you have money, you should give it to us for what we need it for. As opposed to, you are an organization that is charitable, tell us what your needs are, let us see if they match and if they don’t, then thank you for listening to us.”

These insights suggest a lot about the nonprofit culture and participant attitude toward their sport relationships. These relationships are highly valued and participants feel strongly about showing appreciation for the support they receive. This illustrates how caring values manifest from the nonprofit perspective because these insights show the appreciative and respectful attitudes established in and toward these relationships.

**Perceived Team Values**

Because this study is built on the nonprofit perspective of CSR relationships, we cannot understand the sport organization perspective of giving practices or whether a team truly
embraces a culture of caring values when practicing philanthropy. One participant in this study had experience working for a sport organization—under ownership groups that are no longer in place—meaning the closest I can get to understanding team values is via participant interpretations of team efforts and cultures. Although I cannot elaborate actual motivations for giving, it is worthwhile to understand what participants believe are the motivations driving team philanthropy. Particularly in the context of this study, knowing perceived motivations and beliefs about values—whether accurate to the teams’ actual motivations and beliefs—helps situate how those who work with these teams contextualize their efforts. For example, as previously described, nonprofit practitioners tend to shy away from teams that are difficult to contact or appear uninterested in supporting their cause. Conversely, practitioners feel more comfortable contacting teams that are perceived as fostering open, communicative corporate cultures. As such, to elaborate participant perspectives of team values—or their organizational cultures—I explore participant beliefs about team motivations for practicing CSR. These beliefs are elaborated via interpretations of the perceived benefits of engaging in corporate philanthropy.

**Team Motivations and Benefits**

Participants frequently defined philanthropic and nonphilanthropic giving practices based on perceived team motivations for giving, openly discussing the factors that they believed played into organizational decisions to support nonprofits. Here, team motivations are simply defined as the perceived reasons that teams engage in CSR practices. When describing perceived motivations for giving, four primary ideas emerged. First, a leadership theme emerged wherein organizational leaders are perceived as being responsible team giving cultures. Next, three themes emerged to hierarchically describe organizational motivations: genuine giving, giving to be responsible, and giving for public relations benefits. As these themes appeared to describe
perceived giving practices on a continuum of altruism to organizational gain, I discuss them in that order.

**Leadership**

In general, participants believed that organizational commitments to giving start “at the top.” Core organizational values, philosophies, and missions were seen as starting with organizational leaders, regardless of whether those missions were deemed philanthropic. This speaks directly to the notion of caring values, because it suggests that organizational values guide a culture of giving. As one participant suggested: “In my opinion, it always goes back to leadership. So it depends on what the team’s leadership believes about giving back to the community.” Some participants believed that giving in professional sport is “highly reliant on the owner.” For the team perceived as nonphilanthropic, participants generally believed that giving simply was not part of the owner’s philosophy. Instead, the perceived culture was one wherein the organization establishes its own programs. Participants felt this made the organization less likely to give financial support and harder to communication with. Conversely, philanthropic owners and leaders were perceived as creating a culture of giving throughout their organizations. Leaders were conceptualized as individuals who inspired programming and an organizational desire to give back and be philanthropic. For example, one man was described as fostering a caring organizational culture because of the way he treated his employees:

“... it doesn’t matter if you work security at the (team), if you open doors for people, they all know this is a man who cares about all of his employees and, and his wife’s right along with him. So it’s just a culture within an organization. And I believe it starts at the top.”

**Genuine Giving**

The motivation for giving deemed most altruistic was genuine giving, which was portrayed as carrying out philanthropic efforts because of an organizational culture that values
giving back to the community supporting others. In this context, genuine giving was perceived as lacking a promotional motive. People who described teams as “genuine” seemingly expressed a strong appreciation for those efforts. One team’s efforts were described as “definitely altruism” and were perceived as the result of a genuine, organization-wide culture. One participant felt like they were “really genuine in, in their passion for supporting the community,” while others believed “it’s ingrained in them as well to give back to the communities” and suggested that by establishing a clear philanthropic mission, the desire to give permeated the organization: “They have identified a core of who they are, and you can see it throughout their organization, you know, from every person that you touch. … I really felt like they’ve got, they’ve got that genuine core.” This “genuine core,” which extended from the front office to players and coaches, was described as “inspiring,” and some participants felt the team’s giving program helped convey that passion to the community. One participant suggested the team is “gonna blow everybody off the water” because “their heart is so deep in the charitable community that they just want to honor and impact charities like nothing I’ve ever seen before.” Part of what made this effort seem genuine is a publicly stated organizational commitment to give back to the community. The team was described as practicing CSR because of the organizational culture, and not just for the publicity. Arguably, these descriptors suggest that the team is perceived as being genuinely invested in community improvement, and this is not done to serve their own needs.

Participants who described “genuine” giving practices frequently focused on a lack of promotional motives. Describing an event hosted by a team, a participant explained: “… that collaborative effort was not marketed, wasn’t on TV, wasn’t in the newspaper. They did it because it was the right thing to do, not because it got them some publicity, and I think that’s
where (team executives) have been very good.” Another participant elaborated this idea by providing a counter-example:

“… I mean I have nothing but good things to say about how they invest their charitable dollars. There are corporate giving programs out there that are nothing more than PR campaigns. I don’t find that to be the case in this. The PR elements of it are fantastic, but I benefit from that better than they do. And the, the commitment of investment to community development speaks volumes about their presence in the community.”

Additionally, participants believed that sport organizations benefit from establishing a culture of giving because organizational involvement and volunteering creates positive employee morale and a sense of satisfaction. One participant believed that a culture of giving encourages happier, more satisfied employees:

“Employees who volunteer are happier. I mean, people who volunteer live longer and they give more, personally, professionally and otherwise. So I think there’s, I mean, there’s tons of mutual benefit.”

Another participant with experience working for a team explained that by engaging in a large fundraising program for her nonprofit, sport organizations create team-building exercises that permeate their organizations. Partnering with nonprofits in a meaningful way, reinforces a corporate culture of philanthropy that extends to all levels of the organization:

“… when a coach or when a player or when someone in an organization steps forward, it becomes a team-building exercise for the organization. And they don’t even realize that it’s going to be. But it does. And then what happens is, you know, your top management and your players and your coaches, then all of a sudden someone from the organization like a cook or a person that just works in an office—is an administrative assistant or maybe even a volunteer—steps forward and you’re like, ‘Wow.’ You know, now we’re really getting some team-building going. And everybody gets involved. They want to give back. I mean, everybody wants to help and when they give, when they open a platform for people to do that, it’s amazing.”

Sometimes the corporate culture becomes so pervasive that participants described players and coaches who developed a personal interest either in nonprofits or nonprofit clients, such that begin taking time to make private visits and contributions that were not tied to team
programming. This suggests that participants believe genuine giving practices, if truly embraced, can lead to both organizational and personal involvement. Participants appeared to view this approach to CSR most favorably, appreciating the idea that genuine giving practices are often fostered or enhanced by an organizational culture that promotes giving practices.

**Responsible Giving**

Responsible giving emerged as a second motivation for giving that was perceived as teams being charitable in part because they believed it was the right thing to do. As a caring value, this suggests an organizational culture is supportive of philanthropy partially because of a genuine desire to give back and partially because there is a perceived obligation to support the community.

When discussing team motivations for giving, some believed that teams support their communities because they recognize “there is a great need.” One participant believed that “they do have a conscience that makes them um, inclined to want to support the good work that’s going on in the community,” while others felt teams give back to their communities because they “believe it’s their responsibility.” When discussing one of the “philanthropic” teams, one participant believed the team’s presence in the community indicated they were making a genuine commitment to development and relationship building. Although these efforts were about more than satisfying public relations goals, they were also designed to meet a perceived responsibility to the community:

“Um, you know, I think it is an obligation, and that some corporations do it better than others, and understand the relationship part of it, because ultimately that’s what they’re facilitating.”

To other participants, giving was simply perceived as an effort to be “seen as responsible members of the community” and to “show that they are involved in the community.” Some
participants believed this meant giving back in response to taxpayer and government support as well as giving back to show the organizations are cognizant of “pressing, public concern[s].”

The perceived benefits of appearing engaged include putting teams “in a positive light in the community.” By being involved in their communities, teams can show local residents, leaders, and government bodies that their tax investments are being returned because the teams are “giving back because they want to.” As one participant suggested: “… they can use the support for an organization like ours to say, ‘Yeah, but we also, we give back to the community. These are the programs that we have that we work with here.’ It’s not just a one-way street.” Similarly, another participant pointed to the large infrastructural commitments supported by local governments and suggested being philanthropic “gives them that community connection and support that’s really important.” To this participant, supporting nonprofits helps establish an organization’s corporate values by displaying good citizenship and showing an investment in the community:

“And so I think being a good community citizen is really important um, for them. So I think they get that. And I think it gives them legitimate community citizenship, that this is again, not just paying lip service, but really showing an engagement and an understanding of what the challenges are that face their community, and trying to target their money in a way that effectively addresses that. And they, you know, I see the groups that they give the money to, they clearly have an ethic of service in their investment.”

This approach to giving seemed acceptable to participants, almost as if it is expected. Although participants seemed to think more highly of genuine giving efforts, they embraced responsible giving as a way for sport organizations to gain the mutual benefits that come with engaging in corporate philanthropy. Arguably, by showing they are responsible corporate citizens, the teams meet expectations to give while simultaneously building trust and encouraging community elevation. The key here, when considering perceived motivations for
giving, is that participants expect responsible giving to be underscored by an organizational desire to do good or affect change.

**Public Relations Benefits**

Most frequently, teams were perceived as giving back to their communities for the public relations benefits yielded by these efforts. Although teams were perceived as being “serious about giving to improve the community” they were also described as “making sure the community knows that they’re giving to the community, to better the community through charity.” Arguably, this is where altruism collides with business practices. Being philanthropic was perceived as yielding reputational benefits for sport organizations, improving the standing a team had in the community based in part on their brand and public image as philanthropic organizations. Enhancing reputation was perceived as a benefit of being philanthropic that publicly reinforces an organization’s culture or values, but sometimes it was also perceived as being used purely for competitive advantages.

Described as “good publicity” and “a good marketing approach,” sport CSR was often perceived as a public relations practice. Even teams perceived as giving for genuine reasons were sometimes described as having an underlying goal of generating publicity:

“I think you have sports organizations and corporations who are in it for, wanna look good, not really for the true meaning, like the (team), okay? And I think you have sports organizations that are in it for both reasons. Yeah, the P.R. is great, but we really wanna help our community. … I think it’s expected of sports organizations, is what I’m saying. … There’s corporations that do things, really, ‘cause they want to, for the betterment of the community, and there are some that just do it for P.R.”

The notion that altruism and public relations benefits seemingly collide was exemplified by one participant who suggested that teams tend to support children’s causes because “it gets big publicity” and “the public relations bang for the buck is probably not inconsequential in that decision.” For example, teams were perceived as leveraging giving practices to develop a
positive reputation, and one participant argued that providing funding makes little sense unless there is a payoff such as improved brand image:

“Companies give money… and many of them have a, a true affinity for whatever it is they’re supporting. But we need to remember that the real genesis of what companies do is make money for their stockholders. So giving money away is kind of counterintuitive unless it is helpful to their brand. … So companies will spend $10 million promoting the fact that they gave away a million. … brand image drives a lot of philanthropy of that nature.”

While this participant was discussing general CSR practices, she clearly believed the same logic applies to sport giving. Describing how she believes publics perceive sport CSR, she suggested that: “when people see the headline that Joe Schmoe team went over and… presented a check for $10,000, I think it’s all good. … It’s nothing but positive for the team, positive for the player, positive for the organization.” Highlighting the popular philanthropic efforts of one owner, she suggested that “he’s made a very good impact in the community” while setting up a program that strategically maximizes public relations: “he doesn’t want his (money) to be given out in the community in a way that it doesn’t benefit the (team’s) image.”

Similarly, another participant suggested that giving in professional sport is a way to build goodwill should there be a crisis or issue within an organization. Using the metaphor of putting coins in the bank, she explained how teams can benefit from philanthropy by building trust in the community:

“It’s the classic P.R. thing. You want to have… a lot of coins put into the bank so that when you need to pull out a, you know, need to make a debit because you made a misstep, the goodwill is greater than the debit. So I think the teams benefit most because they’re building goodwill in the community, so when they do make a horrible mistake—they release someone that everyone thinks was a bad idea or an athlete does something stupid or the team does something stupid—people say, ‘Yeah, but you know what, they’re a really good corporate citizen. They support my charity, so I’m gonna give them the benefit of the doubt.’”
This was illustrated by one participant who talked about how he is more apt to defend team decisions publicly, often pointing to their charitable work as a reason why he has a different perspective on the team. By believing the team has a corporate culture of doing good, the participant was more likely to trust the team to make other organizational decisions for right or justifiable reasons.

Promoting philanthropic efforts in ways that enhance brand and image was generally viewed positively by participants, who often believed they benefited as much or more than the team when giving efforts were publicized. For example, when teams publicize stories about community support on their websites, both teams and nonprofits benefit because the nonprofit’s name is promoted while the team benefits from sharing news about its charitable efforts. This illustrates how teams are practicing CSR while simultaneously reinforce public awareness about their culture of giving back to the community. Arguably, the team benefits because it “show[s] that they’re a caring organization” and “the more things that they do like that, the more feel-good vibe they’re gonna get from the community.” Others suggested that “there’s a proven success to the publicity and public recognition that comes with supporting a nonprofit” and ultimately “it just makes them look like better members of the community, better environmental citizens, and it really demonstrates that in a kind of big way.” As one participant suggested, one owner has been so philanthropic that when you say his name people automatically think, “Oh, he’s the guy that gives so much to charity.” This illustrates how, through philanthropy, a team can use public relations strategies to establish its brand and image as a giving organization while enhancing its reputation for being philanthropic.

Even though there seemed to be a feeling that altruism and public relations goals could coexist within sport giving, some believed promotional motivations could undermine giving
efforts. When teams seemed overly concerned with promoting their giving efforts, participants felt motivations shifted from altruism to organizational gain. One participant described how a team seemingly practiced CSR “just because they’re capturing it to put it in their nice, glossy, big ol’ binder so that they can mail that out to the community and say, ‘Look at how great we are.’” This participant believed the team’s giving efforts were calculated “as opposed to just having it be the right thing to do.” Similarly, another participant suggested that sport organizations in general do not practice “true philanthropy” because they focus on gaining exposure. Arguing that teams use “philanthropy as a community outreach and public relations vehicle” she suggested that if the teams were “truly all about supporting that service or that children’s hospital program, they could simply just send a check in the mail.” Ultimately, this participant believed promotional benefits were positive for both the teams and nonprofits, but she felt that public relations-based motives, regardless of their genuine nature, shifted giving efforts from altruism to strategic brand management.

In general, practicing CSR purely for the promotional benefits was viewed unfavorably by participants. Although they were supportive of teams earning reputational benefits for genuine giving practices, they did not want their nonprofits used as a vehicle for team publicity. Participants who felt teams were giving back only for self-promotion seemed to think their giving practices were disingenuous. And while they accepted support from these sport organizations because of the potential benefits to their clients, it was clear that they did so with a sense of distrust or a feeling that their organizational needs were not being considered by the teams.


Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study results, answering each question in a systematic fashion to build a picture of nonprofit and sport organization relationships in a single, major metropolitan area. This chapter began with an exploration of how relationships are established between nonprofit and sport organizations. Research Question 1 showed that in addition to applying for grants, nonprofits most frequently reach out to sport organizations by leveraging pre-existing relationships. Having teams represented as board members and having personal connections with team executives is seemingly the most effective way to reach teams. However, leveraging personal connections and being willing to connect with team employees was also a way for nonprofits to communicate with teams.

Research Question 2 highlighted the positive and negative components of relationships with sport organizations. Emergent themes suggest that positive and negative perceptions can be explored in terms of both relationship dynamics and impacts. Most participants related having positive experiences with teams, believing they were responsive, friendly, and accommodating toward nonprofits. However, some participants felt frustrated that teams were sometimes difficult to communicate with. In terms of impacts, participants generally felt good about how the teams supported their organizations, particularly if those practices helped clients.

Next, Research Question 3 explored perceived benefits and challenges of working with sport organizations in an effort to understand whether sport provides “unique” CSR opportunities. The benefits of working with sports organizations were both direct and indirect. Directly, teams were perceived as having the ability to create awareness, reach large audiences, and establish credibility for nonprofits. Indirectly, participants believed that teams could harness their recognizability and celebrity to enhance the direct benefits they provide. Despite the
benefits of working with teams, there were also distinct internal and external challenges to navigate. Internal challenges included issues related to nonprofit capacity, distance from sport organizations, and client safety. External challenges were issues perceived to be controlled by the sport organizations, including carefully managed access to the teams, cause appeal preferences, over-extension due to high community demands, and team restrictions for giving.

Finally, the fourth research question elaborated how caring manifests in nonprofit and sport organization relationships by examined participant perceptions of caring practices and caring values. These practices were evaluated based on how participants exhibited caring practices and on based on participant perceptions of current sport organization practices, as well as beliefs about how teams can do more for their community. In each case, themes emerged to suggest that creating trust, showing mutual concern, and encouraging human flourishing are good indicators of caring practices. For example, results suggest that a nonphilanthropic team fails to build trust, consider nonprofit concerns, and encourage flourishing. Conversely, teams that were noted for being philanthropic appeared to practice CSR in ways that establish trust, address nonprofit concerns, and create positive impacts in their community. However, participants believed certain strategies could improve sport giving. By being more visible in the community, teams could enhance the trust they have established. Additionally, teams can alleviate nonprofit concerns by supporting them both financially and by lending their expertise and resources to help fill capacity gaps. Finally, teams can enhance impacts and opportunities to help the community flourish by becoming more involved in notable community issues. To examine caring values I explored both participants’ personal values and participant perceptions about team values. Personally, participants embraced caring attitudes by wanting to recognize and show respect for the teams that supported them. And while capacity issues often prevented
them from making big gestures, the belief was that any little bit of recognition shows that team efforts are appreciated. In regard to teams, participants believed that sport organizations should not be required to be philanthropic, but they had more favorable attitudes toward organizations that appeared to have giving corporate cultures. They believed that giving back to the community displays a respectful, collaborative attitude. In regard to team values, it was more difficult to establish which caring values actually exist because this study does not include the team perspective. However, participant perceptions about team values are still valuable because they help establish the relationship context in which nonprofits believe they are operating. Specifically participants believe that teams are motivated to give because of leadership precedents, out of a genuine desire to support their communities, because they are expected to be responsible, and for public relations benefits. These themes fell along a continuum of perceived motivations ranging from altruism to personal gain, and the more purely altruistic team efforts were, the more they were appreciated by participants.

The next chapter examines the results more broadly, contextualizing the findings in existing literature and as a larger set of emergent patterns.
Chapter 6

Discussion

The goals of this study are threefold: to understand the nonprofit perspective of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, to understand whether professional sport offers specialized CSR opportunities compared to other corporate entities, and to explore whether ethics of care can provide a practical normative framework for conceptualizing better CSR practices. Because this research is exploratory, I aimed to achieve these goals by conducting depth interviews with nonprofit practitioners whose organizations have received support from professional sport organizations. Conducting interviews with participants from a single metropolitan area allowed me to explore similarities and differences between practitioner beliefs and experiences. The results presented in the preceding chapter offer insight into practitioner experiences through research questions that were designed to explore the nuances of nonprofit and sport organization relationships. By understanding how these relationships are established and how components of the relationships are perceived, CSR practices can better examined in both the contexts of professional sport and ethics of care. This was accomplished by exploring the benefits and challenges of working with sport organizations and by considering how care manifests in nonprofit and sport organization relationships. This chapter begins with a brief review of the results elaborated in Chapter 5.

To begin concurrently analyzing the results of this study, I transition this chapter into its first big-picture analysis of the findings. First, I situate the nonprofit perspective of sport organization relationships within both public relations-based CSR and sport CSR literature. By considering the nonprofit perspective in relation to CSR literature, I begin filling gaps in current
scholarship by examining how participant opinions and insights align with existing research.

Next, based on the nonprofit perspective of sport organization relationships, I consider how ethics of care dimensions emerged to suggest care is a useful normative framework for understanding perceived best CSR practices. In addition to highlighting how other normative ethics fail to reflect nonprofit expectations, I discuss how caring principles emerged as important relationship qualities from the nonprofit perspective. For the second big-picture analysis I consider how the combined factors of relationship building and perceived best CSR practices seemingly merge to act as an indicator of relationship strength. Results suggest that three primary relationship types exist between nonprofit and sport organizations, ranging from weak connections to mid-level relationships to partnerships. These relationship types appear to shift in strength based on variables related to establishing relationships, benefits and challenges of working with sports organization, and caring practices and values.

Upon reviewing the emergent relationship types, I propose a care-based definition of CSR that can be used to guide best CSR practices and situate caring CSR in the public relations domain. Based on this definition and the findings, I present a proposed model of caring CSR that aims to measure care and predict relationship strength in CSR relationships. In addition to highlighting key components of the proposed model, I elaborate the primary variables that appear to serve as indicators of strong, caring relationships. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about practical and theoretical implications of the findings.

**Revisiting the Results**

Results for this study were centered on four primary questions aimed at understanding the experiences of nonprofit practitioners whose organizations have received support from professional sport organizations. Specifically, I explore how nonprofits establish those
relationships, how they perceive the components of those relationships, what the benefits and challenges are of working with sport organizations, and how care manifests in these relationships. I briefly review these results in an effort to guide broader discussion of emergent themes and issues.

Nonprofits appear to establish relationships with professional sport organizations three different ways. First, nonprofits often apply for grants via formal, online applications. Second, nonprofits reach out to teams for additional support such as in-kind donations, volunteer support, access to players for appearances, and sponsorship assistance with specific programs. Most frequently, communication is handled by nonprofit representatives including directors, executives, board members, or volunteers. Nonprofits frequently leverage board members and supporters who have personal connections with the teams. Finally, in rare cases, teams reach out to nonprofits, most frequently contacting them to offer tickets to events being hosted at team venues.

Next, I teased out perceptions about specific positive and negative components of these relationships. Emergent themes suggested that these relationships can be evaluated based on relationship dynamics and giving impacts. Responsiveness was a key component of the relationship dynamics that yielded praise and criticism from participants. Participants who felt they had responsive, respectful and friendly relationships provided more positive feedback about teams than those who believed teams were overly formal and difficult to communicate with. In regard to impacts, participants largely praised organizations for tangible support such as grant recognition events, nonprofit collaboration events, and employee volunteerism. While participants did not report negative experiences with giving impacts, some described rare instances when donations or events did not meet the expectations set by the teams.
To extend these ideas, the perceived benefits and challenges of working with teams suggests that relationship characteristics exist to make working with sport organizations different than working with other corporate partners. Specifically, sport organizations bring specialized direct and indirect benefits to their relationships. First, nonprofits directly benefit from the ability teams have to create awareness about specific issues and reach large, broad audiences. They also directly benefit from sport organization credibility because teams are perceived to have clout that brings added credibility to nonprofit relationships and being associated with sport organizations is considered validating by practitioners. Next, nonprofits indirectly benefit from team characteristics that cannot be transferred to the benefiting organization, but can enhance the direct benefits enjoyed via these relationships. Arguably, visibility is indicated by organizational recognizability and celebrity status, which are characteristics of sport organizations that contribute to their ability to create awareness, reach, and credibility for nonprofits. Despite these benefits, distinct internal and external challenges exist when working with sport organizations. Internal challenges are within nonprofit control and include challenges related to resource capacity such as funding and staffing issues. Nonprofits are also impacted by their physical distance from sport organizations as well as by the internal restrictions needed to protect nonprofit clients. Externally, nonprofits face team-controlled challenges. For example, sport organizations may restrict access to help manage requests, and they may narrow the types of causes they support based on cause appeals. Teams are also perceived to be overextended, as they receive numerous requests for support. Finally, nonprofits often have to work within restrictions related to managing league expectations, hosting events, and accessing players.

