

SPIRITUALITY IN SPORTS FANSHIP: THE CASE OF
ENGLISH FOOTBALL AND LITHUANIAN BASKETBALL
FANS

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Abstract

The changing religious landscape in developed societies has not only introduced a greater religious diversity but also initiated a search for alternative channels to connect with a greater perspective in life. Spirituality has emerged as a source of meaning and contemplation that can be expressed and experienced in various ways; hence being relevant to all aspects of life. As a result, spiritual concern has been addressed in a number of research areas, including education, social care, aesthetics, and business. The recent emergence of sport and spirituality as an area of study creates a context for the present enquiry, which considers elements of sports fanship, such as self-actualisation, self-expression, and social wellbeing, as potentially spiritual, arguing that these aspects might have been overlooked due to previous fanship research lacking diversity in methodological approaches. The study employed phenomenological interviewing in order to obtain extensive narratives from England National Football Team fans (n=5; M=48.6) and Lithuanian National Basketball Team supporters (n=5; M=34). A culturally diverse sample was selected in consideration of social and cultural influences that are apparent in both sports fanship and spirituality. The data suggest that elements of sports fanship may involve spiritual values for some sports supporters. The key themes identified through data analysis (1) 'Connecting with Transcendence', 2)'Connecting with the Self', 3)'Connecting with Others', 4) 'Connecting with the World') contemplate that involvement in sport does not only allow fans to experience momentary pleasures but also encapsulate significant meanings, which are a necessary attribute of a person's spirituality. The culturally diverse sample, however, did not capture substantial cultural differences but rather proposed that personality traits are a more prominent factor influencing person's spiritual involvement in sports fanship, which, therefore, could be addressed in future studies.

I declare that the work in the thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed.....

Date.....

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review. Sport, Spirituality, and Fanship	6
2.1 Sport and Religion	6
2.2 Spirituality	10
2.3 Sport and Spirituality	17
2.4 Sports Fanship and Spirituality	20
3. Methodology and Method	26
3.1 Cultural Considerations in Sports Fanship and Spirituality	26
3.2 Construction of Meaning	28
3.3 Describing Experiences	29
3.4 Procedures	31
3.5 Data Analysis	33
3.6 Ethical Considerations	34
3.7 Participants	34
4. Connecting with Transcendence	37
5. Connecting with the Self	48
6. Connecting with Others	57
7. Connecting with the World	67
8. Conclusion	77
References	82
Appendices	96
Appendix A – Research Information Letter in English	96
Appendix B – Research Information Letter in Lithuanian	97
Appendix C – Research Consent Form in English	98
Appendix D – Research Consent Form in Lithuanian	99
Appendix E – Recruitment Emails	100
Appendix F – Interview Questions	102
Appendix G – Interview Times/Dates/Lengths	103

1. Introduction

The role of traditional forms of religion in economically developed societies is changing, and while symbolic elements of religion that are common to a particular culture sustain their place in the society, substantive meanings tend to lose their significance (Norris and Inglehart, 2006). Although symbolic religious attributes may remain prominent due to religion being deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the society, prosperity, which accounts for an increased sense of existential security, according to Diener et al. (2011), diminishes the importance of religion. Some suggest that contemporary culture and the changing society not only offer greater religious freedom but also encourage people to search for alternative and more personal channels to connect with nature, culture, and the universe as well as acquire meanings and construct their values in ways that may be regarded as unorthodox in highly religious societies (Hoover, 2004; Hedlund-de Witt, 2011). As religion is associated with higher levels of wellbeing and happiness, religious nations tend to be those where social circumstances are highly disadvantageous (Diener et al., 2011). This observation proposes that in those more advanced countries wellbeing and happiness are obtained by different means; hence diminishing the need for religious engagements. For example, King (2006) suggests that art, music, and nature not only encompass feelings of harmony and wellbeing but also provide some people with opportunities for meditation and detaching themselves from their ordinary, everyday lives, allowing them to experience divine and non-material aspects of life and being a central element of one's spiritual path. Hyman and Handal (2006) argue that people tend to seek spiritual meanings and experiences without the use of religion as they find spirituality to be more accessible, inclusive, and less regimented.

Similarly to art and music, sport has a capacity to represent a spiritual path for some people (Hastings et al., 2009). Therefore, a growing body of literature contemplates a relationship between sport and spirituality, suggesting that sport enables an athlete to experience transcendence (Saint Sing, 2004; Parry et al., 2011). In most cases in sport, spirituality is understood within the terms of peak experiences (Dillon and Tait, 2000). According to Taylor (2002), sport can serve as an initiator of a spontaneous meditation creating conditions in which outside variables are reduced to a minimum, and a

complete balance is achieved between a challenge at hand and performer's capabilities. Such occurrences of being entirely immersed in a physical activity extend a human capacity for self-awareness and subsequently raise sport to a spiritual plateau as an enabler of such experiences (Miller, 2008). Therefore, in sport peak experiences are regarded not only as an attribute of a talented performer but also as an instrumental element to personal growth and an athlete's spiritual journey (Watson and Nesti, 2005).

Although religious attributes, such as prayer and acts of worship, are often anecdotally attached to sports supporters (Hoffman, 2003), sports fandom is rarely considered in spiritual terms in empirical enquiries. Some suggest that sports fandom encompasses meanings and values that surpass its current theoretical understanding as the latter is largely based on a range of correlations between one's emotional attachment to a sports team and their consumption behaviours (Chun et al., 2004). Research has acknowledged sports fandom as a central part of some people's lives, suggesting that it is a platform for self-expression, a means for self-actualisation (Grove et al., 2012), and a substantial contributor to one's social and mental wellbeing (Wann et al., 2011). Nevertheless, these claims have not been studied in a greater depth and with a more substantial emphasis on sports fans' perceptions of (and attitudes towards) their activity. Insufficient understandings of the phenomenon are due to the current knowledge of sports fans' cognitions and behaviours having been mostly advanced through psychologically-grounded quantitative work, which has not considered how fans themselves feel about their engagement in sport. Some hypothesise that shared elements exist between sports fandom and spirituality as sport fans may refer to their commitment to their team on a spiritual basis, employing terms such as passion and devotion to express it (Nesti, 2011). However, more open-ended research techniques focused on exploring fans' experiences in their own terms are necessary to instigate an emergence of new themes and relationships between aspects of fandom.