Finally, ethics of care manifested in participant perceptions of nonprofit and sport organization relationships, emerging along two dimensions of care conceptualized by Held
(2006): caring practices and caring values. When exploring perceptions about how teams practice CSR and can improve impacts, participants differentiated between nonphilanthropic and philanthropic practices, primarily criticizing, praising, and offering suggestions for improvement in team-generated activities or initiatives that created trust, exhibited mutual concern for others, and encouraged community flourishing. Next, participant attitudes toward their relationships and perceptions about team culture manifested as caring values. Personally, participants felt teams should not be required to give back to their communities, but they believed it was the right thing for those organizations to do. They showed their own caring values by expressing respect for and wanting to publicly recognize team efforts. Additionally, they perceived team values along a continuum of motivation ranging from altruistic to organizational gain. In addition to practicing CSR because of a genuine desire to give back, teams were perceived as giving back because of community expectations and promotional advantages. Overall, participant opinions reflected a preference for caring interactions that were marked by a genuine corporate culture to give back and an implementation of practices that elevate community members.

When combined, the preceding findings bridge gaps in existing literature by building the nonprofit perspective of giving relationships. The following sections broadly consider the implications of these insights both by situating the findings in existing literature and by framing the results within the context of relationship strength.

**Situating Nonprofit Perspectives in Current Literature**

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, I begin the first big-picture discussion by situating the findings in existing literature. Although CSR research is widely studied in public relations, marketing, and business, scholarship has largely overlooked the perspective of publics that benefit from broad social responsibility efforts and corporate philanthropy. As established in
Chapter 2, nonprofit organizations were identified as the benefiting publics of interest in this study, due, in part, to the appearance that most sport CSR efforts involve supporting local nonprofits via grants, team- and player-supported philanthropy, and cause-related sponsorships. As such, I achieve the goal of understanding the nonprofit perspective by situating the findings from depth interviews with nonprofit practitioners in three areas of scholarship. First, I discuss how participant perceptions align with and diverge from current findings in sport CSR literature. Next, I explore how dimensions of care emerged to explain participant beliefs about best CSR relationships and practices, situating care as a useful normative framework for conceptualizing public relations-driven CSR practices. Finally, I explore participant experiences and beliefs within the context of current public relations theory and CSR definitions before presenting a care-based, public relations-grounded definition of CSR.

**Finding the Nonprofit Perspective in Sport CSR**

Applying the nonprofit perspective to sport CSR literature is an important step in expanding what we know about sport organization philanthropy. Scholars suggest that sport organizations practice social responsibility in the context of six pillars, two of which include community relations and philanthropy (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013). Community relations involve teams supporting local, community-based social issues, while philanthropy involves in-kind and financial donations, often distributed via grant programs. Participants in this study represented nonprofits that clearly benefit from these pillars of sport CSR, having received grants and in-kind support from multiple teams in a single metropolitan area. Teams also address issues such as homelessness, education, and health by supporting nonprofits whose primary missions are to alleviate these social issues. Additionally, in a survey of sport executives, Sheth and Babiak (2010) found that teams primarily donate funds to nonprofits and support social causes.
Combined, these findings suggest that tapping into nonprofit practitioner perspectives is the most direct way of understanding whether sport organization practices are as impactful and inimitable as their executives believe (e.g.: Babiak, 2010; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Sheth & Babiak, 2010).

Arguably, participant perspectives diverge from existing scholarship in subtle ways. First, factors deemed unique to sport are noted by nonprofit practitioners, but not believed to be as impactful as sport executives believe. Second, research suggests that sport organizations face distinct external and internal pressures to engage in CSR, of which external expectations seemingly align with themes related to caring practices. With internal expectations, nonprofit practitioners typically agreed that sport organizations have specialized resources that can elevate nonprofits and their causes. At issue is the extent to which these resources can be distributed in meaningful ways. Third, cause-related marketing (CRSM) strategies appear to have limited value to nonprofits, who are rarely engaged in cause-related programs. Additionally, these relationships are not established as generally suggested by existing scholarship. Fourth, I argue that calls for sport to be positioned as an agent for social change (Bradish & Cronin, 2009) are warranted; however, sport organization values and the tendency to support specific causes seemingly limits potential impacts.

**Unique Sport CSR Factors**

Approaching their research from the business perspective, Babiak and Wolfe (i.e., 2006; 2009; 2013) have based much of their work on the notion that sport organizations embody unique qualities for practicing CSR. Specifically, they suggest that a foundation of four specific factors exist in sport including “passion, economics, transparency, and stakeholder management” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 722). While three of four factors were relevant to and addressed by
participants, they were not necessarily presented in the same contexts or terms suggested by Babiak and Wolfe.

When describing passion, Babiak and Wolfe (2009) suggest that sport generates invested stakeholders who are emotionally attached to their teams, thus establishing a “more attentive audience” (p. 722) than other professions. Although participants believed that fans are a specialized audience to which sport organizations can easily communicate, they questioned whether this passion transfers to community support messages and nonprofits. Not only do nonprofits have few opportunities to measure fan impact and influence, but also there appears to be little or mixed evidence that fans are supportive of nonprofits because of team CSR practices. For example, players seem to encourage more noticeable fan engagement than teams, whose messages seemingly get lost in the fanfare of sporting events. Next, economic factors unique to sport were recognized and addressed by participants. In general, participants did not appear to be impacted by or concerned with anti-trust issues and most felt that sport organizations should not be overtly required to give back to their communities. However, those who believed giving should be mandated justified their position by pointing out the extent to which teams receive public support, a practice that is noted as being unique to the sport industry. One participant suggested that teams should fall within the same restrictions as banks, in part because tax payer support occurs despite the fact that most teams have the money to independently build and maintain stadiums. Next, Babiak and Wolfe’s (2009) concept of transparency mimics but does not fully align with the emergent concept of visibility presented as a benefit of being supported by sport organizations. Transparency suggests that “everything achieved by the leadership of a sport team… as well as outcomes… and contributions to good causes is open knowledge” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 722). Here, transparency is positioned as eliciting “scrutiny of their
business practices or of their employees’ behaviors” (p. 722) making CSR practices an “insurance against negative reactions” (p. 723) to sport organization crises. Results from this study more closely align with the notion that sport organizations are visible—as opposed to transparent—in that they are recognizable and frequently seen within their communities. Arguably, suggesting that teams are transparent elicits a sense that their business practices are readily known and accessible. This is a questionable proposition, particularly because so little is publicly known about internal organizational operations. Although it is possible to access team revenue and player-salary information, few understand the specific ways in which funds are generated and distributed. For example, one would be hard-pressed to find publicly available information about sponsorship deals and how sponsors contribute to philanthropic programs. As such, results suggest it may be more useful to think of teams as being visible, or recognizable, as opposed to transparent. Finally, stakeholder management is external to nonprofits in that it focuses on the various publics sport organizations communicate with—nonprofits simply emerge as one of the groups that teams engage with CSR strategies.

**Internal and External Pressures to Practice CSR**

Based on interviews with sport executives, Babiak and Wolfe (2009) suggest that sport organizations face distinct internal and external pressures to practice CSR. Internal pressures to engage in CSR arise because sport executives recognize they have valuable, rare, and inimitable resources at their disposal. Teams have specialized avenues to create communication opportunities, and recognize that they can share these and other resources with causes they are motivated to support. Externally, teams are expected by both their parent leagues and stakeholders to be involved in their communities. In addition to addressing environmental
concerns and supporting local social issues, teams often engage in league-mandated CSR initiatives.

Internally, sport executives believe teams are valuable because they can influence individuals and establish corporate alliances to benefit social causes (p. 731). Athletes serve as role models with a special connection to the community, and resources such as “tickets; signage; facilities (stadia, arenas); events; access to media, suite holders, vendors, sponsors; and the professional staff of the team” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 732) directly benefit nonprofits. Results suggest that participants generally agree these factors are distinct benefits of working with sport organizations, having highlighted the perceived direct benefits of awareness, reach, and credibility. However, the extent to which these benefits are widely distributed or broadly impactful is harder to determine. Although it would be difficult for any organization to equally distribute these resources to numerous nonprofits, participant feedback suggest that meaningful distribution of these resources occurs on a small scale, typically to nonprofits that have the capacity to manage more mutually beneficial relationships. That is to say that nonprofits with greater ability to return benefits to sport organizations seemingly maintain stronger levels of support from teams. Additionally, while facilities and skilled staff are considered a team resource, participants appeared more likely to see those as resources they wished they could more freely access. For example, although sport executives assert that their resources are rare because stadia, players, front office staff, and media access are not as readily available for other corporate entities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), it seems few truly have access to facilities and players, front office staff are not always easy to reach or capable of making decisions to support nonprofits, and media access is enjoyed primarily during events in which players and coaches are highlighted. As such, while some nonprofits certainly enjoy the above-mentioned rare resources,
the majority of nonprofits—particularly small ones that do not have the capacity to facilitate these opportunities—cannot harness these benefits. Finally, existing research suggests that executives give because they believe their internal resources are hard to imitate. Pointing to the celebrity of team employees and “the power of the owners and their reputation to help in the area of CSR” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 732), executives believe teams have the reputation, credibility, and power to generate unique social impacts. Again, however, few nonprofits enjoy the benefit of being associated with a celebrity, more often wishing they had those opportunities. Although this confirms that athletes and coaches are held in high esteem, the scope of player involvement leaves questions about whether these resources can truly maximize CSR impacts or create meaningful benefits for more than a handful of nonprofits, particularly because nonprofits seemingly need the capacity to meet player, team, and media needs when navigating player involvement.

Externally, participants recognized that sport organizations are expected to meet community and league demands. Although most participants did not believe teams should be required to give back to their communities, they thought it was the right thing to do. Participants felt that nonprofits can successfully give teams an avenue to showcase their corporate citizenship, suggesting that teams can enhance their recognizability and reputation by meeting community expectations. Notably, however, very few nonprofits represented in this study were part of league-wide programs, and some participants expressed concern about those programs because they do not necessarily meet the organizational needs of nonprofits serving local causes. This suggests that teams are actively implementing league programs, but these programs are not necessarily useful to local nonprofits.
Arguably, the internal and external pressures that teams face to participate in CSR activities impact the nonprofits they support, and participant insights raise questions about the extent to which these pressures create meaningful giving opportunities. Although teams may have rare resources, they can arguably be imitated by corporations that embrace nonprofits in meaningful ways. Some participants believed that working with sport organizations is the same as working with other corporate partners, citing that funding and support they received from others was comparable or better. In some cases, participants believed they have established more meaningful relationships with other partners who were described as sharing more resources and being more involved and attentive to the nonprofit’s needs. In this vein, sport CSR is not necessarily unique; Fortune 500 companies seem equally capable of generating direct benefits such as creating awareness, reaching large and dispersed publics, and sharing credibility, and often have the recognizability to enhance those benefits. Externally, the pressure to meet community demands may create scenarios in which teams are expected to give less to more social issues, but doing so seemingly dilutes the impact they can have on individual organizations. A number of participants considered this a challenge of working with sport organizations, feeling that they are more likely to benefit from relationships with corporations that are invested in their causes. However, those organizations that boasted strong working relationships with teams seemingly enjoyed the full extent of distinct team benefits. In addition to yielding awareness and reach, added player support and overall visibility of giving efforts were considered a benefit that cannot be matched by other organizations.

In short, sport CSR can be conceptualized as a niche form of CSR with distinct internal opportunities and external expectations, but scholars should consider whether these pressures lead to universal benefits and challenges. Arguably, distinct differences exist between
organizations that yield consistent support, compared to those that yield marginal support. Only the nonprofits that enjoy strong relationships seem to receive both direct and indirect benefits in a way that is unmatched by other corporate partners. For nonprofits that do not enjoy strong relationships—typically those with less capacity to meet team expectations—it is the challenges as opposed to the benefits that differentiate sport CSR from other types of corporate giving. As such, although sport organizations face distinct internal and external pressures to actively participate in corporate giving, the manifestation of those pressures may not be as meaningful or useful to nonprofits depending on the strength of the relationships being established and managed.

**Locating Cause-Related Sports Marketing**

Cause-related marketing (CRM) seems unavoidable in scholarly discussions about sport philanthropy as the practice is used to form strategic relationships between companies, sport organizations, and athletes to support social causes (Lachowetz & Gladden, 2003). Although frameworks exist to assess relationships between sport organizations and sponsoring partners (Cousens et al., 2006), these frameworks do not consider the nonprofit perspective of these marketing programs. For example, Cousens et al. (2006) provide a framework for evaluating how sport properties and corporate partners negotiate and manage their relationships, assess the overall programs, and re-negotiate their partnerships. By focusing only on the benefits to the giving organizations, however, the entire concept of giving impacts is ignored. It is also notable that so much scholarly attention is given to evaluating CRSM benefits, particularly because results have been mixed. For example, scholars report that supporting specific causes does not enhance brand image, does not increase purchase intentions among fans, and does not impact fan attitudes (Roy & Graeff, 2003; Kim et al., 2010; Lee & Ferreira, 2011). Research also suggests
that a primary tenet of CRSM—the alignment of cause-brand fit—leads to mixed results related to consumer attitude formation (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Bigne-Alcaniz, Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe, & Sanz-Blas, 2012). Results of this study may help illuminate specific issues that begin explaining the inconsistencies in CRSM literature. First, participants believe fans are not actively engaging with cause-related messaging, expressing general doubt as to whether fans truly receive team messages about giving efforts. Because fans are at games to support teams, it is possible that the lack of active engagement with CRSM messages does little more than enhance reputation and credibility by passively confirming that teams are actively involved in their communities. This is much different from exploring brand images, attitudes toward team products, and purchase intentions, because it taps into audience impressions that cannot be measured via tangible evidence such as ticket sales. How the team performs is more likely to drive purchase behaviors, which exist regardless of whether teams are philanthropic. Similarly, publics expect companies to be active in their communities (Cone, 2008) so creating awareness about social responsibility efforts may do little more than confirm that teams are meeting perceived community expectations, something participants believed is a corporate motivation for practicing CSR. Additionally, although cause-brand fit is a key component of establishing successful CRM programs, cause-support in sport seems less about fit and more about supporting causes that are appealing both personally and promotionally. This is notable because research suggests that low cause-brand fit leads consumers to form attitudes about corporate ability (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2012). This seemingly emerges with the causes that sport organizations support, particularly via CRSM. For example, one could argue whether supporting pediatric health causes is a good fit for sport organizations or their corporate partners. For example, a local furniture company is known for its philanthropic sponsorship deals with teams, and their
partnerships always support pediatric hospitals and health initiatives. Although supporting these issues certainly drums up public interest and garners media coverage, the real impetus for supporting these causes is personal and organizational involvement and interest, rather than an overt fit such as promoting youth sports or physical fitness initiatives. However, scholars suggest that a unique aspect of sport CSR is the ability for teams to support a wide variety of causes, and notably, pediatric health programs are well-known in the region. This can prompt questions about CRSM strategy evaluation because relationships between multiple well-known, regional organizations may elicit positive cause-fit beliefs based on regional recognizability and organizational reputation. As such, local reputation, recognizability, and credibility may be more accurate variables to consider when measuring the effectiveness of CRSM strategies. Because fans will support teams independently of these types of marketing strategies, a better indicator of CRM strategy success may be fan awareness of supported nonprofits and social causes.

It is also worth noting that few participants in this study reported being in CRSM relationships. Arguably, participant reflections show that CSR and CRSM practices align in sport, but they also show that scholarly conceptualizations of CRSM may not reflect nonprofit experiences. First, participants viewed CRSM as CSR with an added corporate partner that provides additional funding support. Participants with sponsored relationships described having little or no contact with the corporate sponsors, and one participant who was involved in a major, season-long program described how they were chosen by the sponsor to receive funding after applying to the program. During the season, the participant maintained regular contact with the team to produce videos and promotional material, but ultimately, the corporate partner provided all the funding while the team served as a vehicle for promoting the partner, the cause, and the program. The lack of contact between nonprofit and corporate partners was most starkly
illustrated by the fact that the major sponsor of the largest, most popular, and most impactful grant program was not mentioned once during interviews. Although some participants had experience working with the corporate partner in other capacities, no one mentioned the promotional partnership, even when prompted to describe whether any programs they were involved in had a corporate sponsor. This is not to say all experiences were the same, however. Some participants described being connected to a corporate partner after approaching the teams to create giving programs, while others described leveraging their existing corporate partnerships to create connections with teams. The notion that nonprofits approach teams to create CRSM opportunities runs counter to findings that suggest relationships are generally initiated by corporations or teams (Lachowetz & Gladdem 2003). Arguably, that approach may be more likely to occur at the league or national level, which is where CRSM practices may happen more frequently, because CRSM rarely occurred locally and was seemingly reserved for nonprofits that have larger capacities and share strong relationships with teams. I believe these findings highlight the importance of valuing the nonprofit perspective, particularly because CRSM scholarship overtly undervalues and under-appreciates the how these strategies may (or may not) impact benefiting groups such as nonprofits. Additionally, I believe the lack of attention to relationship building and management between involved parties highlights the transactional nature of CRM strategies, leaving gaps for the public relations perspective to fill as there is much to be desired in the way of creating meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships in this context.

Agents of Social Change

Scholars have called for sport CSR to be examined as an agent for social change (Bradish & Cronin, 2009) although some question whether sport organizations are truly able to accomplish this in unique ways. Godfrey (2009) suggests that the social impacts generated by
Sport are “no different than any other industry” (p. 710) in part because sport CSR practices may be more visible, but not necessarily more impactful. Arguably, the nonphilanthropic organization highlighted by participants illustrates this point. Although the team practices highly visible CSR—organizing player visits, spearheading season-long sponsorship programs, distributing in-kind donations to youth, and bringing strong media presence to events—the actual impact of these practices are harder to ascertain. For example, although decorating a hospital room is certainly a nice gesture, spending that much money on new medical technology would have a more direct and meaningful impact on the children being supported. Instead, a room is turned into a billboard for the team. Similarly, handing out bears to kids may have direct, positive benefits for those children, but practitioners seemingly recognized that it is also a subtle branding opportunity. This highlighted the power of visibility and recognizability as some participants noted that although this team’s efforts are highly noticeable in the community, the support they provide generates weak impacts. Conversely, some participant expressed frustration that other teams do not get the same public recognition for their efforts because they are not as promoted, publicly visible, or recognizable. As such, for giving in this industry to create actual change, the efforts need to be more than teams taking advantage of media access for reputational benefits.

Notably, Bradish and Cronin (2009) further call for sport management scholars to embrace CSR practices “as one of the most important components of contemporary sport management theory and practice,” suggesting that giving back to the community, exhibiting goodwill, and creating social change are components of “sound business strategies” (p. 696). However, results suggest that the ability for teams to create social change is limited by two primary factors: sport organization cultures and the tendency for teams to gravitate toward specific causes. First, if an organization does not espouse a corporate culture that promotes and
embraces philanthropy, the ability to create social change is seemingly lost. As will be discussed shortly, this highlights the importance of embracing caring values—even at the organizational level—as illustrating a genuine desire to support others and create positive community-level changes. Second, if sport organizations continue gravitating to specific causes—such as pediatric health and hospitals—then their ability to create social change is limited to those specialized issues. And while widely distributing fewer resources to more nonprofits is one way of addressing this challenge, this strategy also dilutes the impact a team can have for any individual issue. As previously discussed, participants seemingly believed full-scale adoption of a cause or nonprofit is required to elicit meaningful CSR impacts. This runs counter to current beliefs about sport CSR, which suggest the ability for sport organizations to support various causes is a strength (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009).

In short, the practitioner perspective highlights that sport CSR efforts are as specialized and have the potential to create meaningful impacts. However, the extent to which these impacts can be distributed is limited and not inimitable. As is the case for any corporate entity, a single organization can only extend their resources so far. Even though teams can generate awareness, have extended reach, and are highly credible—and can enhance these characteristics via the visibility and celebrity status they enjoy—the extent to which these benefits are impactful is dependent on how closely a team identifies with a cause or nonprofit. Arguably, social change can only occur if a team is fully invested in a cause, and maximizing resources for one nonprofit leaves fewer resources to distribute among others. Additionally, because recognizability and celebrity are what seemingly differentiates sport organizations from other corporate entities, it is reasonable to suggest that any corporation with the capacity and desire to meaningfully support a social issue can do so as well as any sport entity. This is not to suggest that sport does not have
unique resources such as athletes that can serve as role models, but it also points to the fact that resources alone are not enough to evaluate the strength of CSR programs and impacts. As such, I believe that examining how the existing relationships are managed—regardless of the level of team investment—from a public relations perspective is one way we can modify our beliefs about how to evaluate CSR impacts.

**Applying Care to CSR Practices**

In addition to exploring whether ethics of care manifests in nonprofit and sport organization relationships, this study serves as an opportunity to understand how caring principles can be used to identify and evaluate good CSR practices. Arguably, good CSR should do more than satisfy corporate needs. Instead, by conceptualizing good CSR as a practice that meets the needs of both giving and benefiting parties, scholars and practitioners can foster satisfying relationships that result in positive social impacts. Results of this study suggest that caring practices and values are preferred by nonprofit practitioners and can offer a set of guiding principles for implementing good CSR practices that privilege meeting the needs and expectations of benefiting nonprofits. Arguably, using ethics of care as a guiding framework for building and maintaining organization-to-organization relationships can encourage more mutually satisfying approaches to corporate giving. Instead of viewing CSR as a transactional, business-oriented approach—as is seen in CRM practices—care can encourage scholars and practitioners to privilege beneficiaries and conceptualize social responsibility as a relational, communication-based practice. I begin this section by elaborating how other normative theories fail to adequately imagine good CSR relationships and discuss how care can be used to envision stronger CSR relationships. To do this, I describe how care-related concepts emerged as both a
practice and value in participant conversations, thus positioning care as a useful normative approach to establishing good socially responsible relationships.

**Addressing Other Ethics**

Conversations with nonprofit practitioners suggest that an emphasis on caring practices and values naturally emerge in perceptions of relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations. If caring practices create trust, show mutual concern, and encourage flourishing, then one can argue that these three relationship characteristics are appreciated and preferred by nonprofit practitioners in CSR relationships. Participant values emerged via reflection of a distinct desire for relationships to be built on respect, responsiveness, and genuine interest between organizational partners in CSR relationships. Arguably, the inclination to embrace caring practices and values suggests that caring practices are embraced and valued in nonprofit communication. Adding to the value of care as a normative framework for envisioning good CSR practices, participants did not speak in terms that evoke conceptualizations of utilitarianism or deontology. And while conceptualizations of communitarianism emerged, those reflections only addressed a specific component of the CSR relationships; the need to value community interactions.

**Utilitarianism**

When conceptualizing good CSR practices, utilitarianism only emerged in discussions about team efforts to distribute resources. Opinions about best practices for distributing team resources were mixed. Although some participants felt that teams should narrow their philanthropic missions and establish stronger relationships with fewer nonprofits, many participants believed that the current approach to give a little to a larger number of nonprofits was a useful strategy, especially because of the perceived external demands and expectations.
managed by sport organizations. This evokes the concept of doing the greatest good for the greatest number, but seemingly highlights a distinct flaw of applying utilitarianism to public relations practices. Practically, it is difficult to arrive at conclusions regarding who the most prominent publics or stakeholders are, subsequently making it difficult to measure whether these practices have been useful or successful (L’Etang, 2006). Additionally, in the context of sport giving, one might have to question whether pediatric health causes are more worthy of support than causes associated with at-risk adults. Or, perhaps sport organizations might be expected to identify the most pressing, local social issues, making decisions about support distribution based on perceived greatest needs. Arguably however, all corporations in a region would have to go through the same thought exercise, thus putting CSR practitioners in a position in which one group is overwhelmingly supported. Taking causes out of the equation, sport organizations may simply decide to support the cause that yields the greatest reputational returns on investment, thus entirely taking issues of need out of the equation. As such, utilitarianism seemingly leads to transactional relationships that reduce giving practices to an exchange of resources, ultimately overlooking the fundamental value of philanthropy as an activity that encourages giving for more than self-serving purposes.

**Deontology**

Kantian ethics did not emerge in conversations about sport CSR, perhaps because of how difficult it is to establish non-competing categorical imperatives in business settings. To briefly review, Kant’s categorical imperatives state that actions are moral if they can be applied as universal rules, and individuals have value such that they should never be treated as means to an end. Arguably, business decisions that are implemented to yield returns on investment—whether financial or reputational—cannot be deemed morally pure and ultimately position consumers as
individuals who are being communicated with for organizational gain. For example, any CSR practices implemented for organizational gain arguably place benefiting parties in a position of being used as a means to an end. As such, even if an organization embraces the notion that all businesses should work to improve their communities, any perceived yielded benefits undermine Kant’s principles.

In the context of this study, participants seemingly believed that CSR practices should be managed and conducted in a respectful manner that, ideally, positions giving organizations to show a genuine interest in the supported nonprofits and causes. Although this can situate good CSR as embracing a rule of genuine interest, it cannot account for the discrepancies that emerge if an organization is not practicing CSR for purely moral reasons. Bowen (2007) suggests that organizational intentions must be morally good and pure, arguing that those who practice CSR to yield benefits have violated the second categorical imperative. Because of the nature of social responsibility as a business practice—one that is intended to benefit both organizations and society in general—it seems difficult to navigate these normative propositions and imagine how deontology can be applied to CSR practices. Additionally, nonprofit practitioners seemingly bucked the idea that CSR efforts should be pure, recognizing that mutual benefit is a key component of CSR relationships and that the more sport organizations benefit from their good deeds, the more likely it is that nonprofits will see continued and added support. Participants seemed to embrace the notion that sport organizations yield specific media-related and reputational benefits, acknowledging that they also benefit when their nonprofits are promoted. Additionally, participants seemingly recognized that it is both unlikely and unreasonable to suggest team or corporations should have pure CSR intentions; after all, organizations such as teams need to be able to sustain their operations if they want to have the capacity to give.
Ultimately, participants outright wanted teams to benefit from being philanthropic, offering to sing team praises and suggesting that practicing CSR for specific organizational benefits is not negative. Again, this positions care as a more appropriate normative ethic, in part because care can account for the contextual differences that may make certain types of giving and mutual benefits more or less appropriate depending on how support is distributed.

**Communitarianism**

Communitarianism emerged in participant conversations, in part because they recognized and believed that teams were organic members of their greater community (Kruckeberg et al., 2006). Bluntly, teams do not need to exist for a community to function, but communities have to support sport teams in order for them to operate. Participants generally felt that it is in the best interest of sport organizations to recognize that community-based relationships exist and, ideally, teams should engage in mutually beneficial relationships that yield a loop of support between teams and their communities. Arguably, actions by the team some deemed nonphilanthropic highlight the notion that good CSR is community-based and concerned with addressing local issues. Although one participant suggested this team may not wholly deserve their reputation for being nonphilanthropic because they significantly contribute to national organizations, another participant seemingly echoed the overall sentiment that the best way to build and strengthen community is to support the region where you live:

“And um, and Booker T Washington said put down your buckets where you are… Make the opportunity in the spaces that you have and create that, because ultimately capital and markets and all those things, when you have a functional community that, that just is a natural part of it. But you have to have those foundations.”

As such, although sport organizations are members of nationally operated leagues, individual teams operate locally, striving to contribute to a sense of community loyalty based on regional affiliations. As such, while Kruckerberg et al. (2006) tap into an important ethical construct for
guiding good CSR practices, considering organizations as community members and focusing on relationship-building between community entities, collectivism is more thoroughly embraced. However, communitarianism still fails to describe how these relationships should look and what organizational responsibilities should be. Arguably, care allows us to take the next step toward identifying normatively good CSR practices because the ethic embraces relationship- and community-building by offering a framework for establishing meaningful relationships.

**Embracing Care in CSR**

By asserting what caring practices and values can and should look like, care can provide a measurable, ethical approach to conceptualizing good CSR practices. Although care has gone through varying iterations, it is most frequently situated as an approach to guiding actions and moral reasoning (Held, 2006). Care has evolved from an ethic based on privileging mothering practices to one that privileges relational dynamics that elevate and show mutual concern for both individuals and groups of people. Although disagreements exist regarding the levels at which care can be enacted, I subscribe to Robinson’s (1999) belief that care can occur institutionally. Additionally, I believe Held’s (2006) notion of care as “both a practice and a value” (p. 42) can help guide conceptualizations of good CSR practices in the public relations context. As a practice, care arguably develops over time while increasing trust and mutual concern for individuals or those connected to causes or issues. Held (2006) argues that caring practices should be tailored to create flourishing by elevating individuals in situations where they may have less power or autonomy. As a value, care suggests that those engaging in relationships should be “caring persons and caring attitudes should be valued” (Held, 2006, p. 42). Values can be assessed by considering whether an individual displays characteristics such as trust, respect,
mutual consideration, and responsiveness to needs expressed in relationships. Specifically, Held (2006) argues that “such relations are often reciprocal over time if not at given times” (p. 43).

It is worth reiterating that, in the context of creating and establishing trust as a characteristic of caring practices, Held (2006) suggests: “To work well, societies need to cultivate trust between citizens and between citizens and governments; to achieve whatever improvements of which societies are capable, the cooperation that trust makes possible is needed.” Although Held (2006) argues that for-profit markets cannot be caring contributors in society, I believe care can be brought into the corporate sphere. As Robinson (1999) argues, “bringing care in to the public, and indeed the global, realm is not about ‘privatizing’ the responsibilities of the state” (p. 30). Instead of creating abstractions to determine how morality should be established in practice and value, we should consider two primary factors including relationship context and social cooperation. Robinson (1999) sums up care as follows:

“This is not an abstract ethics about the application of rules, but a phenomenology of moral life which recognizes that addressing moral problems involves, first, an understanding of identities, relationships, and contexts, and second, a degree of social coordination and cooperation in order to try to answer questions and disputes about who cares for whom, and about how responsibilities will be discharged” (p. 31).

Arguably, participant perspectives suggest that caring practices and values can and do occur in organization-to-organization relationships, particularly in the context of CSR practices. For example, nonprofits participants exhibited caring practices and values toward their relationship partners, but also they distinctly preferred when those partners shared similar caring characteristics. Like the current definition of public relations forwarded by PRSA (n.d.), care focuses on enhancing mutual benefits among partners in relationships, and results suggest that
this is an ideal by which nonprofit relationships are formed, judged, maintained, and
strengthened. In short, the most satisfying and well-received relationships from the perspective
of nonprofit practitioners embodied care as a measure of good CSR practices. To elaborate these
ideas, I explore how both caring practices and values emerged in the results, describing how
these dimensions of care can be strengthened in CSR relationships from the nonprofit
perspective.

**Establishing Caring Practices**

In this study, caring practices were predominantly framed in the context of philanthropic
and nonphilanthropic activities. Notably, the contexts in which teams received praise and
criticism often related to creating trust, being cognizant of nonprofit concerns, and being
combined with elevating members of the community.

Because Held (2006) conceptualizes care in the context of personal relationships, she
emphasizes the need to establish trust through action. In public relations, organization-public
relationships identify trust as a multi-dimensional concept that indicates organizational integrity,
dependability, and competence (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Arguably, at the corporate level, trust can
be achieved by establishing a reputation for practicing good CSR. For example, teams
developed trust among practitioners by establishing long-term programs that meet community
needs. Conversely, the team that was considered less philanthropic seemingly lacked trust among
participants because they were generally perceived as giving back because they valued media
attention and reputational benefits. Arguably, the lack of trust extends from the team’s lack of
mutual concern for partners and lack of interest in elevating the immediate community. When
describing primary organizational needs, participants almost unanimously stated that their
biggest need was financial support, however, this team most frequently offers support via in-kind
donations while having significantly limited its grant program in recent years. Currently, the

team focuses on programs that put goods such as shoes, backpacks, and bears into the hands of

local children. While this is a positive activity in its own right, it highlights that the organization

is more concerned about establishing its own programming than it is with helping to support

existing programs and nonprofits. Similarly, when the team established a large-scale, season-

long program that supported a single nonprofit, it looked less like relationship-building and more

like a transactional, temporary CRM initiative. A corporate sponsor footed the bill for the

sizeable grant, thus establishing the team as a mere vehicle for disseminating messages about the

program. Because the program supported a single nonprofit, it also seems reasonable to suggest

that the team’s mission was not to encourage community flourishing, but to support a single

cause and corporate partner via CRM goals and strategies. Although some believe that

concentrated efforts such as this can create more meaningful impacts for nonprofits, this program

arguably fails to be caring because the relationship lacked longevity and did not establish

relationships that extended beyond the year of support.

This team’s efforts become noteworthy when considering the different ways in which the

other teams give back to their community. Specifically, both of the teams considered to be

philanthropic have established grant programs that achieve two caring practices: first, they show

mutual concern by providing nonprofits the significant funding they need most; and second, they

encourage flourishing throughout their community by giving to geographically dispersed

nonprofits that support a variety of issues. These organizations were often upheld as exemplars

for good CSR practices in part because they were considered accessible and friendly to nonprofit

practitioners, who felt they could contact these organizations to ask for various types of support.

Participants also believed that the teams enhanced their communities by supporting numerous
causes, thus following through on public commitments to encourage community betterment. By impacting numerous nonprofits and their clients, and giving nonprofits the support they need most, these teams practice CSR in a manner that fosters a sense of trust among participants. Additionally, by implementing programs that support varying causes, the teams appear committed to elevating their community.

In this context, one might argue that sport organizations still tend to support very specific causes, namely nonprofits that support pediatric health initiatives. However, this is where the distinction seemingly exists between transactional CSR practices and exhibiting care in relationships. Ultimately, participants recognized that it is difficult for sport organizations to establish highly involved, meaningful relationships with numerous nonprofits. Although the capacity for that does not exist, regardless of how wealthy sport organization owners may be, the idea is that sport organizations can still practice caring CSR, even on a small scale. For example, the strength of caring practices in a relationship can be based on how well giving organizations exhibit a desire to acknowledge mutual concerns and encourage flourishing. For example, sport organizations that primarily support nonprofits via major grant programs are meeting funding needs. Additionally, establishing competitive grant programs that make it equally likely for both large and small nonprofits to receive support enhances the ability for teams to encourage widespread flourishing within their communities. Teams that implement such programs are perceived as being concerned with maximizing the impact and reach of their socially responsible efforts, which leads participants to trust other organizational decisions and actions. These warm feelies then extend to the nonprofit perspective of these relationships, wherein nonprofit practitioners show an increased tendency to show mutual concern by considering sport organization needs. For example, participants frequently wanted to create mutual benefits for
sport organizations, often expressing a desire to elevate sport organization efforts by promoting the good work practiced by teams. Arguably, this is also where an appreciation for context makes ethics of care a valuable normative framework for guiding good CSR practices. In this context, practitioners believed it is good for teams to yield benefits such as a positive reputation and trust. The more people believe that teams are implementing good business practices—including those associated with CSR—the more partners will want to align with teams, and the more credible the sport organizations become. If the teams have greater capacity to give back to the community, then—in a symbiotic way—more direct benefits can be passed back to nonprofits and their clients. As such, the contextually-based mutual benefits in these relationships lead to a positive reinforcement of the core dimensions of caring practices, and lead to increased satisfaction with relationships built on trust, mutual concern, and elevation.

**Establishing Caring Values**

Although organizational practices are an important indicator of care, they must be matched by organizational values. As Held (2006) suggests, it is not enough to be benevolent in caring relationships. Instead, an organization should embrace a positive, respectful attitude not only toward giving, but also toward those who are engaged in their giving efforts. I believe this is best illustrated by considering how caring happens at two levels: corporate culture and organizational responsiveness. Specifically, corporate culture emerged as the perceived organizational attitude toward giving, whereas organizational responsiveness tapped into how caring relationships and interactions are established between individuals who communicate in CSR relationships.

Because this study relied on nonprofit participant perspectives, it is difficult to know whether nonprofit perceptions match sport organization motivations for giving. Research by
Babiak and Wolfe (2009) suggests that teams give in response to external pressures such as league mandates and societal expectations, and these pressures were reflected in participant comments, particularly in regard to community expectations. Teams also give, however, because of a rooted desire to support the community, as illustrated by a quote from one team executive who stated: “We utilize marketing, public relations, event planning and combine it with our philanthropic aims. The end result is we want to help as many people as possible—and even if just a little bit—to rise above their circumstances” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 729). This is not only emblematic of a desire to encourage flourishing—showing how practice and value mutually exist—but also illustrates a caring organizational value in which teams want to support their community. Arguably, these attitudes are embodied in CSR as corporate culture, which emerged as a reflection of an organization’s beliefs about giving practices. Results suggest that the more genuine or altruistic a team’s giving practices were perceived to be, the more appreciative participants were of team efforts. Although participants generally recognized that benefiting from being socially responsible was a key driver in being philanthropic, they also believed that some teams were more likely to give than others because they had a caring attitude toward supporting the community and specific issues of interest. Notably, pure altruism, although favorable, was not expected by practitioners. Instead, they believed that that teams could and should yield reputational benefits. However, criticisms of organizational values arose when participants felt that teams were giving primarily for self-serving reasons such as press coverage. Although they appreciated team efforts in these cases, giving of this nature seemed less satisfying and marked by a keen awareness that the teams seemed less interested in supporting the cause and more interested in receiving publicity. Notably, the only team to actively reach out to nonprofits with more than tickets—for example, to schedule player
appearances—was the team perceived to be least philanthropic. Participants believed that the team was strategic about setting up giving opportunities that had cause appeal and heightened opportunities for media coverage. Although some participants who received support from this team did not indicate having an issue with these practices, they seemed more satisfied with relationships that did not appear to focus on generating team visibility. If they felt they were being used for promotional purposes, it seemed to come across as disrespectful to the nonprofits and their clients. Some participants overlooked these attitudes as part of working with teams, but others—particularly those who had difficulty reaching the team—expressed apparent disappointment and displeasure with the perceived motives behind their community support.

This display of nonprofit values is evidence that nonprofits prefer corporate cultures that are genuinely supportive and exhibit a desire to create change and help others. This was particularly noticeable when participants were asked to reflect on whether teams should be required to give. While a few participants believed teams are obligated to give because of the financial support they receive from, most suggested that teams should simply want to give back. This indicates that while nonprofits value the right for an organization to choose how it practices CSR, they also believe that organizations should be philanthropic and should want to help their communities flourish. For example, teams that were described as engaging in genuine giving were perceived as wanting to contribute to and improve their communities. These teams were held in high esteem and described as being trustworthy. Additionally, public committing to large-scale programs signaled to participants that an organization was built on a culture that encourages community engagement and elevation.

At the individual level, caring values were conceptualized in the context of responsiveness. This is also the juncture at which caring practices can be evaluated not by the
size of a donation or the number of nonprofits supported, but by the way in which organizations communicate with and make themselves available to nonprofits, regardless of whether the organization is being supported. In relationships with sport organizations, responsiveness was conceptualized as team accessibility and diversity of causes supported. First, team accessibility was an important topic to participants, who expressed both praise and criticism of team policies. Participants who had an easier time communicating with teams were generally more satisfied with their relationships compared to those who felt they faced barriers to communication. Although some of these barriers were perceived as necessary for teams to manage the incoming demands, others believed that teams were not open to communication with nonprofits and actively established mechanisms to reduce avenues of contact. In this sense, simply being perceived as accessible or inaccessible could change participant perceptions of a team and its giving culture. For example, some participants indicated that while they are not in touch with a team, they know that they could call to receive support if needed. This perceived accessibility helped participants feel like they had the power to make requests and reinforced the notion that those teams were available for contact. Conversely, participants who had little confidence in the team attitudes toward accessibility reported that they no longer bothered trying to contact the teams. This indicates that not only were they frustrated with team communication efforts, but also they felt powerless to initiate communication.

In short, caring values such as being respectful of partners, being accessible to others, and serving the community out of a genuine desire to do good were upheld as the preferred ways for sport organizations to practice good CSR. These principles represent caring values because they indicate a supportive attitude toward and a willingness to be available to others.
In general, it seems that focusing on caring practices and values can encourage caring practices and lead to more satisfying relationships with corporate partners. The benefit of conceptualizing best CSR practices through a lens of care means that we can evaluate relationships both in the ways they are established and managed. Arguably, good social responsibility should carry with it an expectation that practices are rooted in a desire to do good and support others, and organizations should work toward establishing relationships that are both mutually satisfying and beneficial. Practicing normatively good CSR should mean showing concern for partner needs and, at minimum, being respectful of those an organization communicates with. Good CSR can foster relationships that are marked by trust and a desire to support others to the best of an organization’s ability. To illustrate how caring practices and values align in nonprofit and sport organization relationships, the following section offers the second big picture analysis of the findings. Specifically, results suggest that discrete relationship levels exist in sport CSR, and the strength of those relationships is partially based on the presence of caring principles.

Levels of Relationships

Collectively analyzing the results of this study reveals variations within emergent themes seem directly related to degrees of relationship strength between nonprofit and sport organizations. Arguably, the strength of these relationships appears to be tied to a number of factors, and one might suggest that the strongest, most satisfying relationships have the most caring characteristics. Specifically, who establishes and communicates within relationships can increase relationship strength, and the strongest relationships are most likely to yield greater mutual benefits and reduced challenges for partnering organizations.

Based on participant perceptions and preferences, this second big-picture analysis of the
findings suggests that the strongest relationships are the most caring, such that organizational practices and values are keenly focused on enhancing impacts and relationship benefits. Participants that have strong relationships with organizations are extremely satisfied with the benefits they yield, whereas participants in weaker relationships strive to strengthen their connections and organizational interactions.

When participant insights are reviewed holistically, it appears as though relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations exist on a continuum of low to high relationship strength. Patterns suggest that distinct low and high points correspond with what I explore as weak connections (low) and partnerships (high). Mid-level relationships exist in the middle of the continuum, and have the potential to be more diverse because of differing nonprofit and team interactions. Arguably, these relationships can shift along the continuum should relationship circumstances and factors evolve. To elaborate the degrees to which these relationships appear to exist, I present definitions and examples of the proposed relationship types in order from weakest to strongest relationships. In addition to highlighting how key individuals can impact relationships strength, I examine how caring principles emerge, and how the strength of each relationship type leads to different benefits and challenges. Additionally, I describe variations of strength within levels to illustrate how nonprofits change their position along the continuum.

Notably, participants often described their relationships by alluding to relationship strength instead of succinctly defining it, and this was sometimes achieved using counter-examples or by pointing to other organizational experiences. These insights and participant quotes are used to establish and elaborate the characteristics of these emergent relationship types.
Weak Connections

The least developed relationships in this study were highlighted by a lack of communication between nonprofit and sports organizations, and some participants worked for nonprofits that received nothing more grants that required little to no contact with the teams. These nonprofits serve as the foundation for explaining *weak connection* relationships. In weak connections, participants had little additional experience working with the teams and often applied or were nominated for grants via mechanisms that do not require added communication. For example, nonprofits in these relationships only contacted teams if they had questions about the grant application process or were providing follow-up reports to explain how grants were used. Practitioners at these nonprofits typically do not have a point of contact within the sport organization, and they do not receive additional support—such as in-kind donations or volunteer support—from the teams. This occurs, in part, because these nonprofits do not reach out to the sport organizations for additional support. Additionally, these cases were marked by a lack of personal involvement on the part of the sport organizations, which did not seem to initiate contact outside of communication required to distribute and follow-up on grants. Although some participants took part in events for grant recipients, those largely appeared to be one-time experiences.

**Weak Connection Exemplars**

Arguably, the weakest relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations existed when grants were awarded via volunteers who had been recognized by different nonprofits. A couple of participants in the study received grants this way, with one reporting, “if it wasn’t for that [grant], there really wouldn’t be a way to work with them.” Although there was follow-up reporting for these organizations, these relationships were not caring because they were limited
to required reporting and a single event hosted by the team, bringing together all grant recipients. Although the strength of caring practices were limited, participants believed this event differentiated the team from other grant-awarding organizations because it beyond the traditional check-presentations that are typically reduced to “here’s a check and we love what you do, and thank you very much.” Even so, the scale of the event made it difficult for participants to connect with the team, meaning that the relationship remained detached and grant-based.

For many grant-receiving organizations, required reporting was where their relationships with sport organizations ended. One participant explained that she “wouldn’t characterize it as having a particular relationship other than the fact that, you know, they’re a corporate funder and we’ve applied to them.” Similarly, another participant explained that these grants lacked longevity because they had a short-term feel to them, suggesting she “looked at these as more of one-time things or um, not necessarily something that we can count on in the future, to receive again.” These examples lack care in part because no relationship is being established, and what connections do exist are acknowledged as short term.

These experiences are underscored by the fact that nonprofits with weak connection seemed to have a harder time accessing the teams, a perceived responsiveness challenge that reduces relationship satisfaction and makes it appear as though teams are not invested in supporting those nonprofits. One participant described how her relationships with teams felt “formal,” “structured,” and “not relaxed.” Even though her nonprofit received grant support from multiple sport organizations, these experiences did not open doors for friendly relationships or connections with team employees. Another participant mulled over whether it “is a responsibility that our agency hasn’t reached out to them, or um, if they have not been as available; when I think about it I, I just don’t know.” Ultimately, she felt her weak connections were created, in
part, because she did not have the staffing capacity to reach out to these organizations and maintain meaningful relationships.