Ascribing spiritual elements to any phenomenon is always complicated as spirituality lacks a cohesive definition. Existing interpretations of spirituality underline a great disparity between the various understandings of the term and deepen the sense of ambiguity (Ostow, 2006; Kapuscinski and Masters, 2010). While some treat spirituality as a highly ethical and considered way of referring to an individual's religious beliefs,

recognising religion and spirituality as overlapping phenomena (Watts, 2001), others claim that such a relationship is an attribute of the past and that spirituality should be considered in its own terms (Forbes, 2003). The current study adopts the latter approach, arguing that it is a natural process for science to become independent from organised religion; hence spirituality is currently breaking away from traditional forms of faith and together with morals and ethics is emerging as a concern of humanistic studies (Forbes, 2003). Therefore, spirituality is now being regarded as one's personal connection with the world, with others, and with transcendence (Poll and Smith, 2003), not only allowing spiritual discussions outside religious frameworks but also recognising spirituality in earthly happenings and as an element aiding personal growth (Helminiak, 2005). Consequently, a psychological framework of spirituality has been adopted in this study considering spirituality in the context of exceptional human experiences, self-actualisation, and personal growth.

Sports fanship has been recognised as an important social and cultural construct (Jenson, 1992), and, as noted earlier, previous studies have drawn on it as a potential platform for self-actualisation (Grove et al., 2012). Therefore, the present study seeks to understand whether spiritual values and meanings can be contemplated through one's engagement in sports fanship. Building on existing views that sports fanship differs with culture (Xing, 2009; Hsieh et al., 2011), this investigation also seeks to compare how those meanings differ among fans from two different national backgrounds. In order to explore these objectives, the enquiry sets out to address the following research questions:

- What kinds of meanings do sports fans attach to their fanship?
- In what ways might the meanings that sports fans attach to their fanship involve elements of spirituality?
- How do the meanings attached to sports fanship differ among English National Football Team supporters and Lithuanian National Basketball Team fans?

To contextually underpin these research questions Chapter 2 explores the historical connections and functional comparisons drawn between religion and sport. Religion is considered as a precedent to spirituality, which is subsequently recognised as a more

appropriate term in today's society to address transcendence in sport. The discussion progresses onto an exploration of spirituality, which includes a distinction between religion and spirituality, underlining similarities and establishing the current relationship between the two as well as defining spirituality as a process integral to every human-being; hence being relevant to all aspects of human life. Consequently, the discussion recognises that spirituality can be manifested through a number of different channels and sport could be understood as one of these due to its capacity to provide one with a source of contemplation. However, it is highlighted that research largely considers sport as spiritual in the sense of athletic involvement even though a larger segment of society are involved in sport on a more passive basis, i.e., as sports consumers, spectators, and fans. Therefore, aspects of sports fandom that are potentially imbued with spirituality are discussed, including social connections, team identification, emotional involvement, vicarious achievements, and self-actualisation. Chapter 2, also, addresses the lack of methodological diversity in sports fandom enquiries, which might have overlooked the existence of spiritual elements in the phenomenon. Following on from this, Chapter 3 addresses the reasons for employing phenomenological interviews as a data collection method and advocates the need for a culturally diverse sample.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 present research findings by way of analytical narrative. Chapter 4 considers an atmosphere of a sports stadium, an emotional attachment to a sports team and a sporting spectacle, and ritual in a sports fandom context, suggesting that these are not only able to enhance the overall fandom experience but also to create an environment within which one can acquire transcendental experiences. Chapter 5 continues to explore transcendence in sports fandom by suggesting that the latter experience also encompasses self-awareness. This chapter discusses 'emotional release' and 'escape' as elements of fandom, which were elaborated by participants' narratives and appeared to be contributory to respondents' ability to understand and to express themselves by fully capturing all elements of one's true self. This opportunity for self-expression was determined to encompass spiritual facets as it enhanced one's self-awareness and allowed transcending one's circumstances.

Chapter 6 recognises that neither the self nor sports fandom should be considered in isolation or as a merely private experience; hence it discusses the social side of fandom

by considering sport as an enhancer of social cohesion and a nurturer of personal relationships. This chapter also suggests that in some instances the latter aspects can be enhanced by the specific sporting event circumstances and transform into collective energy. As some participants suggested that this energy transfers onto the field of play, the following Chapter 7 discusses to what extent sports fans see themselves as contributors to a sporting event. Analysed through elements of sports fanship such as psychological commitment and loyalty, the data conclude that sports fans not only see themselves as contributors, who encourage and support their team and have a real effect on their team's performance, but also consider this contribution as their purpose in life. In chapter 8, I conclude by proposing that the four major themes (1) 'Connecting with Transcendence', 2) 'Connecting with the Self', 3) 'Connecting with Others', 4) 'Connecting with the World') link social and personal aspects of sports fanship to explain how sports fan's experiences can lead sports supporters to a significant spiritual meaning.

2. Literature Review. Sport, Spirituality, and Fanship

2.1 Sport and Religion

The relationship between sport and religion has been deliberated on various grounds, ranging from elements of ritualisation (Mazurkiewicz, 2012) to the manifestation of moral values (Novak, 1976; Hastings et al., 2009). The basis for such comparisons stems from the intertwined beginnings of sport and religion. According to Freeman (2011), in primitive societies physical activity was not only utilised for survival skills but also featured in ceremonial rituals that, at the time, were people's attempts to communicate with the forces of nature that could not be explained. Similarly, Howell (1970) suggests that physical activity in Australian aboriginal, Polynesian, and Melanesian cultures had a variety of functions including political, economic, domestic, and ceremonial. The latter related to sanctioned behaviours associated with various stages of life and fulfilling functions that were ascribed to religion in more developed societies (Howell, 1970). Therefore, some argue that in primitive societies sport and games were primarily understood within a religious paradigm and regarded as cultic and sacred (Guttman, 1978; Hoffman, 2003). While such claims are inflated in the sense that sport was induced in other societal and cultural practices as much as in ceremonial rites, they rightly recognise a relationship between sport and religion, which became more prominent as culture and society progressed.

In early civilisations with religion becoming more formalised and documented, sport continued to be embedded in ritualistic practices. The most obvious example is Ancient Greece where athleticism was intrinsically linked with religion as sports games were acts of worship held in the honour of gods (Christoforidi and Giatsis, 2009). Interestingly, the modern version of the most famous of these religious festivals, i.e., the Olympic Games, is the pinnacle of contemporary elite sport. Although the modern Olympic Games do not relate to the polytheistic Ancient Greek religion, according to Parry (2007), the Olympics were revived upon the idea of a 'religion of athletics' which encompasses the values of moral and fair contest. Despite being identified as religious values by the given notion, committing to a fair and moral competition is a secular act as much as are other values represented by the Olympic Movement, such as peace and freedom (Parry, 2007). However, according to Bednář (2011), the solemnity and

ceremonial practices found in the modern Games for some may evoke meanings as significant as those encountered in religious rituals.

Although the Olympic Games are a symbolic legacy of a sport model developed in Ancient Greece, contemporary sport is generally regarded as a descendent of a Roman model as in Ancient Rome sport emerged as a type of entertainment (Hardy, 1970). Nevertheless, the solemnity and rituals of the modern Olympics are not the only basis for comparisons between religion and sport. According to Sims (2008), if adopting a functionalist framework of religion developed by Durkheim (1915), sport is a secular religion due to its ability to be a facilitator of social cohesion. This understanding has been elaborated through the notion of civil religion, which is defined as a form of faith with quasi-religious symbols acquired from national or regional history and is often utilised as a set of common beliefs, encouraging social integration (Xifra, 2008).

Consequently, the concept of civil religion has been adopted by many in sociological accounts of sport; for example, Forney (2007) suggests that the combination of football, baseball, and basketball comprise American national calendar by signifying seasonal transitions and national holidays as well as these three sports represent a set of civil convictions and are, therefore, regarded as American civil religion. Similarly, Xifra (2008) stipulates that Barcelona Football Club (due to its importance in Catalan culture) could also be viewed as a civil religion for its supporters as they exhibit devotion towards the club which fulfils the terms and functions of religion, such as significant meaning in life, social energy, and community belonging. Similarly, in Britain, in the city of Glasgow football fan identities are intertwined with ethnic and religious facets (Bradley, 1995). Since the origins of Glasgow Celtic Football Club are closely linked with an influx of Irish immigrants to Scotland in the 19th century (Flint and Kelly, 2013), the club has become an important cultural phenomenon in Scottish society as it creates a setting for the Catholic/Irish community to express their identity and separate themselves not only from the fans of other clubs (Glasgow Rangers in particular) but also from an indigenous community (Bradley, 1995). However, despite the examples of Glasgow and Barcelona, sectarian undertones are not apparent in all expressions of the relationship between football and religion. Liverpool, for instance, another British city with a great tradition and passion for football and a large Catholic/Irish population hosts a contrasting relationship between football and religion. According to Brennan (2008),

distinctive cultural expressions and quasi-religious rituals seen in the city in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster¹ were partly due to the influences of semi-Celtic working-class conscience, which tends to give football a religious significance. Boyle (2001) argues that whilst common practices of sports fanship, such as regular match attendance, collective chanting, singing, and expressive devotion to a supported team, possess significant quasi-religious elements, the relationship between football and religion was never more exposed than during the mourning for Hillsborough. Considering these examples, it appears that, even today, sport is able to surpass its entertainment status and deliver meaningful messages to society.

Sport secures its religious status by being addressed in a religious lexicon and through spiritual attributes (Guttman, 2004). For example, Burstyn (2001) compares meanings and identifications incited by sport with those provoked by the experience of religion. Coakley (2009) goes even further to claim that sport involves expressions of meanings and beliefs that resonate more with society today than those communicated by traditional forms of religion. Furthermore, Meyer (2012) recognises that athletes are often presented through theological symbols and religious language enabling emergence of meaningful messages for many sport supporters as well as filling a gap of religious experience for some. In an essay written prior to Lance Armstrong being stripped of his seven consecutive Tour de France titles, Meyer (2012) suggests that the famous athlete has not only been presented in the media with various religious undertones, referring to him as an invincible, immortal, and often a divine figure but also has been perceived and personified by a number of people in religious and spiritual terms due to his athletic achievements, his battle with cancer, and his charity work. However, Kretschmann and Benz (2012) indicate that sport (due to its competitive nature, which involves egoism, selfishness, and treating others as enemies) is susceptible to criticism about it being intrinsically immoral, suggesting that the given example of hero idolisation and worship of athletes and general religious parallels in sport are simply inappropriate.

The latter view is contested by Hastings et al. (2009) who suggest that if sport was considered as an opportunity for people to reconnect with God and consequently

¹ The Hillsborough disaster is considered to be the worst stadium related event of its kind in British history. It occurred on 15th April, 1989 at the Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, during the FA Cup semi-final game between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest football clubs. The incident resulted in the deaths of 96 people and injuries to 766 others. The legal consequences of the event continue to be contested.

develop a relationship with a religious foundation, athletes would then be encouraged to play sport morally and fairly. Although in some cases religious language may be used inadequately and inconsiderately in the context of elite sport, as introduced previously with the example of the modern Olympic Games, efforts are put in to preserve fair and moral competition. Arguably, this is done because sport historically has been associated with moral and spiritual development. For example, the emergence of muscular Christianity in the mid-19th century saw sport as a catalyst for a harmonious development of mind, body, and soul (Watson, 2007). Similarly, in Eastern societies, martial arts have long since performed an analogous function and are still believed by many to have an ability to enhance one's discipline, morality, and spirituality (Molle, 2010). While the former example supports the idea presented by Hastings et al. (2009) that sport might be a vehicle for some to reconnect with religion, the latter illustrates that the process of moral values being enhanced through sport should not be necessarily framed into any specific religious tradition and, therefore, can be accommodated under the term of spirituality. Similarly, Bednář (2011) proposes spirituality as a more adequate word than religion to capacitate a number of different dimensions within which bodily nature can be surpassed in sport.