In some cases, however, the relationships established in conjunction with the grants created the perception that there could potentially be more team-based support. One participant whose nonprofit did not receive a grant from an organization explained that she receives in-kind donations instead. Another participant described how her organization held a walk-a-thon and a team that had recently awarded the nonprofit a grant served as a minor sponsor. Arguably, these examples show that grant applications can open doors for additional communication, and suggest there is a high end of the weak connections spectrum that could potentially evolve into more involved, caring relationships.

Mid-Level Relationships

More than the other types of relationships that emerged, mid-level relationships seemed to spread more widely across the strength continuum. Mid-level relationships were characterized by increased sport organization support that included more team access increased ability to make requests. Organizations in these relationships frequently received grants, but also received additional support including donations, volunteer hours, and player appearances. Participants in mid-level relationships seemed more likely to feel as though they had opportunities to communicate with the teams, and some of these relationships lasted more than the length of a grant contract. However, these relationships often lacked a vested interest in—or passion for—the cause on behalf of the sport organization or its representatives. Additionally, the longevity of those relationships sometimes depended on changing circumstances. In short, some organizations that received in-kind donations or volunteer support had relationships that extended beyond weak connections. However, other organizations received greater overall team involvement—for
example, through program development—such that these mid-level relationships failed to feel like true partnerships. Arguably, relationships at this level were distinguishable from partnerships because they lacked longevity and team passion for the cause being supported. Along these lines, relationships built on weaker organizational contacts—such as those established by a non-executive team employee or a passionate volunteer—appeared to foster less relationship continuity and stability.

**Mid-Level Relationship Examples**

Relationships that conceivably fall on the lower end of the mid-level relationship continuum are primarily characterized by highly inconsistent but slightly more caring relationships than weak connections. For example, one organization that received a major grant had a previous working relationship with a team that resulted in multiple smaller grants and a sizeable donation of computers to help serve the nonprofit mission. This organization also received tickets to games and other events held in the team’s arena, but the participant felt that the relationship still lacked the kind of team investment that could make it stronger. Another participant described how one team volunteered twice per month, but that was not enough to establish a strong relationship. Although the participant felt that her organization “certainly [knows] the foundation leadership,” she had difficulty “quantifying” the relationship beyond feeling they “know them well” and “are supported by them.” However, she believed that when a team highlighted her nonprofit during a lockout, it showed an advanced, but not deeply committed, level of support: “They’re certainly supportive. I don’t think they are any more drawn to our cause than they are to any other ones.” Arguably, these examples reveal how relationships with teams extend beyond grant applications and required reporting, but there is still room to grow stronger, more caring relationships.
Illustrating a slightly stronger relationship—and the importance of conceptualizing relationship strength on a continuum—some participants felt that receiving grants created opportunities to work with teams and their partners. For example, grant ceremonies were described as a nice opportunity to be publicly recognized and an opportunity to network with other nonprofits. Although some might argue whether such an event can solely exemplify a strengthened relationship, one nonprofit received in-kind donations and programming support that seemingly moved their relationship closer to a true mid-level relationship because their representatives felt they could easily reach out to teams for in-kind donations and additional programming support. This participant suggested that getting a grant “strengthened our relationship with [the team] and gave us more direct communication with them,” thus leading to increased support and a more involved, although not fully invested, relationship.

Notably, some organizations with similar experiences recognized that their relationships were not particularly strong. For example, one participant described having her nonprofit invited to take part in events and programs aimed at benefiting underprivileged youth, but explained that “it’s fun at the moment, creates a little press opportunity, and the agency gets its name in the paper maybe, and then boom, you’re on your way to the next thing.” This particular participant asked, “where is the relationship?” before pointing out that “our relationships are mostly on the superficial level of these, you know, one-time little events or small amounts of money.” In this case, she seemed to describe a relationship that lacked caring values on the part of the team. To illustrate this, she provided a counterexample to suggest that team relationships would be different—or strengthened—if someone in the organization “got passionate” about her organization and its mission. Arguably, this is a key component missing from mid-level relationships: caring values, or an investment in or passion for the cause being supported.
Without that passion, sport organizations seem less likely to commit resources to nonprofits compared to their willingness to commit time and resources to nonprofits they have stronger relationships with. Similarly, another participant emphasized that her nonprofit’s relationships have fluctuated with time and depending on the sport organization needs. Although her nonprofit receives support including stuffed bears, player appearances, and funding—certainly more support than most nonprofits receive—they might go months without hearing from the organizations they work with, thus leading the participant to assert, “I would never assume that they would prefer us (to other causes).”

Organizations with similar experiences received varying support that included “tickets, on-field appearances, [and] grants” as well as player appearances. These organizations seemingly have stronger connections not only because they receive support beyond grants, but also because they appear to have relationships with team employees. One participant believed he had a stronger relationship with one particular team because he knew people who worked for the team: “… a lot of deep connections there and just with them, with their front office and some of their senior staff and their community relations staff.” This gave the participant more opportunities to make request additional support, and while he acknowledged that his nonprofit is not high on the list of people the team calls if they are working on something “at least they’re accessible.” To him, this meant being able to pick up the phone and call with requests.

Arguably, the increased communication opportunities in mid-level relationships seemed to indicate two trends: one, there were greater opportunities to strengthen relationships; and two, participants had more power within those relationships. Two participants described negotiating with teams for support, providing an example of a team rejecting an initial suggestion, but offering an alternative. To him, having them say “We can’t do A, but [we can do] B” was
“awesome,” arguably because it showed respect and illustrated mutual concern on the part of the sport organization. Another participant appreciated that with some organizations she could “have the innate belief that if you contact someone, somebody’s going to get back to you… [and] they’re gonna have a rationale if they can’t do [something].” As such, the strength of these relationships appeared to be defined by both the levels of access and the power that nonprofits had to assert themselves. Unlike participants in weak connection relationships, participants in mid-level relationships seemingly had employee relationships necessary to maintain contact with teams and to make requests for support. This is not to suggest that these relationships involved an extended amount of mutual planning or benefit, or that teams were just as likely to reach out to these nonprofits as the nonprofits were to reach out to the teams. Even so, it illustrates how increased access and relationship autonomy strengthens relationship perceptions.

While participants had more access and power in mid-level relationships, a primary shortcoming of relationships at this level is that they did not appear to longevity or consistent support. This trend seems acutely tied to the nature of how relationships are established. Specifically, results suggest that the potential for greater access comes via connections to individuals within the sport organizations. Although personal relationships seemingly enhanced relationships, they did not guarantee long-term commitments from sport organizations. For example, one participant received regular grants from a team until a board member from that organization left the board. Similarly, two participants separately described losing the same contact with one of the teams, expressing that their degree of access had changed. I believe this indicates that individuals can encourage a relationship between organizations—thus creating what could be defined as a mid-level relationship—but if the relationship ends when the person is removed, then the cause has not resonated at an organizational level. As will be discussed,
moving cause support beyond an individual to an organization-wide interest can be considered a hallmark of partnerships.

In this context, the concept of longevity seemed to be a key characteristic for keeping mid-level relationships from becoming partnerships. One children’s hospital serves as an exemplar for how the high end of mid-level relationships fails to achieve partnership strength. Although this relationship could arguably fall within the domain of a partnership, I argue that it is a high mid-level relationship because of the lack of personalized commitment on the part of the sport organization. Although the team supported the nonprofit through a year-long, high-profile, high-involvement giving program, the relationship significantly changed when the nonprofit was no longer being supported. Additionally, many of this nonprofit’s relationships are the result of player-motivated, as opposed to team-driven, involvement. To begin, the nonprofit receives a variety of funding and support from local teams—much more than received by most nonprofits—but has a particularly strong mid-level relationship with one organization. This team provides in-kind donations and regularly coordinates player visits, and the nonprofit is part of ongoing programs. The participant explained that her organization maintains relationships by “keeping our communication with them high,” and believes: “You know, knowing some of their individuals that work within those departments helps you because you can reach out to them more frequently and remind them of your needs.” This shows that this participant has access to individuals within the sport organization and has the power to make requests. This stronger relationship was asserted when the team chose the nonprofit to be represented as its cause of choice for an entire season. In conjunction with one of their corporate sponsors, the team awarded this nonprofit a $150,000 grant that was highlighted through in-game videos and increased support over the course of the season. Communication between the organizations was
heightened during that time and the nonprofit was responsible for coordinating a variety of press and video production opportunities. While one might argue that this is the essence of a partnership, I argue that it is a mid-level relationship because communication with the team changed dramatically when the year of support concluded. For example, the nonprofit was encouraged to apply to the grant a second time, but experienced problems communicating with the team about whether they would be represented again:

“When the (program) came up a second time, they asked us for a proposal, and then they went a different direction. Which was fine. But they weren’t good about getting back to us about it.”

Here, the participant believed the team’s decision to choose another organization made sense, and they acknowledged that this was a special type of relationship: “Like that was a high level of involvement for the whole season, you know? We were really fortunate for that and you don’t expect that to continue every season, like I said.” Notably, the participant describing this relationship was highly satisfied with its outcomes, although she acknowledged that she was surprised by the lack of contact after the agreement expired.

As an exemplar, this arguably shows how a nonprofit can be in a highly active but mid-level relationship that is marked by weak caring values. Because of the inconsistent, time-dependent nature of the program, this example is more fitting of a mid-level relationship because it lacks longevity and failed to establish deep issue involvement on the part of the sport organization. Although this nonprofit continues receiving heightened in-kind support and still has more open lines of communication than most nonprofits, when compared to organizations with established partnerships, it becomes clear that this nonprofit has a solid working relationship with the team but does not enjoy the kind of corporate investment seen in the strongest relationships.
Partnerships

The strongest relationship type that emerged was rare, but when it did occur it seemingly approached or met the highest relationship standards perceived by participants. *Partnerships* are presented as large-scale sport organization commitments to nonprofits that are mutually beneficial and exhibit the strongest characteristics of care. Specifically, partnerships are characterized as providing a full package of support wherein teams and team employees are personally committed to and invested in a cause or nonprofit being supported. In partnerships, well-known nonprofit executives not only had access to team employees, but also had regular communication with both team staff and executives. Nonprofit participants had both personal and professional access—such as through board members—to make significant requests of sport organizations. Major events were hosted by both the nonprofits and teams to support specific causes, and teams actively participated in these events, highlighting the active collaboration and organizational investment that served as the foundation of these relationships. Support in the form of in-kind donations and player appearances was all but expected in these relationships, such that these nonprofits sought and received additional support that included active involvement by players, coaches, and other high-ranking team staff. At both the organizational and individual levels, teams were involved in supporting these nonprofits through volunteerism and extended fundingsupport. In some cases, employees donated time and money beyond what was committed by their teams. Essentially, partnerships were marked by a sense of passion for and organizational commitment to the causes and nonprofits being supported. These relationships were also distinguishable from other relationship types because of their consistent longevity; these relationships existed consistently for numerous years, and the strongest
partnerships often rose above the individuals that formed the connections to exist as an organization to organization relationship.

Arguably, true partnerships involve a full commitment of nonprofit support that extends to multiple levels of the giving organization and manifests as altruistic corporate commitments to actively support nonprofit goals and initiatives. One participant who did not have what she considered partnerships with local sport organizations described what she believes constitutes this level of relationship. In addition to considering a partnership “an active relationship [that] stays active,” she suggested that partnerships are about having relationships that mean the same thing for both parties—arguably, this reflects a preference for organizations having matching caring values, or attitudes, toward the relationship. When describing the give-and-take nature of partnerships, she alluded to the concept of relationship continuity by referencing a corporation her nonprofit works with: “… they are absolutely, they are here every month. They, they give us money. They do things for the children. That’s an active foundation.” Another participant similarly elaborated her beliefs, explaining that to be involved in a partnership requires collaboration as well as mutual concern, respect, and satisfaction between organizations. She detailed how her nonprofit reaches out to get “feedback and advice” from supporters, and emphasized the perceived need for mutual support in partnerships:

“You know, we in the nonprofit world talk a lot about partnerships and wanting to make sure that they are supportive of each other. And um, so I think that that would probably—if I think back on the conversations—it was mostly about partnerships and, and how to make those the most solid and the most gratifying to both parties.”

Arguably, the presence of caring practices and values seemingly emphasizes the differences between weak, medium, and strong relationships. It is not that weak or medium relationships are bad or that they cannot be valuable, but to be a true partnership organizations need to be committed to nonprofits beyond the occasional gift of financial or in-kind support.
Instead, nonprofit participants seemingly expect that to achieve a partnership all the pieces of a mid-level relationship should be in place, but the relationship also has to be boosted by longevity and organizational passion for the cause. Access is implied in partnerships because the expectation is that regular communication and the power to make suggestions and work together is a sign of mutual collaboration and concern. In general, giving organizations need to exhibit a corporate culture that emphasizes consistent involvement and cause commitment.

As such, participant descriptions suggest that advanced relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations are the most desirable and involved relationships. To participants, these relationships embrace long-term planning, mutually beneficial activities, and some level of identification between the giving organization and the cause. Arguably, the strongest partnerships also transcend individual interests and become an interest for entire organizations. The following examples illustrate how partnerships emerged in this study.

**Partnership Exemplars**

Two nonprofits represented in this study benefited greatly from partnerships with at least one sport organization, and due to the similarity of their experiences, only one will be described here. For the nonprofit exemplified, the organization established a program to which the team was the “lead sponsor,” resulting in $25,000 of annual funding and a commitment to heavily promote the cause using a player as a spokesperson. The depth of this team’s commitment is evidenced in a number of ways: a top executive sits on the board, the team has partnered with a local school supported by the nonprofit, and “somewhere between 30 to 49 employees… get time off from work” to volunteer for the nonprofit. Each year the organizations meet for a planning meeting, and the partnership is maintained by a relationship manager. As the participant from this nonprofit described, “we stay in touch with that person all year long for all of our
relationship and it strengthens who we are.” Describing the sport organization as a “collaborative partner, rather than a handout,” the participant explained how the relationship started with a grant, but evolved into a partnership over time and because of mutual respect:

“And it strengthens over the years, of course. They respect us, we respect them. We follow through on what we say we are going to do, they follow through on what they’re saying they’re going to do.”

This particular relationship highlights some characteristics of caring practices and values that differentiate partnerships from other types of relationships: there’s a financial, in-kind, and personal commitment to the cause; employees at varying levels are dedicated to supporting the nonprofit via volunteer efforts; the nonprofit decision-makers have access to team executives; the relationship is built on establishing mutually beneficial relationships; and this is a long-term collaboration that has strengthened over the years.

Next, another nonprofit was deeply supported by two organizations, but in different ways: one team made an organizational commitment to the nonprofit, while the other team was associated with the cause because of a relationship established with a head coach. The level of involvement with the first team is relatively high as the team owner has made a personal, public commitment to support the nonprofit and a major project it is spearheading. This has generated an organization-wide commitment to the cause that is considered mutually beneficial for both organizations:

“Um so, we, there's a mutual benefit to everything we do, for them and for us. You know, they want is satisfy, for the (team) they want to satisfy their own goals, right? They want help the community and they want their employees to be engaged and active in volunteerism and we provide them an outlet to do that.”

In the case of the coach, the nonprofit approached him because his values appeared to align with the nonprofit’s Christian-based mission. Because the nonprofit felt their cause would resonate with him, they reached out to him personally to increase the team’s level of
commitment. Although the team had already supported the cause for numerous years via funding, in-kind donations, and player appearances, the coach was perceived as a touch point who could potentially “cultivate a whole football team.” This was important to the participant, who felt leadership was a key factor determining the depth of these relationships: “when we get their leaders engaged deeply, the access, the influence, and the investments they make, that’s what they bring to the table.” Essentially, it seemed as though this participant was interested in working with people who showed strong caring values such as a deeply commitment to and passionate toward the nonprofit cause and mission.

Similar to other examples, the two teams supporting this nonprofit have shown tremendous financial and personal commitments. The nonprofit has access to the teams and enjoys the increased benefits of being publicly supported by multiple levels of team employees. However, I this nonprofit’s partnerships arguably serve as an example of how partnerships can exist at discrete levels. For example, this nonprofit’s experiences highlight how establishing a relationship with an individual can create a partnership, but the most committed partnerships seemingly resonate at the organizational level. Arguably, personal commitments only go as far as the individuals who are invested in them. Prior to the coach’s interest, the team’s investment waxed and waned over the years. While the sport organization publicly supported the nonprofit and actively participated in providing in-kind and player appearance support, it was the coach’s active participation—upon being approached by the nonprofit—that seemingly elevated the relationship beyond a mid-level status. The participant even described the team’s commitment as “getting there.” Interestingly, since the interviews were conducted, the coach was relieved of his position with the team; to compare the perceived commitment of these two organizations, it would be informative to further explore whether the team’s commitment has remained at the
same level without the coach’s influence. As such, although the relationships with both teams have existed across time and multiple ownership groups, it seems worth considering how personal investment and passion for a cause can change levels of organizational involvement and commitment to a nonprofit. Additionally, these examples highlight the importance of considering whether and how partnerships are strengthened if support shifts from an individual to an organization.

These ideas can be extended by looking at two organizations who have the distinction of being supported by all three teams in the area—an acknowledged rarity. One organization is a nationally recognized nonprofit, while the other is a smaller and based locally. Both have high-ranking sport executives on their boards and host events with the different teams as sponsors. Players are active in both causes and act as spokespeople for these organizations. Additionally, particular care is taken to make sure the needs of both organizations are met via collaboration and open communication. As one participant described:

“You know this is truly a partnership. When I sit down and I interview a board member who wants to be on our board, I say to them up front, ‘What do you need from us? What do you want from us?’”

This participant was highly concerned with creating large-scale mutual benefits for her partners, but it is worth noting that she represents a large nonprofit that has the capacity to create meaningful opportunities for large, well-known, highly visible partner organizations. Unlike most nonprofits, this one has the ability to create its own awareness, has significant reach without the support of other organizations, and is recognizable via its own branding and reputation strategies.

As such, I believe it is more telling to see how network relationships and caring relationships can coalesce for a smaller organization. In this example, the nonprofit seemingly
has the most inclusive, collaborative, and invested partnerships of all the nonprofits represented in this study. This particular organization has long-standing relationships with all three teams in the area, and each team has participated in special events for the organization, not only hosting themed game nights dedicated to its cause, but also hosting kickoff parties for the fundraising campaigns. Both players and coaches from all three teams have supported the cause both by participating in events and making personal contributions to the cause. Team employees volunteer for the organization, and have even approached their teams and the nonprofit with ideas for events and suggestions to support the nonprofit cause and mission. In recent years, all three teams have served as major sponsors for an event that is rapidly growing in popularity:

“And for the first time we had all the sports organizations involved um, with actually sponsoring our (event) this year. So, you usually never see sports teams all together on something. It would be like four banks—you never see four banks on one event! They just don’t do it … So for the first time, they sort of let their guard down and they said we all want to help. And um, that’s happening more and more with our events.”

As such, it is worth exploring what distinguishes this relationship from others. Based on conceptualizations of what partnerships are, this nonprofit benefits from two distinct care-based relationship characteristics: first, there is a passion for and deep investment in the cause; and second, the relationships are being fostered at an organizational rather than individual level. In this example, team investment does not start and stop with team executives or individuals. Instead, team employees ranging from executives to players to staff members have embraced the nonprofit cause, participating in events, volunteering, and helping with fundraising and personal financial contributions. Additionally, the nonprofit appears to have more open access to top team executives and decisions makers that are involved with the cause, thus giving the nonprofit the power to ask for support and encourage collaboration. The relationship also appears to be built on a desire to respect and acknowledge mutual concerns and enhance mutual benefits. Because
players are involved in the cause, the nonprofit is careful to recognize “time is of the essence in not spending too much of a player’s time or coach’s time in the community, but when you do it, make it count.” Additionally, the nonprofit takes the lead on creating press material; “We’re the ones putting the press releases out and talking to the people and making sure that we’ve got the stories…”

In short, the depth of the relationships cultivated by this particular organization is rare. So rare, in fact, that it is worth questioning whether achieving this level of relationship is a reasonable expectation for other nonprofits. As evidenced by preceding examples, the level of engagement from the organizations involved shows multi-faceted commitments to the nonprofit. In some cases the depth of the organizational commitment to the cause has continued through multiple ownership and leadership changes at both the sport organization and the nonprofit. This suggests that the consistent, long-term relationships this nonprofit enjoys seem to rise above any one individual’s commitment to the cause. However, the rarity of this example comes with a caveat—the leadership at the nonprofit is well-known and highly respected in the community and among sport teams. Not only does this person have the ability to foster relationships with well-known sponsors that can “make the ask” on behalf of the nonprofit, but also they are intimately familiar with how sport organization giving works. In a way, however, this example illustrates how it is not the size of the nonprofit organization that matters, but the strength of the personal relationships and connections that eventually create partnerships. Being connected to the right individuals and properly managing those relationships to maximize mutual benefits for both organizations can elevate a partnership by turning it from an individual passion to an organizational commitment to a cause. Ultimately, this nonprofit serves as what might be considered an ideal example of normatively good CSR relationships. Although other nonprofits
with more established partnerships may exist, this example showcases the power of caring practices and values, and emphasizes the distinct differences between weak connections, mid-level relationships, and partnerships between nonprofit and professional sports organizations. Figure 1 offers a visualization of the proposed relationship continuum, highlighting how relationship strength emerged in the results:

**Figure 1. Levels of Relationship Continuum**

![Levels of Relationship Continuum Diagram]

Arguably, bridging the two set of big-picture findings leads to patterns that suggest the presence of caring relationship characteristics can predict not only nonprofit relationship satisfaction, but also relationship strength between nonprofit and sport organizations. To position this research in the context of public relations scholarship—thus situating sport CSR as a public relations function—and argue for care as a normative standard for establishing good CSR practices, the next section outlines a care-based definition of CSR and proposes a model for predicting good CSR practices based on caring characteristics and organization-to-organization relationship factors.

**Defining Caring CSR**

Although scholars situate CSR in the domain of public relations scholarship (Somerville & Wood, 2008), research in this area has faced challenges related to the lack of a concrete definition of the practice. While some scholars believe measures should be developed to more finely conceptualize CSR (Carroll, 1999), others believe theoretical confusion exists because
researchers use varying definitions and dimensions to measure CSR practices and impacts (Dahlsrud, 2008). Arguably, this confusion arises in part because public relations scholars use and modify both public relations and business dimensions and definitions of CSR. For example, even though Carroll approaches CSR from the business perspective and has modified his original dimensions to reflect economic, legal, and ethical concerns (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003), some public relations and much business research still relies on his original CSR dimensions. Despite this trend, it seems scholars—particularly in public relations—agree that CSR should extend beyond legal obligations (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Hou & Reber, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; O’Connor, Shumate, & Meister, 2008; White, Vanc, & Coman, 2011). The results of this study suggest that nonprofit practitioners agree with this sentiment, believing that sport giving should be an organizational decision. Additionally, scholars have yet to significantly delve into research that conceptualizes normatively good CSR practices. Beyond studying the attitudinal and practical benefits of implementing CSR initiatives, scholarship widely fails to imagine what good CSR looks like. As such, this research begins addressing this gap by conceptualizing what good, caring CSR practices look like from the benefiting nonprofit perspective.