To conclude, the section has discussed various parallels drawn between religion and sport. It has suggested that sport tends to be seen and addressed in religious context because of its role in ritualistic rites in primitive societies and ancient civilisations as well as due to the ceremonial practices that are apparent in contemporary sport. However, it has also been noted that sport could be a source of more substantive meanings such as national, regional or cultural beliefs as well as values of moral and spiritual development. Whilst the relationship between sport and religion has influenced the emergence of such meanings in the sporting setting, they are not necessarily religious as they do not relate to any traditional forms of religion. Therefore, spirituality has been proposed as a more inclusive term to define the emergence of transcendent meanings in sport. Based on this proposition, the following section sets out to define spirituality in order to advocate its appropriateness for the context of the present study.

2.2 Spirituality

Spirituality is often recognised as a phenomenon that is more inclusive and accessible than institutionalised religion (Zinnbauer et al., 1999; Ostow, 2006; Helminiak, 2008; Kapuscinski and Masters, 2010). King (1996), for instance, suggests that spirituality is an escape from religious constraints into a realm which is universally human whilst still capturing elements of transcendence. As identified by the latter definition, transcendence is the element connecting religion and spirituality as it is commonly understood to encompass the divine figure, non-material aspects of life and to be an antagonist to immanence and secularity (Hey, 2012). Due to such key concept being shared between the two phenomena, researchers often discuss and explore spirituality within religious stipulations. For example, Hard et al. (2012) depict core dimensions of spirituality within religious terms, Meezenbroek et al. (2012) highlight that a large number of spirituality questionnaires rely on Judeo-Christian tradition, and Good et al. (2011) suggest that the distinction is not significant enough to differentiate religion and spirituality. Whilst the highlighted approach might be useful in religious studies (given that religion is commonly understood as a mechanism for developing and nurturing one's spirituality (Carmody et al., 2008)), making a tight connection between spirituality and religion tends to hinder attempts to explore spirituality on its own (Helminiak, 2008). Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, a clear distinction as well as shared elements should be determined when embarking on either religious or spiritual research (Streib and Hood, 2011).

There are numerous approaches to understanding the relationship between spirituality and religion. Hyman and Handal (2006) found that people tend to see religion as objective and external whereas spirituality is mostly described as subjective and internal. These binary distinctions inform people's perceptual attitudes towards religion and spirituality and are representative of a large segment of literature striving to distinguish the two. Firstly, they highlight that whilst religion is considered as documentable, observable, and measurable (Bregman, 2004), spirituality is almost the opposite in terms of its vagueness and could indeed represent whatever one perceives to be transcendental or sublime (Helminiak, 1996). Likewise, it is commonly highlighted that spirituality is a highly private and personal experience whereas religion represents beliefs and practices that are structured and institutionalised (Henningsgaard and Arnau,

2008). However, some argue that such an approach is not helpful in providing a true reflection of this complex relationship as it misleadingly polarises religion and spirituality not only into institutional and private but also into bad and good (Pargament, 1999; Hill and Pargament, 2003).

Spirituality tends to be seen positively due to its perceived individual perspective (Bregman, 2004). However, according to Pargament (1999), treating spirituality as only a private experience ignores the cultural and social context of individualisation and privatisation, which indeed precipitated the emergence of the phenomenon. Such context is a consequence of social coherence no longer being perceived as a function of traditional forms of religion (Francis, 2004). Therefore, spirituality may be a privatised religion which is adopted by people in an attempt to adjust to the situation that has been presented to them by culture and society (Francis, 2004). Furthermore, the emergence of spirituality accounts for the present narrowly focused approach to religion as an institutional set of laws and beliefs, which extenuates the positives of spirituality and overlooks the elements of religion that are individual (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). Religion traditionally (and similarly to spirituality) has been concerned with personal beliefs, emotions, and existential anxiety, and only recently with the emergence of spirituality these concerns have been shifted to a spiritual realm in people's perceptual attitudes (Zinnbauer et al., 1999), all of which invalidates the recent polarisation of the two phenomena.

It appears that the key concerns and functions of both religion and spirituality are equivalent. Consequently, Hill et al. (2000) propose that both concepts should be seen within the context of the sacred as genuine forms of religion and spirituality revolve around a connection with the higher entity. As suggested by the latter, the sacred is some form of divine figure, such as God, which defines the earlier noted transcendent reality that religion and spirituality encapsulate (Dy-Liacco et al., 2009). Adopting such understanding, the main distinction between the two phenomena becomes the framework within which an individual seeks to connect with the sacred, which is predetermined within religious context and non-existent or unclear within the spiritual one (Hill et al., 2000). In other words, whilst religion conceptualises the notion of the sacred and frames the search for the sacred into collective practices and institutional laws, spirituality personalises it and allows an individual to pursue this relationship

through various undefined channels (Hyman and Handal, 2006). As a result, for some people religion is their spirituality while others may choose different avenues to discover the sacred (Tanyi, 2002).

The key issue in conceptualising spirituality through the sacred figure is that it fails to reflect a broad spectrum of spiritual forms which exist in the contemporary world. Regardless of how the sacred is understood or named, i.e., God, the Ultimate, divine, this notion is still a theological presupposition which employed in the spiritual context attaches spirituality to a theistic form of religion (Helminiak, 2005); hence suggesting that spirituality is a necessary condition to being religious and that most people encounter it through common faith practices (Hill and Pergament, 2003). However, such understandings not only negate non-theist forms of religion as legitimate spiritual paths but also show a lack of consideration to common people's perceptions. As noted by Schleffer et al. (2008) the sacred entity is commonly perceived by people to be more relevant to religious context than spiritual milieu. Therefore, heavily relying on the divine figure defines spirituality as a substitute for religion or a form of private religion, which is understood as believing in some form of the greater force without belonging to any particular religious community or organisation (Bregman, 2004). In other words, the notion of private religion allows an attachment of any personal beliefs or values to religious laws and in that way simultaneously downgrades spirituality to some sort of artificial substitute for religion (Bregman, 2004).

Spirituality is often presented as a multifaceted phenomenon which encompasses individual beliefs, values, and meanings, suggesting that there is a variety of different spiritualities, ranging from religious spirituality to humanist spirituality (Egan et al., 2011). Therefore, religion can be an expression of spirituality, which nurtures one's spiritual beliefs (Newman, 2004). However, conflation of spirituality and religion is rather an attribute of the past and an influence of the Christian tradition, where spirituality was regarded as a reflection of the Holy Spirit rather than a development of the human spirit (Robinson, 2007). A variety of definitions, suggesting that spirituality is purely a search for personal meaning in life (Henningsgaard and Arnau, 2008) or an inner sense-making mechanism (Del Rio and White, 2012), disregard the sacred as the central element to the phenomenon and centre around the notion of the self, which assumes that spirituality is an integral human process. Hill et al. (2000) suggest that

such an approach is precarious as it exposes the phenomenon to be understood in terms of ideologies, fulfilling activities, and lifestyles that do not necessarily induce the sacred. However, the sacred is not something that can be explained or theorised, and hence it cannot be applied as a criterion determining what human experiences are spiritual (Helminiak, 2005). Furthermore, spiritual life is not an additional life that one chooses to live or not as a manifestation of spirituality is inevitable to all humans through their ordinary life experiences and can be encountered in all aspects of life (Rieman, 1989).

Due to such a high level of individualism, it becomes apparent that in order to gain a better understanding of spirituality, it should be studied with a more significant reference to the self. Such an approach has been previously proposed by the ideology of self-spirituality which sees spirituality as a process of delving deeper within oneself and as a gradual journey to becoming true to the self, the pinnacle of which is experiencing the higher entity within oneself. The issue with self-spirituality, however, is that it not only fails to consider the self in relation to others and the universe rather than in isolation (Hedlund de-Witt, 2011), but it is also similar to a number of spirituality definitions which lack robustness. These definitions refer to spirituality as a private and personal act involving construction of meanings and values (e.g., Henningsgaard and Arnau, 2008; Del Rio and White, 2012); however, they do not provide any further explanation as to how spirituality actually occurs. Moreover, self-spirituality, although concerned with the self, is attached to the higher entity; hence subscribing to some form of the sacred and revealing that an elaboration of self-spirituality theory would be sought after in religious narratives. A more refined approach to the self and spirituality is proposed by Pecchenino (2008), who identifies that the self is multidimensional; therefore becoming true to one's inner self and finding one's spiritual identity is a process of understanding and being able to express all the different selves one entails. Engaging into the construction of spiritual identity provides one with a course in life (Pecchenino, 2008).

Considering the self as a spiritually induced concept, Helminiak (1996) proposed a human model, which included both psyche and spirit. Although these two dimensions are understood as distinct parts of the human mind, they are not seen as completely separate, and their constant interaction implies a connection between human psychology

and spirituality (Helminiak, 1996). Similarly, according to Stanard et al. (2000) spiritual elements within the human functioning model goes back to Jung's (1933) understanding of human beings as psycho-spiritual creatures; hence reiterating the importance of spiritual perspectives to be considered alongside physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects of a person. Jung (1933) saw spirituality being internal to the human psyche and understood the relationship between it and psychological human functioning as an interaction between conscious and unconscious, which (if synthesised and harmonious) resulted in achieving wholeness. As similar approaches have been adopted by successive theorists in the field, critics argue that such perspectives merge spirituality with humanistic psychology quite unnecessarily by shifting psychological concepts towards a spiritual milieu (Bregman, 2004). However, others claim that spirituality proposes a genuine enhancement to psychological perspectives specifically in relation to personal development theories (e.g., Mack, 1994; Benjamin and Looby, 1998; Stanard et al., 2000; Van Dierendonck and Mohan, 2006).

Personal growth is concealed in the relationship between human dimensions of the psyche and spirit (Helminiak, 1996). However, in order to achieve growth, the alliance between psyche and spirit has to be balanced as the psyche is capable of both enabling the human spirit to evolve and restricting it from being expressed (Helminiak, 2008). Although this relationship advocates a variety of theories of human development that incorporate spirituality, according to Myers and Williard (2003), there is a lack of consensus across different considerations in this matter. For example, whilst Jung (1933) saw human growth within spiritual terms and as a gradual process of becoming more at one with oneself and experiencing the genuine self, May (1982) contemplated that spirituality could be regarded as a process of surrendering which could translate into the realisation and acceptance of a reality that is greater than oneself. Although a disparity seems to be evident between these two examples, it might be that accepting universal values as personal is indeed the synthesis that embodies the process of achieving one's full potential as "what is most personal is simultaneously most universal" (Mack, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, ability to understand and act in accordance with one's true self is a necessary condition to connecting with the universe or acquiring a greater perspective in life. Such an assessment corresponds to the view, expressed by Maher and Hunt (1993), that spirituality allows one to nurture a connection with a greater force, which rather than being a sublime figure, is still a part of oneself and a

part of others. This is also consistent with an attempt by Benjamin and Looby (1998) to conceptualise spirituality within Maslow's theories as their understanding underlines that reaching the peak of self-actualisation encapsulates a natural proclivity to consciously strive for callings beyond one's basic needs, to connect and co-operate with others, and to encounter the world through a holistic outlook. Furthermore, Maslow (1971) not only saw individuals at the peak of the Hierarchy of Needs as self-actualisers, but also as 'transcenders', which allows drawing upon the preceding discussion and concluding that transcendence is the common spiritual element adopted by psychological accounts of human growth.