Based on this study’s findings, nonprofits seemingly recognize the context-driven aspects of corporate giving. Although practitioners generally believe that CSR efforts should extend beyond legal obligations, they also recognize that philanthropic practices can and should yield benefits for giving organizations. Arguably, participants believe that CSR practices should be balanced between altruistic and self-serving motives. This aligns with the belief that “CSR is not pure philanthropy, but rather, a holistic business mindset, much like a corporate culture, where the ‘socially responsible’ obligations of the firm could and indeed, should incorporate both social
and economic interests” (Bradish & Cronin, 2009, p. 692). When expressing their own caring values, for example, nonprofit practitioners show a preference for organizations that seem invested in socially responsible causes. They are more likely to want to publicly recognize genuine CSR efforts, and want caring teams to reap reputational benefits of the work they do. Additionally, they believe that publicizing an organization’s good community work can positively benefit both the giving and receiving organizations. Publicizing philanthropic efforts simultaneously promotes sport organization efforts while also helping increase awareness about nonprofit practices and causes. Additionally, if an organization is perceived as being altruistic—thus reflecting a corporate culture that values philanthropy—the reputational benefits lead to increased organizational trust and credibility within the community. Being that organizational credibility is a direct benefit of working with sport organizations, it seems the benefits of promoting CSR efforts are increasingly impact nonprofits. This reflects Rumsey and White’s (2009) finding that nonprofit and partner relationships are nuanced in that increased benefits to the giving organization may eventually return to the nonprofits. As such, even though practicing CSR for public relations benefits is theoretically conceived as self-serving, it is more likely that a practical balance between altruism and organizational gain actually yields direct benefits for supported nonprofits.

Arguably, this practical balance can best be justified by conceptualizing CSR in the context of caring public relations. As opposed to marketing and business conceptualizations of CSR—which focus almost exclusively on benefits to giving organizations and sponsors—relationship-based approaches to CSR can privilege a balance of mutual benefits while privileging the needs and concerns of benefiting audiences. It is also worth noting that numerous public relations scholars have identified the triple-bottom line approach in CSR communication
strategies, suggesting that organizations conceptualize CSR as a practice that focuses on creating positive environmental, economic, and social impacts (e.g., Gill et al., 2010). Based on participant perceptions related to caring practices and values, it seems that framing CSR within the context of care ethics can encourage socially responsible practices that are built on a genuine desire to create positive community impacts while elevating those audiences that benefit from CSR practices. The notion that caring practices and values emerge in the nonprofit perspective of giving relationships is powerful because it shows that a combination of caring practices and values leads to more satisfying relationships. Instead of providing cut-and-run support, caring CSR can be conceptualized as a practice that envisions good CSR relationships as ones that leave both organizations feeling fulfilled.

To forward this perspective, a definition of CSR can be established that not only situates social responsibility as a function of public relations, but also conceptualizes good CSR practices in the context of caring relationships. This proposed definition modifies the PRSA (n.d.) definition of public relations by adding dimensions of the triple-bottom line approach and ethics of care to suggest that:

Corporate social responsibility reflects an organizational commitment to create mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with publics via strategic environmental, economic, and socially conscious practices that develop public trust, privilege mutual concern for others, and encourage flourishing in the communities and environments in which a business operates.

This definition is designed to hone in on numerous components of caring CSR practices. First, by situating CSR as an organizational commitment, it is implied that caring values should exist as a corporate culture that actively promotes an organizational investment in socially responsible
efforts. Next, relationships with publics should be both mutually beneficial and respectful. As with the PRSA (n.d.) definition of public relations, the conceptualization of CSR as mutually beneficial is intended to establish it as a relationship-building practice both within and between organizations and their publics. However, I include in this definition a specific call to establish respectful relationships, which can arguably be founded on the concept of caring values. As argued by Held (2006), I believe it is not enough for organizational relationships to be benevolently or purely beneficial to one party. Instead, mutual benefit should be established via respect and heightened consideration for those publics being supported, thus evoking caring values that can guide decisions regarding caring practices. In line with existing public relations research, the triple-bottom line approach is highlighted because it removes the outdated legal dimension and because content analyses suggest these are the dimensions along which CSR is being practiced and communicated (Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012; Gill et al., 2010; Hou & Reber, 2011; Kim et al., 2010; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; O’Connor & Shumate, 2010; Sone et al., 2009; Tang & Li, 2009). Finally, these dimensions are situated in the context of caring practices, suggesting that organizations should seek to achieve trust, mutual concern, and flourishing in their approaches to CSR.

Arguably, this definition achieves three major goals for advancing CSR as a public relations theory. First, it situates CSR in the domain of public relations, conceiving the practice as a relationship-building rather than transactional corporate activity. Second, it elevates the importance of the beneficiary perspective by establishing CSR as a practice that privileges the perspectives and needs of those publics and entities being supported. Third, it emphasizes a practical normative approach to good CSR practices by providing a guideline for what good CSR can look like, embracing both caring practices and values in a potentially measurable way. To
illustrate the potential strength of this definition, the next section introduces a testable model that can be used to evaluate and predict the strength of caring relationships.

**Presenting a Model of Caring CSR**

In addition to presenting the preceding definition of CSR, I believe a model can be established to guide future research in this area (Figure 2). Stepping back from the specific details of the research questions and considering the extant literature related to CSR, sport CSR, and ethics of care, an overarching pattern emerges that seemingly bridges the gaps between key CSR and ethics of care concepts to predict and suggest best CSR practices. Specifically, it appears as though relationship strength can be predicted by the level of caring in relationships, by the ways in which relationships are established, and by the degree of challenges nonprofits face when entering relationship. The strength—or level—of relationships is then connected to the types of benefits that benefiting organizations yield from CSR efforts.

To elaborate the proposed model, I define and establish potential dimensions for each variable. I begin presenting the framework by exploring Caring Relationships, defining the dimensions of caring practices and values that can predict the level of care in a relationship. Next, I define how Network Relationships can explain and account for how relationships are formed between nonprofit and sport organizations. Next, I review the challenges that may exist to modify relationships, elaborating how capacity and organizational restrictions can negatively impact relationship strength. Figure 2 (next page) presents the proposed model of Caring CSR, showing the proposed positive and negative relationships between variables.

**Caring Relationships**

Because this study is aimed at understanding whether caring practices can be used to guide best CSR practices, it is notable that care emerged in a potentially measurable way.
Specifically emergent patterns suggest that the most satisfying and strongest relationships can be gauged by the level of caring between organizations. Arguably, relationships can range from mutually caring to singularly caring to transactional, and the degree of caring that exists in a relationship relies on the presence of both caring practices and values. In this context, the more mutually caring a relationship is, the more likely it is to be a strong relationship; whereas the more transactional a relationship is, the more likely it is to be a weak relationship. To guide development of this variable, I define *caring relationships* as mutually beneficial relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations that are based on enhancing caring practices and embracing caring values within the relationship. To illustrate how this variable impacts the proposed model, I first describe how caring relationships are evaluated, then illustrate examples of different relationships.

**Evaluating Caring Relationships**

Ethics of care establishes that relationships should be built on a foundation of caring practices and values, in part based on the context in which relationships exist (Held, 2006).
Based on the two dimensions of care and emergent themes, I believe that the degree to which a relationship is caring can be measured by understanding how care is practiced and valued by the organizations in a relationship. Arguably, caring practices create trust, exhibit mutual concern, and encourage flourishing, while caring values are expressed through indicators of genuine giving and organizational responsiveness. First, I describe dimensions of caring practices, before elaborating dimensions of caring values. Then, I elaborate the degree to which these dimensions can predict the level of care in these relationships.

**Dimensions of Caring Practices**

Caring practices are the actions that organizations can take to show care. Ideally, organizations that practice caring CSR are able to earn trust because of their actions; for example, following through on stated commitments is one way to establish trust. Caring practices should also embrace mutual concern by envisioning giving strategies that attempt to understand and respect the needs of others, thus privileging beneficiary perspectives. Finally, caring practices should encourage flourishing by attempting to elevate others via CSR initiatives that help others in meaningful ways.

**Dimensions of Caring Values**

Although strengthening caring practices is a key component to strengthening care in a relationship, one must also exhibit caring values. An examination of the relationships that were deemed philanthropic and nonphilanthropic revealed patterns that suggest perceived team cultures of giving and team responsiveness is an indicator of team values. Caring values are complementary to caring practices, and are considered the attitudes—or corporate culture—that an organization has toward giving. Arguably, two dimensions can be assessed to evaluate caring
Giving motivations can be evaluated along a continuum and organizational responsiveness can be evaluated at both the organizational and individual levels.

**Giving Motivations**

When describing philanthropic organizations, participants indicated a preference for “genuine” giving motivations. Genuine motivations appear to exist along a continuum from altruism to organizational gain, with mutual benefit as a mid-point that seemingly combines altruistic and gain-centered motivations to give. Altruistic values indicate that an organization is giving out of a pure desire to give with no return. Selfish values indicate that an organization is giving only because of the generated benefits (such as reputation and media coverage). In the middle, mutual benefit combines these two giving values to suggest that an organization is giving out of a genuine philanthropic interest while also consciously yielding benefits. Notably, mutual benefit appeared to be the most favorable motivation type, in part because of the business context in which these relationships are established.

**Responsiveness**

Compelling evidence exists to suggest that organizational responsiveness can indicate a giving corporate culture. Responsiveness is defined as the degree to which an organization is open to communicating with outside constituents. This manifests as perceived team accessibility. Participants described accessibility two ways: between organizations, and between individuals within organizations. Organizational accessibility can be conceptualized as the degree to which an organization makes itself available to nonprofits. This can be accomplished through the establishment of grant programs, clearly defined points of contact (both individuals and departments), and easily accessible information (for example, via organization websites). The more options a team has to create organizational contact, the more accessible they appear and
become. At the individual level, caring values can be assessed based on the quality of the relationships and the attitudes of the individuals who are communicating. For example, an organization might encourage individuals to be personally involved in giving practices, or it might encourage employees to establish personal relationships in a way that reflects the corporate culture.

**Strength of Caring Relationships**

As with the dimensions of network relationships, the dimensions of caring practices and caring values do not exist exclusively of one another. Caring values underpin caring practices, which are essentially used to help illustrate those same values. As such, the more caring the values—in this cause mutual benefit and altruism are both considered caring—and the more caring the practices, the more likely that caring relationships are being formed. Three types of caring relationships are identified in this study, ranging from transactional to mutually caring relationships. *Transactional relationships* between organizations occur when neither the giving nor receiving organization is practicing care or expressing caring values. In these relationships, funding or goods may be exchanged, but there is no additional contact or communication that can indicate the two organizations are concerned about establishing dimensions of care. Next, *singularly caring* relationships exist when one of two organizations expresses caring values or attempts to initiate caring practices. For example, a nonprofit may wish to show appreciation for a team by extending direct benefits or expressing appreciation and respect for their support. However, the team does not return these practices in a caring way—they may simply provide support because it is requested or they may kind, but not caring in their personal interactions with the nonprofit. Finally, *mutually caring* relationships exist when both organizations are invested in showing care via practices and values. In these cases, programs may be developed
that take nonprofit needs into consideration and are designed to elevate the nonprofit. In return
the nonprofit may do what it can to promote the good work being done by the giving
organization. From a values perspective, there may be accessibility in the form of regular contact
and collaboration, while the genuine giving is either altruistic or mutually beneficial. Arguably,
the more mutually beneficial a relationship is, the more likely that a strong relationship exists
between the two organizations.

**Exemplifying Caring Relationships**

Mutually caring relationships represented in this study exhibited high levels of both
caring practices and values and most frequently resembled partnerships. Participants in mutually
caring relationships described being in regular contact with sport organizations both to receive
support and to collaborate on events and projects. Participants generally had a specific point of
contact—in one case, deemed a “relationship manager”—with whom they communicated
regularly, and felt comfortable calling the organization to make requests. In these cases, teams
appeared to have a genuine interest in supporting the nonprofit, engaging in practices such as
volunteerism because of both organizational and individual identification with the cause. These
values were also exemplified through caring practices. In the case of sport organizations, not
only were direct benefits shared, but also indirect benefits were leveraged for the nonprofits. For
example, nonprofits with mutually caring relationships often received support via player
appearances or the establishment of an athlete or coach as a spokesperson. In return, nonprofits
extended their capacity as far as they could, not only doing what they could to share information
about the sport organizations’ efforts, but also by both publicly and privately expressing
gratitude for the relationship.
In singularly caring relationships, one organization was more likely to exhibit care through practices and values. These relationships typically indicated a mid-level relationship and, notably, whenever a singularly caring relationship existed, it was the nonprofit showing the care. This simultaneously illuminates the power differentials that can exist in CSR relationships, in a way highlighting the ways in which nonprofits are more reliant on corporate partners than those partners are reliant on nonprofits. One case that particularly highlights a singularly caring relationship occurred with a nonprofit that received a grant from a team. In this case, the nonprofit wanted to show appreciation for the team (caring value) by hosting an event (caring practice) to thank the team for their grant support and to give the team awareness among the nonprofit publics. Although the nonprofit indicates that they understood that circumstances prevented a team representative from coming to the event, I believe this highlights a singularly caring relationship because the team did not display the same care toward the nonprofit. Although their reasons for giving the grant may have been genuine, the team maintained a relationship that was transactional—they received a grant nomination, distributed the grant, engaged in planned follow-ups, but had little communication with the organization outside of this exchange.

Finally, transactional relationships are ones in which neither organization shows caring practices. These relationships were most noticeable among participants whose organizations were in weak relationships wherein they had received nothing more than a grant. These emerged as transactional relationships because neither organization seemed to have a vested interest in doing more than was required by the situation. On the part of the nonprofit, this meant applying for and receiving a grant, then publicizing the funding was received per the grant guidelines. What little follow-up was required by the grant was met with no additional attempts to make
contact with the team. On the part of the sport organization, as with the example provided to illustrate a singularly caring relationship, the transactional elements of distributing the grant are met with little additional follow-up.

Notably, the type of caring relationships a nonprofit has does not always indicate their satisfaction with those relationships. However, a pattern emerged in which those participants in transactional and mutually caring relationships were more satisfied with their connections than were participants in singularly caring relationships. A number of organizations who had transactional relationships were satisfied with the connections they had, in part because the support they received was exactly what they wanted—funding without the hassle of detailed follow-ups. Conversely, some wished to have stronger relationships and expressed an interest in working toward that goal. In mutually caring relationships, participants were also satisfied in that they felt they were able to meet both their own and the sport organizations needs. None of the participants in mutually caring relationships expressed a desire to further strengthen the relationship. However, participants in singularly caring relationships seemed more likely to express frustration with their relationships, and were more apt to express a desire to establish more meaningful relationships. This mimics concerns with asymmetrical models of public relations (Grunig & Dozier, 2012) that suggest involved publics have less autonomy and more dissatisfaction in their relationships because of the imbalances that are presented.

**Network Relationships**

When evaluating the relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations, a pattern emerged to suggest that how relationships are established and maintained at the individual level is a potential predictor of how caring and, subsequently, how strong a relationship is. Based on the examples presented in this study, it appears as though many relationships depend on
individuals—from within both the nonprofit and sport organizations—as the key factors impacting relationship strength. Specifically, the emergent pattern indicates that the higher individuals are within their respective organization’s managerial structure, the more likely it is that those individuals are decision-makers or are directly connected to decision-makers, thus strengthening the organizational ties. As such, in the context of this study, I define network relationships as the relationships between individuals at nonprofit and sport organizations that are used to establish, maintain, and strengthen organizational connections. Network relationships can be strong, moderate, or weak depending on the level of employment held by individuals from both the nonprofit and sports organizations.

**Establishing Network Relationships**

Before elaborating the emergent pattern, it is worth recalling that relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations are established three ways: Nonprofits apply for grants, nonprofits reach out to teams for support, and teams reach out to nonprofits. When nonprofits reach out to sport organizations, contact is typically initiated by nonprofit employees, board members, or volunteers. In some cases, however, board members may be team employees, thus blurring the lines between nonprofits reaching out to teams and vice versa. As will be discussed shortly, this is arguably the point at which individuals are differentiated as the key predictor of relationship levels.

Based on the examples in this study, it appears two dichotomies can help account for the strength of relationships between nonprofit and sport organizations. These dichotomies are related to (1) the employment levels of individuals within the nonprofits and (2) the employment levels of individuals within the sport organizations. In short, where individuals fall within the managerial structure can contribute to indicating the level of the relationship. For example, an
executive director for a nonprofit is an employee with decision-making capabilities, compared to a volunteer that is not employed and likely has little autonomy. Similarly, an owner or team executive for a sport organization can drive organizational decisions, compared to departmental staff members or interns who may have few and minor decision-making opportunities. In general, participants in this study indicated that in some cases non-employees such as volunteers or supporters helped establish relationships with sports organizations on behalf of the nonprofit. However, the participants—most of which were executive directors, CEOs, and presidents—were most frequently the point of contact when communicating with sport organizations. When describing their primary contacts within the teams, participants indicated that they contacted team employees ranging from interns to department directors to players to team executives.

**Strength of the Network Relationship**

It is important to note that the described dichotomies do not function exclusively of one another. Instead, predicting the relationship level between nonprofit and sport organizations requires establishing the employment levels of key individuals from each organization in the relationship. If both organizations are represented in the relationship by individuals who are high in the managerial structure, it appears to be more likely that a strong network relationship exists. If only one organization is represented in the relationship by an individual or individuals high on their respective managerial chart, it is more likely the nonprofits and teams have a moderate network relationship. Finally, if individuals in the relationship have limited decision-making capabilities—such as volunteers or interns—it appears that the network relationships are weak. The following examples serve to illustrate the patterns being described.
Exemplifying Network Relationships

Partnerships represented in this study displayed one common pattern: High-ranking team officials were directly invested in the cause or nonprofit and they were in contact with decision-makers within those respective nonprofits. Strong network relationships were described by participants as being established and maintained by decision-makers in managerial positions within both the nonprofit and sport organizations. In one case, a participant described how her nonprofit purposefully manages its relationships by matching the employment level of those who are communicating with the team. Their CEO is in charge of maintaining relationships with a team owner, while their president/COO maintains a relationship with the team’s CEO. For another nonprofit that boasts multiple partnerships, the sport organizations are represented by board members that include general managers and team executives. These relationships are then maintained by the nonprofit’s executive director.

In moderate network relationships, which usually indicated mid-level relationships between organizations, there was a distinct imbalance between the levels of nonprofit and team employees. In these cases, either the nonprofit representative or team employee was not a high-ranking official or decision-maker. For example, one nonprofit received significant support from individual players because of personal connections they made with a specific volunteer—a non-employee. This did not, however, generate a strong network relationship or a partnership with the sport organization, although it did help establish high-functioning mid-level relationship. Conversely, numerous nonprofit executive directors reported being in contact with a team community relations managers or directors. Although these directors were able to secure in-kind donations and player appearances, they did not have strong relationships that encouraged collaboration or responsiveness from the teams. Alternately, if both individuals in the
relationship were low- or mid-level managers, the relationship seemed more likely to be a weak or moderate relationship. For example, one nonprofit resource manager felt comfortable contacting teams for support, but described being in touch with interns within one organization. In this relationship, she primarily received tickets to games. This shows that while this organization had a moderate network relationship, it was one that fell on the lower end of the spectrum.

Finally, nonprofits with weak network relationships typically had weak connection relationships and generally did not have contacts within the sport organizations, regardless of the managerial rank or decision-making capabilities of the nonprofit representative. These relationships were primarily characterized by grant applications that rarely required contact with the sports organizations.

In the context of understanding how these connections emerge, it is worth discussing a few key network relationship distinctions. First, it is noteworthy that team executives were only involved in relationships that were managed by high-ranking nonprofit decision makers (such as executive directors and presidents/CEOs). Second, while these relationships hold true when considering individual nonprofit and team representatives, there is no discernible pattern related to organizational departments. That is to say that being in contact with specific departments—such as a team’s community relations, media relations, or marketing departments—does not change the nature or strength of the relationship. This further reinforces the notion that individuals are the key component of establishing, maintaining, and possibly predicting the strength and level of care in nonprofit and sport organization relationships.
**Distinguishing Board Members**

It is worth noting that board members illustrate the importance of being connected to decision-makers when navigating nonprofit and sport organization relationships. In some cases, board members were volunteers who were not employed by either the nonprofit or sports organizations. Despite being a representative within the relationship, board members that had varying connections within sport organizations were able to accomplish different tasks for nonprofits. For example, one participant described how a board member with a team connection was able to acquire apparel for the nonprofit to distribute to its clients. In another case, a participant described how having a major team sponsor on her board created opportunities to ask for significant support and event participation from multiple teams. While each of these board members had internal team connections, the latter appeared to have more influence not only because of their distinction as a major sponsor, but also because of their connections to high-ranking decision makers within the organization.

It is also worth elaborating the importance of board member connections in this context, particularly because research in nonprofit management suggests that “stronger board members are a significant predictor of board performance” (Brown, 2007, p. 312). In a study examining commitment and performance among nonprofit board members, Preston and Brown (2004) found that board members and executive directors believed five primary behaviors served as indicators of performance: attendance at meetings and events, quality participation in meetings and events, knowledge of the nonprofit mission and programming, knowledge of board and nonprofit issues, and providing additional support and assistance as needed. The notion of providing additional assistance was highlighted by board member willingness to promote the nonprofit to non-board members or “perform a variety of functions that extend their primary
board member responsibilities” (Preston & Brown, 2004, p. 227). Arguably, this aligns with the “asking” behaviors exhibited by nonprofit board members in this study that are either representatives from sports organizations or are connected to team employees. Participants who described having board members who could make requests seemed more likely to have those requests fulfilled. Additionally, Preston and Brown’s (2004) findings suggest that the more affective commitment—or emotional connection—a board member has to a cause, the more likely they are to be active, valued, and personally invested in the nonprofit. Patterns in this study suggest that higher levels of personal involvement among team representatives led to stronger and more caring network relationships with higher levels of organizational commitment.

Challenges

Based on the results describing challenges faced when working with sport organizations, two types of challenges emerged to potentially moderate relationship strength. Internal challenges included financial and resource capacity, while external challenges included organizational restrictions, cause appeals, and relationship longevity.

Internal Challenges

In this study, financial and resource capacity emerged as internal challenges for nonprofits and seemingly dictated their ability to participate in certain giving and relationship-building activities. For example, without resource capacity such as staffing and physical resources, it was difficult for nonprofits to host events or manage communication expectations. Without proper funding, nonprofits are also unable to fill resource needs or manage relationships where funding resources may need to be directed away from programming. Capacity was seen as an issue that could prevent nonprofits from establishing stronger relationships.
External Challenges

External challenges were perceived in nonprofit and sport organization relationships, and these challenges were often considered out of nonprofit control. Organizational restrictions were one type of challenge that emerged, wherein sport organizations had restrictions in place that could alter the ability for nonprofits to increase the strength of their relationships. For example, teams sometimes hosted events for large groups of people—while these events increased opportunities to collaborate and network, they also made it difficult for nonprofits to personally connect with team representatives. In other cases, a team might be obligated to participate in league-wide programming, thus preventing them from establishing programs or relationships with nonprofits.

A number of participants also indicated that specific causes appear more likely to garner support from organizations. In this context, cause appeal present a challenge for nonprofits because they represent a sport organization preference for supporting particular causes that may be appealing because of their potential for personal involvement or their ability to generate human interest stories. Participants generally held in high esteem sport organizations that gave to more diverse causes, but nonprofits that represented pediatric health causes seemingly had the strongest relationships.

Next, although relationship longevity did not emerge as a specific theme, it was apparent that the strongest relationships were built over time and through extended collaboration. One participant described how the partnership her nonprofit had with a team had started as a weak connection and evolved to a mid-level relationship through increased collaboration. In this vein, Held (2006) argues that caring “relations are often reciprocal over time if not at given times” (p. 43). As such, longevity should have predictive value when determining relationship strength.
Yielding Direct and Indirect Benefits

Based on the strength of relationships that exist—weak connections, mid-level relationships, or partnerships—nonprofits seem more or less likely to yield direct and indirect benefits. Participant insights suggest that working with sport organizations offers specialized indirect benefits, which can enhance direct benefits. Specifically, direct benefits include the ability for teams to create awareness, reach large and widespread audiences, and bring credibility to relationships. Indirect benefits include team recognizability and celebrity, characteristics that enhance the ability for sport organizations to generate direct benefits. Arguably, partnerships are most likely to yield the greatest benefits, whereas mid-level and weak relationships may enjoy some benefits but to a significantly smaller degree. Arguably, the more direct and indirect benefits that a nonprofit receives, the more likely it is that a relationship is established based on caring practices. If these benefits are shared in a way that builds trust, shows mutual concern, and encourages flourishing, this suggests that a team is more invested in sharing resources in a mutually beneficial way.

Direct Benefits

In the context of CSR practices, direct benefits are the strengths that can be shared between organizations. Emergent themes suggest that awareness, reach, and credibility are the primary direct benefits of working with sport organizations. For example, a team that has the capacity to generate awareness via established communication practices can help a nonprofit generate both brand and issue awareness by using its skills and resources to distribute those messages. Teams also have the ability to reach large groups of people at sporting events and via social media. By disseminating messages to these large, sometimes geographically dispersed publics, teams can help nonprofits expand their own reach. Finally, sport teams are generally
considered credible organizations, and garnering the support of a sport organization can yield two types of credibility for nonprofits. In addition to earning credibility because of the clout a sport organization carries, nonprofits believe they receive validation when a sport organization supports them. Notably, these benefits seem to be attainable outside the context of sport. Because nonprofits generally believe that the indirect benefits are what separate sport organizations from other corporations, it is possible that these direct benefits can be identified in a variety of industries.

**Indirect Benefits**

Arguably, what sets sport organizations apart from other corporate counterparts is their recognizability and celebrity. These benefits are perceived to be indirect not only because they cannot be transferred to nonprofits, but also because they enhance or modify direct benefits. Recognizability is the general public profile that teams have, whereas celebrity is the public profile embodied by individuals such as athletes and coaches. It appears as though recognizability and celebrity serve to strengthen direct benefits because these are the factors that give organizations greater reach, greater credibility, and increased opportunities to generate awareness.

**Implications**

Although large bodies of academic and professional literature exist to explain best CSR practices, few scholars and practitioners have conceptualized what it means to practice normatively *good* CSR. As CSR research continues to grow, the body of knowledge about how to communicate about CSR efforts, which audiences to communicate with, and how to increase cause appeals and related business strategies is just the tip of what we know about CSR practices. Despite the fact that we are slowly chipping away at what there is to know about this
ever-expanding business practice, much remains to be understood. This study attempts to fill some of the gaps in CSR literature—particularly in the context of public relations—by exploring not the organizational benefits and perceptions of giving practice, but the beneficiary perspectives of being supported via CSR initiatives.

Findings from this research suggest that both sport CSR and ethics of care are appropriate contexts and ethics through which to examine and evaluate public relations-based CSR practices. By making the first known attempt to examine sport CSR from a public relations perspective, I show that sport provides a niche context for conceptualizing and understanding CSR impacts and best practices. This context also creates an opportunity to examine whether ethics of care can be a useful normative framework for guiding scholarly and practitioner understanding of good CSR practices. Although caring principles theoretically align with public relations goals and standards, findings show that nonprofit beneficiaries that receive CSR support most greatly value relationships marked by caring practices and values. This arguably opens new doors to understanding best CSR practices by envisioning good CSR both from the beneficiary perspective and through the lens of a normative ethic that can be evaluated and identified in practice.

The following sections consider both the theoretical and practical implications of this research, establishing closing arguments regarding the value of the findings. First, via theoretical implications I describe how this study addresses gaps in public relations and CSR literature. I consider how the findings can extend our understanding of current public relations theory, then situate the results within broader business-based sport CSR scholarship, arguing for a more public relations driven approach to sport CSR. Next, I consider the practical implications of this
research, conceptualizing how practitioners can use the findings to enhance relationships and push their organizations to embrace more impactful, satisfying CSR strategies.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study was designed to address a number of disciplinary gaps in CSR and public relations research. As previously described, both Gregory (2011) and Godfrey (2009) have made distinct calls for change in both public relations and CSR research, arguing that major gaps exist in relation to methods, contexts, and theory-building. Theoretically, I attempted to meet numerous challenges presented by these authors, first by exploring CSR in a new context, and second by arriving at a public relations-based definition of CSR that is complemented with a proposed model for predicting best CSR practices. In addition to briefly describing how this research attempts to close gaps in extant literature, I review how approaching CSR practices from a caring perspective can advance and complement public relations theory, particularly by valuing the beneficiary perspective as an appropriate gauge of good, relationship-focused CSR strategies.

**Meeting Challenges**

Gregory’s (2012) recent call to advance public relations research focused on the notions that current scholarship lacks diversity, relies heavily on quantitative approaches, and lacks critical assessment, often failing to link organizational practices to societal relationships. Godfrey (2009) echoed these sentiments in the CSR context, lamenting that research has yet to heed the Margolis and Walsh (2003) call to more deeply consider the social impacts of giving practices. Arguably, to begin understanding impacts and societal connections, one must embrace Gregory’s (2012) challenge to address the over-use of descriptive approaches by embracing methods that can illuminate new perspectives of giving relationships. This study begins
addressing these issues by using depth interviews to expand understanding of the beneficiary perspective, allowing an exploration of the perceived impacts of giving practices. Additionally, this research adds to the growing body of practitioner-driven CSR literature not by speaking to public relations practitioners, but by speaking to individuals who are at the heart of CSR relationships—representatives from nonprofits that receive support via CSR initiatives. By taking this approach, I address a disheartening gap in CSR literature: Since 2008, only one known study has focused on the nonprofit perspective of CSR practices (Rumsey & White, 2008), and the primary contribution of that work was insight into nonprofit beliefs about organizational motives for practicing CSR. This study moves beyond the corporate perspective by focusing on the nonprofit beneficiaries, doing so to learn about the ways in which nonprofit practitioners approach, perceive, and evaluate giving relationships. Additionally, by using depth interviews I add to the descriptive body of knowledge about how CSR is practiced, but use those insights to propose a prescriptive approach to good CSR practices. By opening new avenues for exploring good CSR practices, I embrace a relationship-focused public relations perspective that aims to privilege and value publics and encourage practices that elicit mutually beneficial, responsive approaches to organizational communication.

**Extending Public Relations Research**

This research attempts to extend public relations theory in two specific ways; first, by privileging the beneficiary perspective of CSR relationships and second, by conceptualizing CSR within the context of care ethics. This study argues that public relations goals and the normative principles set forth by ethics of care are closely aligned and may open new ways for approaching, defining, and understanding best CSR practices and impacts. Insight into the nonprofit perspective of giving relationships confirms that caring principles are valued by
nonprofit practitioners who are charged with navigating corporate efforts to be socially responsible.

This research extends current conceptualizations of CSR practices by growing theoretical knowledge beyond an analysis of best communication practices and perceived organizational benefits. By embracing the nonprofit perspective of CSR practices, we gain a better understanding of giving impacts, a perspective that is sorely lacking from current literature (Godfrey, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Findings suggest that CSR practices—in the sport context—have the potential to make meaningful community contributions through nonprofit support. By injecting nonprofits with financial and in-kind donations, organizations can increase nonprofit capacity to allow those entities to better serve both their clients and their communities. Being that funding is a primary concern for nonprofits, providing financial support allows these organizations to increasingly develop and implement programs that meet specific needs. The beauty of nonprofit work is that many practitioners have a keen understanding of the particular cause or issue their organizations serve, making them distinctly qualified to identify and support niche community-based problems. As such, providing the means for nonprofit to build on their existing initiatives is both appreciated by and impactful to practitioners. Sometimes nonprofits simply need the financial support to restructure a program or hire a part-time employee to handle relationship management with community partners, and CSR efforts. By understanding this perspective and introducing these experiences to the existing body of public relations literature, I hope to extend how theorists conceptualize what it means to practice good CSR.

In that vein, the primary theoretical contribution of this study is a care-based definition of CSR that is complemented by a proposed model for evaluating the extent to which care can strengthen both CSR relationships and the subsequent nonprofit benefits of receiving corporate
support. Specifically, the focus on relationship building, mutual benefit, and caring practices that emerged from participant perspectives helps situate CSR in the public relations domain while conceptualizing good CSR practices as aiming to encourage both impactful and satisfying relationships. Development of this definition is particularly important because public relations scholars often used business-based conceptualizations of CSR to guide research. Existing research suggests that public relations strategies often focus on triple-bottom line perspectives of CSR, but definitions based on these findings have yet to emerge to challenge and usurp Carroll’s (1979) well-known definition. As such, this new definition is important to situating CSR as a public relations function and simultaneously aims to encourage scholars to move beyond descriptive research by encouraging a prescriptive approach to identifying and evaluating best CSR practices.

Moving to an evaluation of good CSR practices that are not based purely on organization benefits, the proposed model complements the new definition by offering measurable variables that lead to increased relationship strength and beneficiary benefits. Because normative public relations research largely fails to provide prescriptive guidance for best CSR practices, this model is designed to encourage relationship evaluation based on the beneficiary perspective. This simultaneously addresses issues related to identifying impacts because the model, in part, suggests that good CSR practices and strong organizational relationships are measured by the benefits that nonprofits receive via CSR initiatives. Additionally, the model further advances relationship theory by conceptualizing good CSR practices as not only creating measurable impacts, but also as being satisfying to relationship partners. In other words, although it is appreciated when CSR practices encourage visible, measurable social impacts, truly satisfying relationships are marked by responsive communication, inter-organizational respect, trust, and
effort to show mutual concern. As exemplified in the findings, it is noteworthy that a hierarchy emerged to illustrate practitioner satisfaction of giving practices. When a team was perceived as being less than philanthropic, it was described as lacking community trust, failing to consider the needs of others when giving, and failing to show concern for community needs. Conversely, teams identified as practicing close to ideal philanthropy were portrayed as building and earning trusting relationships in the community, being attentive to nonprofit needs, and seeming genuinely interested in strengthening their communities. Not only does this suggest that relationship-building and corporate involvement are important indicators of good CSR practices, but also it suggests that caring principles can help guide socially responsible relationship-building.

Arguably, however, it is not enough to conceptualize CSR as a public relations practice based on communication strategies and organizational benefit. Instead, scholars should attempt to theoretically imagine what good relationship-building practices look like, and findings suggest this can be done by combining public relations principles—such as mutual benefit and stakeholder privilege—with perspectives forwarded by ethics of care. Although little research has explored care in public relations, I believe it offers a useful normative framework for evaluating good CSR practices. By privileging the nonprofit voice, this research shows how caring practices and values are a natural cornerstone of existing CSR relationships. Participants who were most satisfied with their relationships not only felt that they were able to exhibit care toward relationship partners, but also felt that partners were committed to supporting their causes in meaningful ways. Additionally, by conceptualizing CSR practices in the concept of care, we can see how a lack of caring practices does not negate the value of a relationship; instead, care allows us to normatively consider ideal relationships and relationship dimension. Embracing the
mutually beneficial relationships that public relations scholars value, caring CSR can be imagined as a model for increasing relationship strength and CSR benefits, which addresses L’Etang’s (2006) call to consider a more appropriate normative approach that is measurable because it is built upon dimensions that can be identified and evaluated.

Arguably, by embracing CSR is a caring way, public relations can position itself as a management function that can set the tone for building mutually satisfying and beneficial organizational relationships (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). As public relations practitioners are often charged with communicating about corporate efforts, they can also guide how corporate culture is cultivated and presented. Arguably, this means positioning CSR efforts not solely for organizational benefits such as publicity and meeting expectations, but also because there is a genuine organizational desire to create change. This can partially be accomplished by embracing the relationship-building practices forwarded in public relations scholarship. For example, Coombs and Holladay (2009) challenge the notion of emphasizing two-way communication practices in public relations theory “because nearly any form of effective communication is two-way” (p. 95). Instead, they argue that scholars “much push past the imprecision to discover where strategic communication naturally intersects with CSR” (p. 95). I believe this can be accomplished by embracing and elevating caring approaches to CSR practices. For example, caring dimensions emerged in this study’s findings to suggest that organizations should exhibit their genuine philanthropic corporate cultures by practicing CSR in a way that shows an interest in and respect for the community-based issues being addressed by nonprofits. In this context, two-way communication is implied, because organizations must communicate with one another if they are to understand and meet each others’ needs. Likewise, if communicating about CSR practices with varying publics, and organization can gauge perceptions of trust to understand
whether their efforts are both effective and effectively communicated. The driving theme
underpinning any of these efforts, however, is relationship building. Privileged both in public
relations and conceptualizations of care, this suggests that the best CSR practices establish strong
relationships that maximize benefits based on responsive communication strategies. Ideally,
strong relationships embrace mutual concern, benefits, and respect, all of which can be
communicated via public relations practices.

Notably, these principles align with organizational-public relationship (OPR) dimensions
of openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999) as
well as concepts of control mutuality and communal relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999), all of
which can be considered ideal relationship-building practices whether at the organization-to-
organization or organization-public levels in caring relationships. Arguably, what differentiates
caring CSR practices from these dimensions is the notion that, normatively, care gives theorists a
benchmark of ideal practices as well as a method for achieving these ideals. For example,
communal relationships require communicative efforts by both partnering organizations in a
CSR relationship. How that communication plays out can be evaluated using caring principles. If
one organization naturally controls the power in a relationship, caring practices and values can
establish an environment that allows partnering organizations to navigate the power differentials
in a way that is satisfying for all parties involved. This is akin to participants in this study asking
for specific support, then having the sport organization provide an alternative that meets both
organizations’ needs. In this sense, CSR relationships do not have to exhibit all the OPR
dimensions to be successful or satisfying. If both organizations in a relationship are investing the
same level of care, there is general relationship satisfaction. Additionally, nonprofit practitioners
are generally appreciative of the support they receive regardless of whether it is given genuinely
or for organizational gain. This then means that if one wants to evaluate the greatest degree of relationship satisfaction—or the ideal—relationships that exhibit both caring practices and values are the most satisfying, most appreciated, and generate the most organizational trust.

Arguably, these findings simultaneously contribute to growing iterations of care ethics by showing that care can be applied in institutional settings. First, nonprofit practitioners in this study exhibited caring characteristics, showing that they value caring attitudes and actively attempt to show appreciation for organizational support by implementing their own caring practices. Second, they showed that they highly value caring practices and values in between.organization relationships, suggesting that the relational qualities that underpin conceptualizations of care ethics can be exhibited via corporate practices and cultures.

**Extending Sport CSR**

Beyond addressing numerous gaps in the CSR literature, the findings in this study extend scholarly understanding of CSR practices in the context of professional sport. First, the findings challenge previous studies that suggest sport provides unique CSR opportunities. Although participants generally agree with executive opinions about the notion that recognizability and credibility are unique to sport (Sheth & Babiak, 2010), it seems that these characteristics are indirect benefits of these relationships. Direct benefits such as awareness, reach, and credibility can be enjoyed through relationships with other corporations. Additionally, other corporate relationships are often considered more satisfying because non-sport partners seem more likely to become personally invested in specific causes and issues. This is important in the context of sport CSR theory-building because it suggests that direct benefits can be yielded by various corporations and relationship quality should not be measured solely on the benefits yielded by support. As such, although sport offers a specific context in which to study CSR practices, it is a
context that helps illuminate some of the flaws of taking a bottom-line approach to social responsibility.

Specifically, existing sport CSR research is grounded in business and marketing literature that seemingly focuses on organizational perspectives that emphasize executive beliefs, benefits to the giving organizations, and bottom line goals. This research challenges these perspectives by showing that nonprofit beneficiaries appreciate the benefits they receive from corporate support, but truly value CSR efforts that are focused and built on genuine, caring relationship-building strategies. Arguably, this challenges the pervading belief held by sport CSR scholars, who suggest public relations in this context is merely an opportunity to counter media scrutiny and avoid external regulations (Waddington et al., 2013, p. 49). By positioning public relations in this manner, sport CSR scholars overlook the importance of sport organizations embodying community and building organizational relationships. Arguably, existing sport CSR literature downplays the role that public relations has in maintaining sport organizations as integral community members, all but devaluing the importance of the community relations departments and team foundations that contribute greatly to establishing organizational culture and communication practices.

Additionally, by considering sport CSR in the context of caring public relations practices, this study challenges the notion that the key goals of sport CSR should result in “sport teams [fostering] well-being, loyalty, support, and good will of community stakeholders” (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013, p. 25). Arguably, sport CSR strategies should focus less on prioritizing the organizational benefits of being socially responsible, and should focus more on treating beneficiaries as publics who face community-based challenges. If sport organizations want to reap the benefits of being perceived as driving community cultures, a public relations-based
approach to sport CSR should focus more on the relationship building aspects of CSR that position sport organizations within their broader communities. This can drive teams to recognize that the best way to foster loyalty, support, and good will is by practicing good CSR that downplays organizational benefits and privileges relationship- and community-building in a way that is mutually beneficial for all organizations involved.

**Practical Implications**

A number of practical implications emerged in this study, both in the context of public relations and nonprofit practices. When considering the proposed definition and model of caring CSR practices, findings suggest that both giving and benefiting organizations can implement strategies to increase relationship strength and satisfaction. Careful attention should be given to how relationships are managed, focusing on strategies show mutual concern and enhance the quality of the benefits yielded.

**Best Giving Practices**

Numerous practices can be embraced by giving organizations to strengthen relationships and maximize relationship benefits in a caring manner. First, giving organizations should embrace opportunities to collaborate or show mutual concern for nonprofit needs, even if done in subtle ways. For example, even if the ability to give is stretched thin, nonprofit practitioners appreciate when alternatives are offered, but more than anything they simply want to be treated respectfully. This means making lines of communication available to community partners and being responsive to requests. Arguably, community relations should incorporate either a single point of contact or establish a position aimed at handling nonprofit requests, which can get difficult to handle in the sport industry. Although increased staffing is a significant cost, it is
worth considering particularly because the relationship-building function in sport is often situated with community relations as opposed to public or media relations.

Second, when giving, sport organizations should establish mechanisms for considering community needs. Establishing relationships with both large and small community organizations can increase CSR impacts. And while it is perfectly reasonable to support causes that are important to the organization and its culture, teams should consider whether they have the capacity to support other community needs.

Third, sport organizations should consider whether their giving efforts are meeting beneficiary needs, and how they can use their capacity to enhance socially responsible efforts. For example, nonprofits almost unanimously need financial support to maintain their operations, but they also require secondary support such as volunteers and in-kind donations. Sport organizations should consider whether they can support nonprofits by volunteering skills and educational opportunities to help nonprofits improve their operations. Some nonprofits do not have the capacity to create communication programs or network with local organizations. As such, teams can encourage volunteering that helps with business practices such as creating collateral materials, building web space, or offering bookkeeping training sessions. Additionally, teams can harness databases and events to help nonprofits meet potential donors and supporters. Many team foundations have databases of supporters who purchase auction and other items—perhaps building profiles of those supporters can create a system wherein donors and nonprofits are connected to extend donor support. From an organization-to-organization perspective, inviting nonprofits to events with other corporate partners may help open doors for collaboration between individual or multiple organizations.
Fourth, sport organizations should consider the challenges nonprofits face when entering or approaching these relationships. Recognizing nonprofit capacity limits can not only help guide a team toward possible avenues of support, but also can help them appreciate the challenges that nonprofits face. For example, very few practitioners represented in this study had communication backgrounds, meaning that they may not have the skill to meaningfully communicate messages to their audiences. Without the resource capacity to maintain their own programs, little is left over to support relationships and subsequent demands. As such, giving should be implemented in a way that does not strain nonprofit resources or force nonprofit employees to add to the immense amount of work they likely have. Additionally, teams should consider developing evaluation tools that can not only provide reporting to the giving organization, but can measure impacts in a way that is meaningful to the benefiting nonprofits. If these nonprofits can better utilize the reporting frameworks they already have, or engage in a simple reporting strategy that can be used in multiple capacities, the amount of additional reporting work can be reduced.

Finally, organizations should be honest about their motivations. Notably, most participants do not expect organizations to practice CSR on a premise of pure altruism. Not only do they expect giving organizations to benefit from being philanthropic, but they want organizations to garner perceived reputational and attitudinal benefits. Additionally, nonprofits recognize that they benefit from CSR practices, whether they are genuine or not, even if they seemingly prefer when there is a sense of altruism behind giving motives. Arguably, this open-minded way of viewing CSR activities can help remove some of the cynicism that accompanies giving practices, but the key to balancing these perceptions with organizational benefits is to practice CSR in non-deceptive ways. One way to reduce negative stigmas associated with giving for organizational gain is to simply be honest about goals. If an organization is implementing
CSR initiatives because they believe it is expected, that only become unsavory if the organization attempts to pretend the efforts are altruistic. For example, participants were less satisfied when a team was perceived as contacting nonprofits to set up player appearances solely for media attention. Although these participants recognized that they benefited from that media coverage, they felt as though these efforts were mostly for organizational gain as opposed to being a positive contribution for all involved, including the nonprofit and its clients. As such, even if CSR is practiced out of obligation, being up front about motives and making communication easy for partners can significantly increase relationship satisfaction and organizational perceptions.

Best Nonprofit Practices

Nonprofits seemingly feel that gaining support from sport organizations is a challenge, but one that comes with distinct benefits. A number of practices can be implemented to overcome the perceived challenges of receiving support from sport teams. To begin, nonprofits should not be afraid to make the ask or enlist someone credible to ask for them. Although sport organizations may not be open to every request they receive, they will often offer alternatives or explain why they cannot provide support. Also, nonprofits should not be afraid to combine resources with other nonprofits or entities. One of the greatest challenges to forming strong relationships is a lack of capacity, whether financial or resource. By combining resources or establishing programs that can benefit multiple organizations or public, nonprofits can likely make their cause more appealing, but also can stretch their capacity to create noticeable impacts from varying types of CSR support. One way to do that is by seeking volunteers, even for business-related support. For example, individual team employees may be interested in providing
they practical skills, so identifying capacity gaps and reaching out with requests for support may be more appealing to organizations and employees that do not have financial resources to share.