Transcendence has been previously explained as the opposite to material aspects of life, which suggests that it is illogical to consider it within human growth concepts due to their immanent nature. However, Vanheeswijck (2011) underlines that when viewing transcendence simply as otherness, which is obscure emotions, immediate realisation of being aware of others and being aware of the self as the other, the difference between immanence and transcendence disappears. Koltko-Rivera (2006) suggests that self-transcendence was meant to be a completion of the Hierarchy of Needs, which was a dimension surpassing self-actualisation and largely referring to peak experiences within which person felt elevated beyond the self. Understanding a peak experience as a continuation of self-actualisation speculates that whilst it is a temporal occurrence, it is both preceded by something such as mental fitness (Hoffman et al., 2012) and results in enduring effects on personal development (Lanier et al., 1996). Similarly, Maslow (1971) considered self-actualisation as a gradual process rather than a single mystical moment. Therefore, Ingersoll (1994) argues for ordinary life experiences to be taken into account when considering spirituality and consequently human growth. He suggests that an experience evoking meaning and having long-term consequences is not necessarily a peak experience. Hence, experience, which encompasses spirituality and facilitates personal development, is any experience that is capable of exceeding one's former knowledge (Benjamin and Looby, 1998). In other words, transcendence can be achieved through any experience which allows one to reconstruct one's former understandings. Therefore, Helminiak (1996) claims that the human spirit is defined by self-awareness, suggesting that one's former frame of reference can only be transcended if one questions and interprets encountered experiences.

The latter act, however, should not be a sporadic occurrence as spirituality is defined by continuous commitment to transcendence rather than a single instance of self-awareness (Helminiak, 2005). Furthermore, spirituality encompasses all practices, rituals, and behaviours in which the individual engages in order to sustain this commitment (Helminiak, 2005). Although these practices and behaviours are unique to each individual, they embody the same overarching values in life and lead one to eudaimonic wellbeing. This type of wellbeing is a result of one living life in accordance to one's true self by committing to self-actualisation and personal growth and simply having a clear direction and purpose (Van Dienrendock and Mohan, 2006). All of these personal attributes equip one with spiritual strength, and whilst eudaimonic wellbeing does not necessarily provide the individual with a constant feeling of happiness and pleasure, it ensures a depth of feeling both positive and negative (Ho and Ho, 2007). However, such a person has a deep enough spiritual reservoir to go through a full circle of struggle, change, and transformation independently and consequently be rewarded with ability to, at times, experience intense feelings such as happiness and exhilaration (Ho and Ho, 2007). Therefore, only a person that is able to see the depth of an ordinary lived experience may sometimes encounter transcendence.

The present section has deliberated the meaning of spirituality, suggesting that it is a broader, more inclusive, and more accessible phenomenon than religion, which (in order to be explored in a greater depth) should not be compromised with religious terms. The discussion has stated that whilst spirituality is open to various interpretations, experiencing the sacred is not a necessary condition to being spiritual. This assessment has not only removed religious connotations from the present discussion but also allowed an emergence of spirituality as the key element of personal growth. Based on that and on the redefinition of transcendence as otherness, spirituality has been explained as a continuous commitment to self-awareness, which involves constant reflection and interpretation of one's lived experience leading to better realisation of true values and acquiring a purpose in life. It has become apparent that these key concerns of spirituality transcend all aspects of life. Therefore, spirituality, although with different variations, has been studied in the context of ethics (e.g., Issa and Pick, 2011; Beekun and Westerman, 2012), palliative care (e.g., Johnston Taylor, 2013), and art (e.g., Rowe, 2011). Recently spiritual concern has also emerged in sports

research proposing that physical activity can enable one to reach the depth of human experiences.

2.3 Sport and Spirituality

Some scholars suggest that sport is spiritual in its purest, most basic form as it allows a performer to experience a higher level of self-awareness and interpersonal consciousness (Miller, 2008). A high degree of self-awareness is able to enhance athletic performance as well as to obtain external energy at times when it is most needed (Narimani et al., 2011). According to Saint Sing (2004), this level of self-consciousness translates into athletes being aware of both their body and their soul, and, most importantly, the synthesis of the two, which often occurs in the midst of a sporting competition. Saint Sing (2004) suggests that, in sport, body and soul have a capacity to join in unison and provide an athlete with transcendent energy when all the other reservoirs are exhausted, resulting in exceptional athletic performance. Gallwey (1975) presents a similar idea proposing that if during a tennis match a player's mind is at one with his or her body, the latter may be able to exceed its own limits by entering new levels of energy. Although it might be that extremely high levels of energy are determined by intensive training, discipline or mental toughness, Saint Sing (2004) states that whilst these are the types of preparation building reservoirs inside of an athlete, achieving the depths of them is determined by finding sacredness within oneself. This loose usage of sacredness, however, signifies the common flaw persistent throughout the previous research in the field, which is a lack of empirical evidence being concealed in the pseudoscientific observations. Whilst that should not be a deterrent to the study of sport in spiritual terms, a more conceptual approach is necessary to advocate why the described occurrences capture a capacity of sport for transcendence.

Drawing on the preceding discussion it appears that rather than employing terms such as sacred and sacredness, transcendence should be advocated through the processes integral to human mind which involve human psyche and spirit (Helminiak, 2005). Therefore, recently spirituality has emerged as a concern of sport psychology, the main attribute of which is exceptional human experiences (Watson and Nesti; 2005; Bednář, 2011). Traditionally, however, such instances tend to be discussed within the frameworks of flow and peak experiences, and often without consideration of

transcendent or spiritual dimension. For example, Jackson et al. (1998) define flow in sport as moments which present a complete balance between the level of challenge a particular task requires and the performer's capabilities, hence discussing it within the terms of motivation, optimal arousal level, and confidence. However, more recently a symbiotic relationship has been found between spirituality and peak experiences, which suggests that whilst spirituality may help one achieve peak experiences more frequently, peak experiences could also result in higher levels of spirituality (Dillon and Tait, 2000). This finding allows more elaborative claims about peak experiences in sport, suggesting that a temporary instance of a complete synthesis between mind and body may have enduring effects on one's life due to their contemplative nature (Kelly, 2011).