From a relationship-building perspective, nonprofits should be careful to embrace caring practices and values in a meaningful way. For example, to strengthen relationship trust nonprofits should be careful to follow through on promises, meet stated obligations, and decline opportunities that will stretch the organization past its capacity. When one participant felt that it was unreasonable to receive a grant worth half of her nonprofit’s annual budget, she was simply acknowledging and working around capacity issues. This also means that nonprofits should carefully consider what they can do to create mutual benefits for giving organizations. Arguably, organizations implementing CSR programs should not ask for returns that stretch nonprofit capacity. However, nonprofit practitioners may be able to create benefits in small, subtle ways. If a nonprofit cannot host an event with large media coverage, then perhaps a nonprofit representative can publicly speak on behalf of their organization to help the sport organization promote its giving efforts.

In line with creating mutual benefits, nonprofit practitioners should also be careful to temper their own expectations of giving practices. In the sport context, the perception is that teams are regularly approached for support. With that in mind, nonprofits should consider whether their requests are reasonable based on team capacity. Although most participants would love to receive player support, the reality is that athletes are hired to play their sport, and travel and practice obligations limit their free time. This means that players are not as available as many would consider, and are unable to attend multiple events, network on behalf of nonprofits, or act as spokespeople for multiple organizations. Likewise, asking teams for support during their seasons can result in longer response times and less community involvement. During
seasons, all levels of employment are working at full capacity, and most long-term programs (whether community-based or not) were established during the offseason. As such, nonprofits looking for advanced levels of support should consider contacting teams when their sport is not in season, creating less time-constrained opportunities to open discussions about relationships or collaborations.

With these implications addressed, the following chapter concludes this research with a review of the primary goals of this study, the main contributions, and directions for future research.
To conclude this study, this final chapter establishes the value of the major findings three ways. First, I review the primary goals of this study, briefly detailing how they were achieved. Next, I review the main contributions of this study by reviewing the proposed definition and model for conceptualizing and evaluating caring corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, helping to illustrate the theoretical and practical outcomes of the findings. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research both to test the proposed framework and extend scholarly understanding of nonprofit perspectives and ethics of care in the context of CSR research.

Reviewing the Main Goals

The three primary goals of this study were addressed both independently and collectively, helping to bridge specific gaps that exist in CSR literature. First, this study is centered on understanding the nonprofit perspective of CSR relationships. Answering Gregory’s (2012) call to expand the perspectives being addressed in public relations research, this study builds on existing CSR work by exploring perceived impacts of CSR practices from the perspective of benefiting nonprofit organizations. Instead of focusing on communication practices and behavioral impacts related to reputation, attitudinal changes, and purchase intentions, this research privileges the nonprofit voice to give scholars and practitioners insight into whether giving efforts create meaningful, socially impactful relationships (Godfrey, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Second, this research offers the first known public relations-based exploration of CSR practices in professional sport. By using sport as a context for understanding and evaluating CSR
practices, this study helps illuminate how communication happens between organizations, and to what ends. For example, the context of this study allowed for a close examination not only of how inter-organizational relationships are established, but also of how they are maintained, perceived, and strengthened. Additionally, this study adds to the existing body of sport CSR literature by adding the public relations perspective to the business-based approach that has been used to build scholarship in this area. Arguably, by focusing on the relationship-building aspect of sport CSR practices, this research establishes that public relations plays a clear role in sport CSR. Not only does this challenge business-based notions that public relations is primarily needed for damage control, but also it situates sport CSR as a niche practice that is worthy of more discrete scholarly attention.

Finally, the contexts provided by sport CSR and nonprofit perspectives helps achieve the third goal of exploring social responsibility within a normative framework of ethics of care. Specifically, emergent themes suggest that caring practices and values are useful dimensions for evaluating CSR impacts, not only because they tap into public relations practices, but also because this framework allows us to give more weight to the nonprofit perspective when determining best CSR practices. Simply engaging in CSR practices and measuring impacts is not enough to establish whether an organization is implementing good CSR. Instead, care can be used to normatively establish ideal CSR practices. In that vein, the strongest relationships—partnerships—are marked by organizational involvement, caring attitudes toward giving, and an implementation of practices that are based on creating mutual benefits and community flourishing. When examining these goals as a whole, a new CSR definition and framework for evaluating strong, caring, beneficial relationships emerges that is based both on principles of caring ethics and the benefiting nonprofit perspective.
Main Contributions

Bridging the gap between public relations-based CSR and sport CSR research, this study explores the nonprofit perspective in the context of caring ethics. To extend public relations theory, I propose both a working definition of CSR and a model for evaluating CSR-driven relationships.

Proposed Definition

Based on the results of this study, I believe that a public relations-based definition of CSR can help guide development regarding best practices and evaluations of CSR efforts. Scholars have lamented the lack of clarity in current CSR definitions (Dahlsrud, 2008) and public relations research has arguably been hampered by the fact that it relies on business-based definitions of the practice, despite the fact that scholars has argued that CSR belongs in the field of public relations (Somerville & Wood, 2008). As such, I forward a definition that is based on the current PRSA (n.d.) definition of public relationships, one which focuses on relationship-building and mutual benefit in practice:

Corporate social responsibility reflects an organizational commitment to create mutually beneficial and caring relationships with publics via strategic environmental, economic, and socially conscious practices that develop public trust, privilege mutual concern for others, and encourage flourishing in the communities and environments in which a business operates.

The definition presented here is designed to illuminate a number of important public relations- and care-based components of giving practices. First, the definition is developed based on nonprofit perspectives of giving relationships, thus privileging a public that is widely overlooked in CSR theory. Next, the definition focuses on relationship building and mutual
benefit, helping to situate it as a relational—not transactional—practice that can be practice in the domain of public relations. The focus on environmental, economic, and socially conscious practices also establishes the triple-bottom line dimensions as those most appropriate for CSR. Although scholars generally agree that the legal dimension is no longer appropriate for conceptualizing and evaluating CSR practices (i.e., Schwartz and Carroll, 2003), public relations scholars still tend to use Carroll’s (1979) dimensions of CSR to evaluate communication practices. Many scholars have turned to the triple-bottom line dimensions, but no one has embraced it as the most appropriate set of dimensions for describing current practices. Finally, this definition specifically outlines dimensions of caring that exist in theory and emerged in conversations with nonprofit practitioners. By conceptualizing CSR in terms of caring outcomes, this definition establishes a theoretical and practical approach to social responsibility that can be used both to guide and evaluate best practices.

**Proposed Model**

Arguably, numerous patterns emerged to suggest that a measurable approach to ideal, caring CSR practices is both theoretically and practically attainable. Emergent patterns suggest predictive variables exist in these relationships and the degree to which relationships are caring or built on strong, personal connections can positively impact relationship strength. However, relationship strength can be reduced if internal or external challenges exist to diminish the ability for a nonprofit to fully take part in the relationship. Next, level of relationship can arguably predict and be predicted by the types of benefits nonprofits receive by being in giving relationships. Overall, the strongest, most satisfying relationships are driven by caring practices and values on behalf of both organizations, yield mutual benefits, are driven by organizational investment in a cause or nonprofit, and garner benefits that meet primary nonprofit needs.
First, caring relations are established via two dimensions that occur concurrently: caring practices and caring values. Caring practices are efforts that establish trust, show mutual concern, and encourage flourishing. Caring values are the corporate cultures that guide organizational decisions to be philanthropic or to be responsive to partnering organizations. Arguably, caring relationships exist at three levels, the most satisfying of which is when partner organizations show similar levels of caring practices and values in their relationships. Next, the degree to which a relationship is caring often depending on the individuals involved in establishing and maintaining those relationships. Patterns suggest that the more decision-making power individuals have within their respective organizations, the more likely they are to be capable of and willing to establish strong network relationships. For example, if the points of contact in a relationship are executives from both the nonprofit and corporate partner, it is more likely that a strong network relationship exist. Notably, challenges such as limited nonprofit capacity or narrow cause appeals on the part of sport organizations can negatively impact the strength of relationships.

Ultimately, the strongest relationship that can exist is a partnership. Partnerships between organizations are more likely it is to be collaborative, mutually beneficial, caring, and negotiated among high-level managers. Arguably, partnerships are the ideal type of inter-organizational relationships because they most closely achieve good CSR practices based on strong relationship building and care.

In short, by tapping into the nonprofit perspective and considering CSR in the context of caring ethics, I believe that the preceding definition and model provide a useful guide for conceptualizing, practicing, and evaluating public relations-based CSR efforts. The following section highlights a number of potential directions for future research.
Suggestions for Future Research

The exploratory nature of this research required a qualitative approach that privileged the experiences of nonprofit practitioners that work with sport organizations. The insights provided by these participants helped illuminate a new definition and model of CSR, both of which can and should be tested. Numerous approaches can be taken to elaborate the findings from this study:

1. Because this research was conducted in a single metropolitan area, comparative research should be carried out to help establish whether the experiences of these participants are common among nonprofits in other cities. For example, there may be different cultures and expectations of giving in cities with fewer or more teams.

2. Other public relations theories should be used to explore the strength of this definition and framework. For example, dialogic theory may be useful for explaining the existence of caring values in the context of engaging in respectful personal interactions. Dimensions of organization-public relationships may also be useful for exploring different aspects of care, specifically practices and values. Finally, co-orientation may help establish how closely nonprofit and partner organizations perceptions align on dimensions such as giving motivations and values.

3. To establish the validity of these findings, focus groups with nonprofit practitioners may be useful for evaluating the accuracy of the emergent themes. For example, focus groups may be used to establish whether caring practices and values are true indicators of caring relationships. Additionally, these insights can be used to begin developing quantitative evaluation tools.
4. Moving these findings from qualitative to quantitative research can occur in two ways. The first way this can occur is by creating evaluation tools and quantitative measures that can aid in the measurement of caring CSR practices and values. The development of survey items, for example, can be used by scholars and nonprofits to gather data and information about the strength of relationships.

5. Adding to the preceding idea, researchers may consider conceptualizing and measuring a dimension of satisfaction within this framework. As such, in addition to measuring the strength of the relationship, scholars can measure how well received they are by nonprofits—also creating another opportunity to measure practitioner perceptions.

6. Finally, the framework can be measured via experimental methods, testing the validity and reliability of the proposed variables and their individual dimensions. For example, experiments may be used to establish whether the proposed levels of relationships are significantly different from one another. Experiments can also help establish whether the variables had predictive validity.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Although my personal interest in sport led me to an interest in sport philanthropy, my passion for public relations practice and scholarship led me to conduct research that is designed to help maximize the impact of CSR efforts. I believe that by privileging the nonprofit perspective, public relations practitioners can enhance the good work they are doing in their communities, giving back in ways that are both impactful and satisfying. To do this, public relations scholars can use this research as a stepping stone for conceptualizing more ethical and socially impactful ways of practicing CSR.
While practical limits alter the degrees to which sport organizations can give back to their communities, I found it heartening to know that teams appear to be supporting nonprofits in meaningful ways. This is not to say that there is not room for improvement in the way caring practices are establishing and caring values are expressed. In particular, I would like to see a more concerted effort by teams to open lines of communication with nonprofits. Even if the sport organizations cannot support the nonprofit requests, being available and responsive seems to significantly impact how satisfied practitioners are with these relationships. Conversely, the grant programs being established in this community not only met these nonprofits’ greatest needs—funding—but also seemed to encourage opportunities for these organizations to create positive impacts and meaningful change in the context of the issues they support.

Ultimately, my hope is that this research inspires public relations scholars to conceptualize CSR practices in a way that privileges those being supported while emphasizing the need to establish caring, respectful relationships with constituents. Through additional research, my goal is to extend the ideas presented in this study such that meaningful, useful measures can be developed to help enhance the experiences and benefits created by socially responsible efforts.
Submitted by: Melanie Formentin  
Date Submitted: May 14, 2013 10:44:22 AM  
IRB#: 43151  
PI: Melanie Jane Formentin  
Review Type: Exemption  
Protocol Subclass: Social Science  
Approval Expiration: -pending-  
Class Project: No

Study Title

1>Study Title
Where do social responsibility efforts go? Understanding the impact of professional sport responsibility from the perspective of benefiting organizations.

2>Type of eSubmission
New

Home Department for Study

3>Department where research is being conducted or if a student study, the department overseeing this research study.
Mass Communications

Review Level

4>What level of review do you expect this research to need? NOTE: The final determination of the review level will be determined by the IRB Administrative Office.
Choose from one of the following:
Exemption

5>Exempt Review Categories:
Choose one or more of the following categories that apply to your research. You may choose more than one category but your research must meet one of the following categories to be considered for exempt review.
Information about the review categories can also be found in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46 Subpart A Section 101:
hp://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.101. Information that is bolded below is additional clarification provided by Penn State, as allowed by federal law.
Category 7: NOTE: This category does not exist in the federal regulations under CFR Title 45 Part 46 Subpart A 46.101(b) and is used solely by The Pennsylvania State University as per the terms of its Federal wide Assurance with the government.

**Basic Information: Association with Other Studies**

6> Is this research study associated with other IRB-approved studies, e.g., this study is an extension study of an ongoing study or this study will use data or tissue from another ongoing study? 
No

7> Where will this research study take place? Choose all that apply.
[X] University Park

8> Specify the building, and room at University Park where this research study will take place. If not yet known, indicate as such.
Although the research will be based in State College, PA, this study will be based on in-depth interviews that are going to be conducted with decision-makers in non-profit organizations in the Tampa Bay Area (Florida). For the comfort of participating interviewees, interviews will be conducted at each individuals' personal offices.

9> Does this research study involve any of the following Penn State Research Centers? 
[X] None of these centers are involved in this study

10> Describe the facilities available to conduct the research for the duration of the study.
I will be in the Tampa Bay Area for the duration of Summer 2013, at which time I will be conducting this research. Because of my availability in the area, I will work with interviewees to schedule interview meetings at the offices for their nonprofit organizations. If they would prefer to meet in other locations (i.e.: Starbucks, Panera Bread) for their own comfort/perceived privacy I will work with them to make those accommodations.

11> Is this study being conducted as part of a class requirement? For additional information regarding the difference between a research study and a class requirement, see IRB Policy I – “Student Class Assignments/Projects” located at http://www.research.psu.edu/policies/research-protections/irb/irb-policy-1.
No

**Personnel**

12> Personnel List

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSU User ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department Affiliation</th>
<th>Role in this study</th>
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<tr>
<td>mwf5207</td>
<td>Formentin, Melanie Jane</td>
<td>Mass Communications</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>117720</td>
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<tr>
<td>dsb177</td>
<td>Bortree, Denise Sevick</td>
<td>Advertising/Public Relations</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>117720</td>
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**Formentin, Melanie Jane (Principal Investigator)**

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<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mwf5207@psu.edu">mwf5207@psu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Notifications: Yes</td>
<td>Pager:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSU Person Type: Graduate Student</td>
<td>Fax:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept: Mass Communications</td>
<td>Address 1: 115 Carnegie Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Stop:</td>
<td>City, State, Zip: University Park, PA 16801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures:** I will perform all procedures/techniques related to this study. This will include identifying and recruiting participants, confirming participation with participants, administering the interviews, storing transcribed interviews and doing data analysis.

**Experience:** I have done numerous interview-based studies in my academic career and in general have done a number of studies on my own. I have also conducted interview-based research in its totality on my own before.

**Bortree, Denise Sevick (Advisor)**

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<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Notifications: Yes</td>
<td>Pager:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSU Person Type: Faculty</td>
<td>Fax:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept: Advertising/Public Relations</td>
<td>Address 1: 106 Carnegie Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address 2:</td>
<td>Mail Stop:</td>
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<tr>
<td>City, State, Zip: University Park, PA 16802</td>
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**Procedures:** Dr. Bortree is serving as the dissertation adviser. She will not participate in any tasks beyond approving the steps the principal investigator taking to complete this study.

**Experience:** Dr. Bortree is a tenured faculty member who has conducted a wide range of research and sat on numerous dissertation committees.

**Funding Source**

13> Is this research study funded? Funding could include the sponsor providing drugs or devices for the study.

Yes

NOTE: If the study is funded or funding is pending, submit a copy of the grant proposal or statement of work for review.

14> Sponsor List

Sponsor Name
Penn State College of Communications
• **Sponsor Name**
Penn State College of Communications

**Sponsor address or other contact information**
Penn State College of Communications
Dean's Office
201 Carnegie Building
University Park, PA 16802

Approved by Associate Dean, Marie Hardin
e-mail: mch208@psu.edu
phone: 814.865.1395

15> Is the funding awarded through a subcontract?
No

16> Is the sponsor providing drug, device, etc, free of charge?
No

17> Does this research study involve prospectively providing treatment or therapy to participants?
No

**Conflict of Interest**

18> Do any of the investigator(s), key personnel, and/or their spouses or dependent children have a financial or business interest(s) as defined by PSU Policy RA20, “Individual Conflict of Interest,” associated with this research? NOTE: There is no de minimus in human participant research studies (i.e., all amount must be reported).
No

**Exemption Prescreening Questions (Prisoners)**

19> Does this research study involve prisoners?
No

20> Does this research study involve the use of deception?
No

21> Does this research study involve any FDA regulated drug, biologic or medical device?
No

22> Does this research study involve the use of protected health information covered under the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA)?
No

23> Does this study involve any foreseeable risks and/or discomforts (i.e., physical, psychological, social, legal or other) to participants?
No

24>Will information collected from participants during the research study be recorded in such a manner that participants can be identified directly or indirectly through identifiers linked to the participants?
No

Exemption Questions: Objectives

25>Summarize the research study’s key objectives, aims or goals.
The key objective of this study is to understand how corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts by professional sport organizations are perceived by the nonprofit organizations that receive support through CSR initiatives. Additionally, ethics of care is being presented as a new normative framework for approach CSR strategies and relationships.

26>Provide the background information and rationale for performing the research study.
In an effort to understand the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in professional sport, this study will explore how CSR efforts are perceived by benefiting nonprofit organizations. To date, public relations scholars have largely overlooked the beneficiaries’ perspective in CSR relationships. An emphasis is placed on professional sport CSR not only because I want to explore whether sport provides a "unique" opportunity for practicing responsibility (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009), but also because of my own experience working for a professional sport organization.

Most importantly, it is worth addressing gaps that exist within CSR literature. Although CSR is positioned as an ethical public relations practice aimed at enhancing benefits to both the organization and stakeholders (Somerville & Wood, 2008), it is increasingly disappointing to see how little research explores actual and potential benefits beyond those reaped by organizations. In a historical review of CSR development in business and management literature, Godfrey (2009) pointed to an existing call “for a change in empirical research away from justifying CSR to examination of the impacts of CSR on recipients and society at large,” noting “research heeding that call has yet to reach the publication stage” (p. 703). In particular, Godfrey (2009) believes CSR research needs to shift “away from a focus on the motivations for CSR… and toward an investigation of the social impacts (e.g., reductions in poverty, increases in health) arising from the social activities of corporations” (p. 709). Arguably, this can be accomplished by speaking with and studying arguably the most overlooked stakeholder group in CSR literature—the benefiting nonprofit organizations. Since 2008, only one study has explored CSR from the perspective of nonprofit beneficiaries, and even that work focused primarily on the beneficiaries’ perceptions about organizational involvement in CSR (Rumsey & White, 2009). To truly explore the whole impact of CSR, it seems a push needs to be made to move beyond understanding the organizational benefits of doing CSR toward focusing on the societal improvements created by CSR. Instead of simply building on conceptual understandings of what CSR can do for an organization, CSR theory can answer calls to increase cultural diversity, utilize more diverse methodologies, and include more practitioner input by understanding whether CSR is doing the job it purports.

This study aims to meet these challenges in two ways. First, professional sport is presented as a unique industry within which to study the broader impacts of CSR. Focusing on CSR efforts implemented by sport teams can allow a closer examination of the types of organizations supported by CSR initiatives and the impacts of that support. Additionally, examining sport CSR
addresses the need to incorporate more practical assessments of CSR, particularly by highlighting the specific relationships that emerge through cause-related marketing (CRM) practices in sport. Second, an argument is made for approaching CSR research through the normative lens of the ethics of care. Although public relations research has explored normative ethical frameworks for approaching public relations, little work has applied this thinking to CSR. Additionally, little work has explored the potential for practicing public relations through the lens of care. This study argues that the goals of public relations and normative principles set forth by ethics of care are closely aligned and may open new ways for approaching, defining, and understanding CSR and its impacts.

27>Summarize the research study’s procedures by providing a step-by-step process of what each group of participants will be asked to do after informed consent has been obtained.

Individuals being asked to participate in this study will be asked to participate in three stages of data collection/analysis after consenting to participate in the interview. The latter two steps will be offered to each participant, and may be done at the discretion of each participant, but are not required for participation in this study.

First and foremost, participants will be asked to sit for a 1-1.5 hour interview that will be designed to explore and understand their experiences with sports organizations that have provided funding through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. During this time, they will be engaged in conversation about their responsibilities with the nonprofit organization, their perception of benefits they’ve received from nonprofits, and their beliefs about sport CSR in general.

Second, because interviews will be transcribed and coded, participants will be asked to participate in a cursory member check of the analyzed data. A data analysis technique based on Lindlof and Taylor (2011) will be used to establish coding categories, definitions, and examples related to key findings. Although participants do not have to participate in this step, the option will be made available to them in an effort to explore whether the categories accurately represent participant experiences and whether coded examples match the experiences being defined. Based on feedback, I will either re-visit the categorizations or note feedback for inclusion in the final interpretation and data presentation processes.

Third, a second round of member-checking with a small sample of interview participants will also be used to establish whether my interpretations are an accurate reflection of the nonprofit managers’ experiences. I will also check to make sure that participants feel their confidentiality has been protected. Should participants find major discrepancies between my interpretations and their experiences, I will take care to revisit my data and findings and take their comments into account.

28> List the data collection measures/instruments that will be used in this study. Upload all instruments, measures, interview questions, and/or focus group topics/questions for review. Data collection instruments are a required element of the review process.

Interview Schedule (I will use an interview schedule to guide the interview process. This instrument will not be shared with participants.)

29> Provide the age range of the research participants. Check all that apply.

[X] 18 - 25 years
[X] 26 - 40 years
[X] 41 - 65 years
Provide a brief description of the participant population.
Participants will be communication managers or managers who are decision-makers at nonprofit organizations in the Tampa Bay area. Specifically, I will be talking to decision-makers in nonprofit organizations that have working knowledge of partnerships with professional sport organizations in the area.

Does this research exclude any particular gender, ethnic or racial group, and/or a person based on sexual identity?
No

Describe the steps that will be used to identify and/or contact prospective participants. If applicable, explain how you have access to lists or records of potential participants. During this process, participants must be informed of the following information:
- The researcher identifies him/herself as a Penn State researcher; and
- The study is being conducted for research purposes.
A number of nonprofit organizations that have received grants, support, or funding from sports organizations are clearly listed on the websites for professional sports teams in the Tampa Bay Area. I will use these lists/references to begin building my database of participants.

First, I will visit the websites for the nonprofit organizations listed on the page. Next, I will search for mention of decision-makers who may be able to speak to my topic of interest. Next, I will contact those individuals by phone and email. If no such individuals are recognizable, I will call the nonprofits directly to attempt speaking with someone who can connect me with an appropriate individual. I will then go through the same process of contacting the identified person via phone and email.

PLEASE NOTE: Submission of recruitment materials is not required for review, but may be requested on a case-by-case basis.