Improved athletic performance, according to Narimani et al. (2011), could be attributed to spiritual growth. However, some argue that spirituality is a misconception and that most of what is ascribed to spirit in sport can easily be explained through psychological constructs such as mental control and mental toughness (Crust, 2006). Interestingly, these psychological constructs have been attributed to athlete's spiritual wellbeing, suggesting that the more significant spiritual characteristics one possesses, the likelier he or she is to be mentally tough and able to cope with adverse situations presented by sporting competition (Ridnour and Hammermeister, 2008). Narimani et al. (2011) also propose that fulfilment achieved through prayer is indicative of an athlete's self-confidence. The benefits of Christian prayer in sporting contests have been explored by Czech et al. (2004), who discovered that the ritual of praying relate to four dimensions: improving performance, routine rituals, thankfulness, and acceptance of God's will. Whilst some may argue that rituals are superstitious acts (Maranise, 2013) rather than a mark of spirituality, and others may deem praying for successful performance as unethical behaviour in sport (Kreider, 2003), Hochstetler (2009) argues that praying in athletic environments is often a way of acknowledging the incompleteness of human nature which impels one to ask for safety and safeguarding from the higher entity. Czech and Bullet (2007) also discovered that as well as praying for success athletes also pray for safety including praying not to get injured and to perform at the best of one's ability. As illustrated by the previous examples, prayer in sport can indeed be spiritual in its acknowledgement of the greater force (Czech and Bullet, 2007), it is also important to note that although sometimes prayer is beneficial regarding athletic performance; the act of praying is not necessarily a spiritual expression. For example,

Murray et al. (2005) assessed the differences in levels of spirituality between softball teams who pray and those who do not, and indicated the highest spirituality levels in those players who devoted their individual time to pray for the team and their teammates. It was also established that a team prayer had proven to be a beneficial method in achieving a heightened sense of team cohesion (Murray et al., 2005).

Employing prayer in order to enhance a feeling of togetherness within a sports team relates to quite mystical and sometimes spiritual references to the concept of team cohesion as commonly team building is understood in regards to nurturing team spirit (Whitaker, 1999). Some even describe teamwork as a biblical construct, which is applicable to sport as great victories are achieved by a team effort rather than individual performances (Weir, 2000), while others suggest that selflessness is the central element of teamwork (Jackson and Delehanty, 1995). Although both presented statements are based on personal interpretations rather than empirical observations, connection with others could potentially be an aspect elaborating current understandings of spirituality in sport. Van Dierondock and Mohan (2006) note that empathy is a spiritual quality as well as it is the characteristic that is aimed to be developed through various team-building techniques (Holt and Dunn, 2006). Therefore, it appears that sport can also nurture one's spirituality through enhancing an individual's connection with others.

As proposed by the concept of sport as civil religion (Xifra, 2008; Garrat, 2010), sport has a capacity to not only build connections among those who are actively engaged in it, i.e., athletes, but also those who are involved in sport on a more passive basis, i.e., sports fans. This is not the only similarity between active and passive participation in sport; hence some suggest that there are elements to sports fanship that encompass spirituality. For example, Gaillardetz (2005) proposes that sport is able to reveal moments of transcendent human greatness, and while athletes are the ones who expose the spirited nature of sport, sport supporters are the ones who observe it and immerse themselves in the spectacle. Consequently, Gaillardetz (2005) argues that for some sports fans there is a genuine spiritual dimension to their involvement in sport. Similarly, Nesti (2011) highlights that whilst spirituality has been ascribed to (and explored in) athletic involvement in sport, an engagement of fans and their input into the team's performance could be an interesting area to investigate from a spiritual

viewpoint, striving to understand whether fans see their contribution to their teams performance in spiritual terms.

To conclude, the present section has addressed spiritual concern in sport, suggesting that whilst claims about transcendent energy being acquired in critical moments of sporting contest lack empirical evidence, the introduction of peak experiences allows a more sufficient theorisation of such happenings. The discussion has also indicated a prayer as a spiritual practice that is often utilised in a sporting contest. It has been noted that praying in sport can not only be an acknowledgement of an incompleteness of human nature but also (in a case of team sports) a means to achieve a heightened sense of team cohesion. Consequently, connection with others has been recognised as an unexplored concept in sport and spirituality research, and as one that could contribute towards acknowledging spiritual concern in sports fanship. Therefore, the following section addresses existing sports fanship research, drawing on the themes such as loyalty, group affiliation, self-actualisation, and self-expression that could potentially be elaborated through descriptive research strategies.

2.4 Sports Fanship and Spirituality

Fanship is commonly characterised as a devotional admiration of a particular object, which is manifested through loyalty, emotional attachment, and keen interest (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Fans are also frequently considered as fanatics, whose behavioural patterns are those of social and psychological pathology (Jenson, 1992). These claims are largely based on examples of fans characterised as obsessed loners, who engage in a fantasy relationship with a celebrity figure, and hysterical crowd at various events, such as music concerts and sporting competitions (Jenson, 1992). However, in literature pathological behaviours and detrimental effects to one's cognitive ability are more often linked with celebrity worship than a general notion of fandom (e.g., Maltby et al., 2006; Lin and Lin, 2007). Furthermore, Harris (1998) provides a more general definition of a fan, suggesting that fans are simply a particular segment of an audience who possess an augmented relationship with either a spectacle or another object specific to their fandom. Jenson (1992) suggests that acquiring a more extensive understanding of this relationship and its inherent elements is necessary given the extent of fandom in today's society.

Sports consumers stand out as a group of fans that have been researched the most. Some have attempted to establish how distinct sports fanship is from other types of fanship. Sports fans have been found to be similar to fans of other genres in their level of fanship, collective happiness, and identification (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). These findings proposed that research concerning sports fanship could potentially have a wider application to fanship in general (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). However, the given study did not specifically recruit highly identified fans of investigated categories including sport, music, media, and hobby fans. Arguably, due to such a method of sampling, results were not representative of each type of fans. Gantz et al. (2006) compared televised sports fans with fans of other programming genres and established that sport viewers expressed considerably high levels of motivation and intensity and possessed a significant inclination towards engagement in pre-game and post-game activities, which was not observed with other sampled populations. Consequently, Grove et al. (2012) indicated that amongst other elements, fanship is capable of having a positive effect on one's psycho-social wellbeing as well as being a platform for self-expression and social integration. Due to the significance of these functions, it is reported that some sports fans see their engagement in sport as a central aspect of their lives (Porat, 2010; Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012).