Explain how permission to take part in this research study will be obtained from potential participants (and parents, if minors are participants). During the consent process, participants must be informed of the following basic ethical principles of human participant research:
- The researcher identifies him/herself as a Penn State researcher;
- The study is being conducted for research;
- A description of the procedures that the participant will undergo as part of the study;
- The individual’s participation is voluntary;
- They may end their participation at any time; and
- Participants may choose not to answer specific questions.

PLEASE NOTE: Submission of consent/assent forms is not required for review, but may be requested on a case-by-case basis.

Upon contacting an individual who will be able to speak to my topic, I will send an email asking them to confirm a meeting time. Within that email I will obtain consent to participate by pointing out the basic ethical principles of human participant research. If participants are not willing to participate, we will simply not move forward with scheduling an interview. If a participant agrees
to conduct their interview, I will consider this their statement of consent, informed based on the information I sent in the email intended to set up a meeting time.

34> Will any type of recordings (e.g., audio, video, digital or photographs) be made during the conduct of this research study?
Yes

PLEASE NOTE: If audio or video recordings with audio are made, Pennsylvania state law requires agreement from all parties.

35> Describe how recordings will be utilized in your research study (e.g., what parts of the study will be recorded/photographed, etc.).
The interviews will be digitally recorded on a personal audio-recording device. Interviews will be transcribed for data collection and analysis purposes.

36> Is compensation being offered (e.g., money, extra/course credit, gift certificates, etc.)?
No

37> Are student records (e.g., coursework, grades, test scores, etc.) being collected as part of this research study?
No

38> Please check the "I Agree" box below to confirm that all data (and recordings if applicable) are stored securely (e.g., locked cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only to the research personnel listed on this application.
[X] I agree

39> Please describe how data confidentiality (including recordings/photographs, if applicable) will be maintained AND how data will be reported when writing the results (use of code numbers, pseudonyms, without names attached, etc.). All data is to be stored in a confidential manner (even if identifiers are not connected to the responses), in locked locations, on password protected computers.
Data confidentiality will be maintained in a number of ways. Although interviews will be recorded, I will not use participant names to mark recordings or in transcripts. No identifying information will be tied to the transcripts as pseudonyms will be used throughout the data collection and reporting processes. Transcripts will not be shared with anyone beyond members of my committee. Additionally, because I will be talking with people about specific experiences in nonprofit organizations, any descriptions of those organizations will remain generalized to prevent participants from being recognized in final reports. I will also use member-checking opportunities to confirm that participants feel their identities are properly concealed.

All data will be stored on my personal laptop (which is password protected and not used by anyone other than myself) and an external hard drive that will be stored at my home.
DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS
Document 1001 Received 05/11/2013 09:25:01 - Interview Schedule

SUBMISSION FORMS
Document 1001 Received 05/11/2013 08:53:27 - Grant Proposal College of Communications
Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communications Grant Accepta
Appendix B: Final Interview Schedule

Opening Introduction
- Thanks for taking time to talk.
  - If appointment set up with someone else, review subject, ask them if they would like quick clarification about what we’re talking about.
- Before we start, I just want to confirm it’s OK for me to record this interview. (Start recorder.)
- As mentioned in X-communication, all responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Although I will know who I’ve spoken to, your participation will remain confidential, and your name will be changed in any publications, the name of your organization will not be used, and the city in which this research was conducted will be concealed. I will keep your responses confidential by never sharing any of the recordings or transcripts, except with the members of my dissertation committee. Your name/organization will not be associated with the transcripts in any way.
  - I will use general descriptions of organizations for explanatory purposes, but will be careful not to make any obvious connections between answers you provide and those descriptions. If you tell me something very specific that I feel significantly contributes to explaining what I’m trying to understand, I will do my best to make my description as general as possible.
- Does all this sound OK to you? Then, let’s get started.

Questions
1. Tell me about your day-to-day job with the organization.
   a. How long have you worked here? What is your title?
   b. Have you worked with similar organizations in the past? (Get years experience.)
   c. What is your educational background?
2. Describe the cause or causes your organization supports.
   a. Can you tell me about how the organization does this.
   b. What would you say are your greatest organizational needs?
3. Tell me why your organization supports this cause.
4. Describe who your organization serves.
   a. How would you describe your organization’s relationship with these groups?
5. Which sports organizations have you worked with? Explain what these sports organization have done for your nonprofit
   a. How closely has the organization worked with you?
6. What would you say is the level of the relationship between the team and your organization compared to other partnerships you might have?
7. Describe how this partnership came about. Why are you in this relationship?
   a. Tell me how the team or sponsor organization approached you to start this partnership or describe how your organization approached them.
   b. How long has your organization been working with them?
   c. Who is your primary contact with the team? Can you tell me what department they are in?
8. From the time you first developed your relationship with the team until now, how have things changed for your organization?
a. Describe some of the specific things that have changed for you. (For example, in relation to donations, volunteerism, operations, community awareness, etc.)
b. Would you be able to share any documents or information with me that you use to show what your organization has been doing?

9. Describe the support you’ve received from this team (i.e., merchandise, game tickets, grant funding, volunteering, etc.).
   a. What have your interactions with the team been like? (i.e., positive, negative, neutral, no real interaction)
   b. When you have been in direct contact with them, how have people at the organization treated your organization (and possibly guests, i.e., at Community Heroes presentation)?
   c. Explain whether this kind of support is something you can only get from working with a sports organization.

10. Tell me how players or coaches have supported your cause.
    a. How important is it for you to have player or coach involvement?

11. (Only for organizations working with multiple teams) Tell me how your experiences with these teams have compared.

12. How do you think recipients benefit from the partnership?
    a. How do you think people who benefit from the work of your organization view this partnership?

13. How do you think the public at large views this partnership?
    a. How do you think fans of the team view this partnership?
       i. Does it seem as though they have become more likely to support your cause?

14. How does your organization communicate about this relationship?
    a. How does this partnership create opportunities for you to communicate about this relationship?
    b. Tell me how or whether you use this partnership for specific public relations advantages.
    c. How does being able to communicate about this partnership help your cause?

15. Tell me about some things your organization has been able to accomplish because of this partnership.
    a. Explain how important it is for your organization to be able to do these things.
    b. How does it feel knowing your organization is able to do these things?
    c. How do you think your ability to accomplish these things may have been different if you had been supported by a non-sports organization?

16. How has the team benefitted from this partnership?
    a. In general, why do you think sports organizations participate in philanthropy like this?

17. How closely do you think the sports organization identifies with your cause?
    a. Do they seem invested in your cause or seem to have a personal interest?
    b. Why do you think they identify with your organization or cause?

18. Describe how additional corporate partners have contributed to your partnership with the sports team.
    a. Explain whether one group is more involved in the partnership (the team or corporate partner).
b. Explain how you think this partnership may have been different if either the sports organization or the corporate partner wasn’t involved.

19. Describe whether working with the sports organizations is different compared to other organizations.
   a. Explain how you think these differences are a result of working with the sports organization.

20. Describe the ways in which you think this team has contributed to the community.
   a. What would you say are the most noticeable ways these contributions emerge?

21. To what extent do you feel sports organizations should be required to support community efforts such as yours?
   a. Describe the types of responsibilities you think sports organizations (such as the ones in Tampa) have to the community.

22. Explain the extent to which you think non-profits rely on partnerships with local sport organizations.
   a. Describe whether it seems like nonprofits need this support to implement their programs and run their organizations.
   b. How does this make members of the nonprofit community feel?
      i. Explain the extent to which members of the nonprofit community are worried about losing the team’s support.

23. Why do you think certain teams are harder to connect with than other teams?
   a. How do you feel about the fact that some teams are harder to get in touch with?

24. When is working with a sports team a bad fit for a nonprofit organization?
   a. How are nonprofits concerned about something going wrong in the relationship?
      i. What types of things in particular may be cause for concern?
   b. What kind of things have you heard about that haven’t gone well for nonprofits who are partnered with sport organizations?

25. In general, how much cause is there for concern that something will go wrong in a relationship with a sport organization?
   a. For nonprofits in these partnerships, describe whether it seems like certain aspects of the partnership are out of nonprofit control. (i.e., media coverage, player issues, etc.)

26. Have you heard of any nonprofits that have had to change the way they operate in order to establish or maintain partnerships with sport teams?
   a. What is the general feeling about having to make changes?
   b. Do nonprofits tend to make changes? If so, why are they willing to?

27. If there were no limit to the help a sports organization could provide, what could they do differently to better help the nonprofit community?
   a. How might these changes improve the impact of what sports organizations do?
   b. How important would it be for sports organizations to make these changes?

28. What long-term impacts do you think sports organizations can have by giving back to their communities?

29. Before we end the conversation, are there any thoughts you would like to add?

30. Demographics
Closing Comments, Script
- Remind about documents.
- Ask permission to follow up.
  o Additionally, you will likely hear from me again when I am in the process of re-reading and interpreting what has been said. First, to make sure you feel like your anonymity is safe. Second, to make sure I have accurately interpreted what you said.
- Thanks for time.
- If you have questions, please feel free to contact me.
Appendix C: Recruitment Email

NOTE: Parts of this email have been omitted to protect the location in which this research was conducted.

Hello _______,

Happy _______! My name is Melanie Formentin, and I’m a doctoral student at Penn State University. I’m currently working on my dissertation, which is a study about corporate social responsibility and philanthropic giving in professional sport. Although most research in this area focuses on benefits to the sports organizations, I am more interested in learning about the non-profit perspective. … I’m particularly interested in understanding the impact of sports-based responsibility in the (city).

I’m writing to you because I’ve identified your organization as having received some type of support or funding from at least one of (the) local professional sports teams. Specifically, I’m hoping to conduct an in-person interview with someone in your organization who has working knowledge of the relationship between your organization and the team or teams that have given to you.

As a note, my intention is to keep these interviews both confidential and anonymous. As I will explain further during any scheduled interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed in that interview transcripts will be shared only with the four members of my dissertation committee. However, anonymity will be secured through use of pseudonyms in any transcripts or reports that come from the interviews. Additionally, this work is being done independently and none of the local teams have been contacted for information regarding their giving programs. I simply identified your organization by visiting the websites for the three major professional teams in (city)… and noted organizations they have publicly supported.

All this said, I hope you will consider taking part in this study. I think one of the most valued perspectives in philanthropic giving should be that of the recipient organizations, and with this project I hope to give voice to that perspective. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via the phone number or email address listed below. I will be more than happy to speak with you about the work I am doing.

Thanks very much for your consideration,

Melanie Formentin

Doctoral Candidate, Penn State University
Phone: 813.601.3974
Email: formentin.melanie@gmail.com (primary), mwf5207@psu.edu

Additional Information: This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Penn State University. If you have any additional questions about the study, you may also contact my advisor, Dr. Denise Sevick Bortree, at dsb177@psu.edu.
Appendix D: Follow-up Email

Hi _______.

Happy _______! Earlier this month I contacted you regarding the possibility of interviewing someone at _______ regarding the support you have received from local sports teams. I am still interested in having such a conversation.

If you or someone at your organization would be able to speak with me, please let me know. The original email I sent is contained below.

Thanks so much for your consideration!

Melanie :)
### Appendix E: Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Comments that describe perceived ability for teams to raise awareness about organization, brand, mission, or cause.</td>
<td>“I haven’t really done a detailed um, study to determine what people we’ve picked up from being associated with these teams. But again, if you have people who are fans of the [team] and season-ticket holders, and they see that the [team] are donating to you, and they have an opportunity in their business that they work for or something—it’s you have, you’re forefront in their mind. You are at the, you know, they know your name. They’re beginning to know your name. And they do get us mixed up sometimes, with other organizations, because there are a lot of childhood cancer organizations!…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived public evaluations of teams, teams as vehicle for creating nonprofit credibility.</td>
<td>“… you can use it for, you know, to, to toot your horn. It helps um, give credibility to your organization, because the vetting system and grants and stuff like that … Every single one of the sports teams has quite a good, solid way of finding out if you’re the real deal.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reach</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability for teams to reach large, geographically dispersed audiences, media reach.</td>
<td>“Um so, but that communication piece, that’s the, that’s something, that part is hard to get that as big as that from anywhere else. It’s a big, it’s a national stage, because they’re a national, you know, they’re participating in a national organization, Major League Baseball.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility/Celebrity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Team and player recognizability, perceptions of how teams or players have star status, impacts of celebrity status.</td>
<td>“Yeah, memorabilia! (laughing) I don’t really care about something signed by the CEO of [Corporation 1], [Corporation 2]? (laughing) But I’ll take a [player] baseball any day! Um, they have personas, they have celebrity, um… you know. There’s something just about professional sports that normal corporations don’t have to give you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring Practice</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Nonprofit desire to recognize sport organization or other partner giving efforts.</td>
<td>“… but never the [team]. Some year they’re gonna get it, but it’s the one, you know there’s very little you can do, but you can certainly thank and get the word out and laud their charitable efforts. So it’s relationship building as much as anything.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cause Relationships</td>
<td>Nonprofit relationships with personal clients, perceptions of clients.</td>
<td>“I always just say, ‘They’re good kids from bad situations, it’s not their fault they’re foster…’ You know, that’s, you just advocate for ‘em a little bit, but let them know that you’re just helping these kids who have never seen a game, never been.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Partners</td>
<td>Any mention or discussion of corporate partners, whether connected to team or not.</td>
<td>“[Cable company] has been involved with us for about 10 years. Again, money uh, time, talent, treasure. They give us money to support um, our events, but they give us free airtime. And the free airtime, we dedicate all of the airtime they give us to [team program]…”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Cause, program, business, or client descriptions specific to nonprofits.</td>
<td>“Um, we support financial literacy education to students; kindergarten through high school. Work readiness, entrepreneurship. We want them to, to be able to own their own economic success and their economic future.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Needs</td>
<td>Perceived nonprofit needs, based on question prompting exploration into the topic.</td>
<td>“Oh, organizational needs. That's, that's always a funny one to me, because money and monetary donations are important, and they are critical to the success of this organization. But we are in the business of clothes.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Participant characteristics including cause and work experiences, years active in field, job description and title, and educational background.</td>
<td>“Currently director of marketing and I have responsibility for several different areas. The, the um, community outreach, community engagement, that includes injury prevention, childhood obesity, or healthy start federal projects. So several um, really community-based programs.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Downsides</td>
<td>Player Issues</td>
<td>Examples of when working for a team is a bad fit for nonprofits. Perceived downsides to working with teams, particularly in the context of player-related issues being a source of team problems.</td>
<td>“Um… Hmm. … I mean, I guess if it is gonna give you the wrong kind of PR. I mean, so if you had a player out and then the next week he got arrested for… I mean, I think there is potential pitfalls that the team itself also, so I mean it’s, you’re in that marketing environment. I mean, it could be if the [team] up and pull out of here, people would be so pissed and then it won’t help us at all.”</td>
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<td>Impact</td>
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<td>Perceived impacts of receiving support from sport organizations.</td>
<td>“One of the things that we’ve been tracking since we started [program]… is those matches are staying together longer and they’re stronger matches. Because there’s, if you think about the relationship that’s built around a common interest, which is sports. So the men and the children are matched because they like sports, so it works. And it was shocking to us. We never anticipated that those matches would be stronger matches and longer matches than typical.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading to Community Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions about audience responsiveness to team efforts, particularly whether fans/audiences become involved with cause.</td>
<td>“No, we have um, over time, had conversations with people. We’ve gotten notes, we’ve gotten, you know, little just notations on checks and on notes that come in or through the email, um, you know, because people can give online, where they’ve made comments and made mention of this.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit financial and resource limitations.</td>
<td>“I feel like we could always do a lot more… but I think we try as much as we can given our, there’s a capacity issue again. You know, I’d love to be, you know, doing more.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFP: Capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit limitations based on physical distance from sport organizations.</td>
<td>“Um, we have probably a little bit more of a relationship with the [team] because they’re our neighbors.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFP: Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nonprofit limitations based on need to protect clients.</td>
<td>“The only problem would be if they request too much of you that, and, and it would be very few charities that can handle it. ‘Well, we have to be able to hold our press conference at your facility.’ Um… well, let me see, if we got all the kids off campus or in the houses where you couldn’t see them, then you could bring in the public. No. You can’t bring the public in here. You can’t just open our gates and say ‘anybody can come in.’ So that would be the only thing that would create for us specifically. Otherwise I would love to have a relationship with them, be able to say, you know, that they support us.”</td>
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<td>Team: Access</td>
<td>Inability to contact, access, or communicate with team representatives.</td>
<td>“And I think if you had the ability to talk one-on-one, like even the [team] and the, the [team], they had even a small, short interview with some of their, you know, people that apply, that could get a little bit more information or, you know, not make assumptions, but ask questions that they might have about the grant. I think that would give them a broader exposure, like it did with the [team].”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team: Cause-Fit</td>
<td>Perceptions about team choices to support specific types of causes.</td>
<td>“I just think it becomes, I just think it’s about their goals at that time. I don’t think that individually they choose not to work with you, or not be kind to you. I think um, that maybe it’s just the goals at that time are to highlight something different than what you have to offer. Okay? So…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team: Extension</td>
<td>Perceptions of team limitations to give because they field numerous requests for support.</td>
<td>“Well, you don’t really see ‘em. Um, I don’t see anybody else here. Like, they haven’t come, but again they’re doing this so that um, they’ve got 130 different organizations. I don’t think they could possibly do much more.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team: Restrictions</td>
<td>Perceived restrictions created by teams to limit the degree to which outside organizations can be in contact.</td>
<td>“Um, because this is the middle of football season: No. For the, for, uh, kind of rough to get football in the middle of that. Just not happening the same way.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Presence</td>
<td>Descriptions of and insights into team-initiated media presence at events.</td>
<td>“We’re the ones putting the press releases out and talking to the people and making sure that we’ve got the stories and making sure that—you know, they certainly have all their outlets and I’m sure that their outlets are really the ones that pull in the major TV stations. But it’s amazing how much media comes when they do something. It’s like a frenzy, almost. I call it a media frenzy, it’s like crazy! It’s amazing! And, how powerful they are.”</td>
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<td>Motivations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived team motivations for giving, particularly leadership, reputational benefits, obligations.</td>
<td>“Philosophy. Corporate, you know, core values, philosophy, people at the top. I mean, normally that’s where it comes from. I mean, I worked for corporate for 22 years... and we had a huge list of values um, you know, here we spent a lot of time, that’s why I, I’m so familiar with it, because we’ve spent a lot of time defining, ‘who are we?’”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Players</td>
<td>Role Models</td>
<td>Player involvement in cause support, particularly as role models.</td>
<td>“Well and I think, too, like in the case of the one player that learned to give back from his college coach, I think for those players that really—again this is just my commentary—but for those players that really see that they’re a role model and the difference that they can make in the life of a child or what their appearance means somewhere, for the ones that really do it for the right reason, from the heart, I think it’s just something that comes to them.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>(Establishing)</td>
<td>Descriptions of how relationships are established. Included: Board members, grant applications, existing relationships, organizational contacts, reaching out, and teams contacting.</td>
<td>“Um, I’ll give you an example of a meeting that took place last week, I was on vacation. Um, our board member um, connected us for a meeting with the executive of the [team] organization who works with all their corporate partners. So, he scheduled a meeting for our chief development officer. Our gentleman, [name] and our corporate partnership liaison, they went and met with an executive at the [team], at the invitation of our board member executive with the [team], and he’s tried to open the door for other corporations that we would like to get into.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Levels</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Examples of weak organizational relationships. Players have little contact with teams, typically grant applications.</td>
<td>“Well the [team] knew that, the follow-up with the [team] has been that. With the [team] more in a little report we did, but I never got to do that personally.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Examples of mid-range organizational relationships. Some contact exists but may be formal, lacks collaboration and organizational investment.</td>
<td>“[Team], I would probably put them right in the middle. Um, you know, we’re not high on their list, but we’re definitely not the low man on the totem pole, either, you know. We’re right there. Um, [team] I would probably put us in the middle as well. We’re not the number one charity that they support, because they support so many. But we are by no means at the very bottom. We’re very well taken care of by them and we appreciate it, and they give us way more than we could ever ask for.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Examples of strong organizational relationships. Nonprofit collaborates with teams, which show investment in cause and organization.</td>
<td>“I mean, if I could describe an ideal relationship it's the one we have with the [team]. Every layer of their organization is involved here on some level. Different people are cultivated at different levels, there is tremendous investment. Time, talent and treasure here, right? And there's less at other organizations, not to say it's more meaningful or less meaningful. But um, if you look at an ideal relationship it's the one we have with the [team].”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction Neither</td>
<td>Neutral statements about relationship satisfaction.</td>
<td>“You know, Melanie, there’s so much out there that I don't worry about those that we don't have. I truly work um, in my professional work with [nonprofit] on the, the premise that there is enough. And so, bless and release, if it's not a good fit then I move on to the next one.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfying</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Statements indicating satisfaction with relationships.</td>
<td>“Well, just um, you know, we, we are truly in a, philanthropic community I mean, people get it and um, you know, the, reaction, the interactions that we've had with you know, all of these teams, I mean they've just been positive and I mean, they truly have. I mean these people really want to give back in a, they know that right here in our community it's, it's where we need it. And, and they do give it back and just, you know friendly and um, just kind and able and willing to help, and they are.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsatisfying</td>
<td>Statements indicating lack of satisfaction with relationships.</td>
<td>“Um so, you know, and I don’t think also realize that you know, we already have enough, we spin our wheels enough with funding and everything else and they make it more difficult. So, it frustrates me (laughing), obviously, when they put up too many barriers or whatever.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Required Giving</td>
<td>Opinions regarding team obligations to be philanthropic.</td>
<td>“You know, I think it’s about representing who they are. I mean, I would love to see them want to do that, because it’s the right thing and do, because you know, they are profitable and have the ability to share that profit with the community. But I, I would not say it would be a requirement, because you get a community sports organization that does it because they have to? You know, and even though it provides, you know, funds, um I think it really should, should be out of a desire versus a requirement.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Activities</td>
<td>Description of team giving practices, such as cheerleader, coach, player, and employee involvement, or in-kind donation types such as tickets, memorabilia, etc.</td>
<td>“Um, but they, they do the same thing: sponsorships, tables, donations, memorabilia, all three of them and they sit on our board. All three of them.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Benefits</td>
<td>Perceived team benefits of giving back to their communities.</td>
<td>“… they show that they are involved in the community, it shows that they are, that they don’t just give back to three charities. They are involved in several, the [team] are involved, and obviously they’re involved in hundreds of charities. [Team] are involved in charities. It just shows that they give back. It puts them in a positive light in the community. It says hey, you know what, yeah, they’re making lots of money, but they’re also giving lots of money back.”</td>
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References


VITA

Melanie Formentin

Education
Ph.D., Mass Communication, The Pennsylvania State University, August 2014
M.A., Mass Communications, University of South Florida, May 2010

Teaching Experience and Certifications
Instructor, COMM 420: Research Methods in Ad/PR, The Pennsylvania State University
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Spring 2013
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Selected Publications and Presentations
Formentin, M., & Babiak, K. (2014). Playing the social media game: How sport organizations are communicating corporate social responsibility via new media. In A. Billings & M. Hardin (Eds.) Handbook of Sport and New Media (pp. 189-199), New York: Routledge.