Sports fanship has been largely studied within the context of team identification, which is defined by Wann et al. (2001) as a sport fan's psychological connection to a team. Some refer to the strongest and most consistent connection as allegiance to a sports team (Funk and James, 2001), which is represented by fans' behaviours towards their team at times of defeat (Campbell et al., 2004). Therefore, if a fan is low in team identification, one may engage in a pattern of behaviours and cognitions known as CORFing (cutting off in reflected failure) and may attempt to detach his or her identity from the supported team (Campbell et al., 2004; Kwon et al., 2008). However, in cases of high team identification, a fan may sustain his or her attachment to the team despite poor results; hence one may engage in BIRFing (basking in spite of reflected failure).

Team identification appears to be an overarching element of fanship as it is indicative of a sports fans' level of cognitive and emotional involvement in their activity (Dhurup, 2011; Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012), it also correlates with psychological wellbeing (Reding et al., 2011; Potter and Keene, 2012) as well as, in some cases, offering a

formation of social identity (Halberstadt et al., 2006; Lock et al., 2012). This trait is based on the understanding that fans tend to assume similarities between them and the teams they support, which could be based on values, personality, and attitudes (Sukhdial et al., 2002). Similarly, Lock et al. (2011) indicate that fans choose to identify with those newly established teams whose origins, they believe, match their existing social identity. According to Branscombe et al. (1992), in cases where a team encounters a threat to its identity such as defeat, highly identified fans may find aggression as the most accessible means to raise their level of self-esteem and subsequently restore the identity of their team. However, the most recent research in sports fandom has largely focused on positive influences of team identification such as wellbeing (Wann et al., 2011). This research, based on Team Identification – Social Psychological Health Model, which has indicated the relationship among team identification, social connections and psycho-social wellbeing (Wann, 2006), suggests that fandom is often utilised as a method for gaining and maintaining valuable social relationships (Wann et al., 2011). It has also been noted that team identification is able to evoke a general feeling of connectedness in a community (Wann et al., 2011).

Consequently, a large number of enquiries into sports fandom have indicated group affiliation or social interaction as one of the most significant motivational factors for engaging in fandom activity (McDonald et al., 2002; Armstrong, 2008; Koo and Hardin, 2008; Funk et al., 2009; Lock et al., 2011). Appelbaum et al. (2012) reported that spectating sport positively correlates with extraversion, suggesting that social skills (particularly within the context of group interaction) are predictors of involvement in sport. Although according to Reding et al. (2011) sports fandom may be related to low levels of interpersonal skills, they argue that in a group of fans, who support the same team, one may feel a level of social support and may be able to experience a connection with society in a wider sense. Similarly, McDonald et al. (2012) note that affiliation is often a way for sports fans to establish a sense of identity. However, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) argue that identification with a particular fan group may not be based on social connections within that group as feeling of belonging to a fan community is usually found in emotional connection with the activity and shared values. Similarly, Cottingham (2012) indicates that whilst the most emotionally significant collective experiences are apparent when spectating a match, collective meaning associated with such instances is able to transcend stadium atmosphere, which

is considered to enhance emotiveness (Uhrich and Benkenstein, 2010) and to be expressed and recognised in different settings and situations.

For some sports fans the central motive for seeking emotionally stimulating sport event experiences is 'escape', which relates to one's desire to have a mental diversion from a daily routine (Funk et al., 2009; Wann et al., 2008). Essentially such an activity is about experiencing something different (Gencer et al., 2011) as well as attempting to remove certain social and lifestyle constraints and express one's individual facets (Bernache-Assolant et al., 2011). Gencer et al. (2011) identify 'escape' as a significant function of basketball fanship speculating that it mostly resonates with people who feel disappointment in their private lives. Therefore, it is argued that striving for diversion translates into seeking mental wellbeing (Funk et al., 2009). Wann et al. (2011) also suggest that wellbeing of sports fans is likely to improve if their team performs successfully which proposes a level of vicariousness among fans in relation to their chosen athletes or teams (McDonald et al., 2002; Wu et al., 2012). Within this relationship the element of vicarious achievement has been mostly recognised and regarded as a motive for some people to associate themselves with successful athletes or teams in order to gain positive experiences and fulfil their personal needs for achievement (McDonald et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2009). Hence, it could be argued that there is a high level of emotional engagement for fans that approach their team performance as their own success or failure.

Eastman and Riggs (1994) indicate that in order to deal with their emotions and cope with the uncertainty of a sporting competition sports fans are likely to engage in ritualistic practices. These authors also suggest that fans may see themselves as contributors to their team's performance stipulating that some tend to blame themselves when their teams lose (Eastman and Riggs, 1994). Therefore, sports supporters engage in practices which, they believe, assist their team in winning as players are thought to perform better when they are cheered on by enthusiastic fans (Eastman and Riggs, 1994). Chun et al. (2004) suggest that rituals are an important part of sports fanship as it enables fans to associate their experiences with cultural values and social relationships. Cottingham (2012) also recognises the importance of symbols and rituals that either precede or are a part of emotionally charged collective experiences. In addition, the pervasiveness of such practices is arguably able to enhance emotional intensity in sports

fanship experience (Cottingham, 2012). According to Wann et al. (2001), the more emotionally intense an event is, the more significant it would appear to a fan.

As briefly addressed in the section 2.1, the emotional significance of sports fanship is often expressed via religious terms such as faith, devotion, spirit, sacrifice, and prayer; hence provoking a comparison between religion and sports fanship (Wann et al., 2001). In addition, Wann and Zaichkowsky (2009) note that some sports fans believe in mystical happenings in sport although they do not subscribe to such thinking outside the sport context. Therefore, some argue that sport may carry religious significance in lives of some sports supporters (Wann et al., 2001; Cottingham, 2012). According to Delaney (2011), football presents fans with emotional states, such as joy, suffering, and devotion, which, like religious engagements, are able to offer a distraction from their everyday life. By way of this comparison Delaney (2011) advocates that the need for religion is essentially a need for a struggle in trying to prove other religious people that your religion is superior to theirs. Similarly, Klugman (2009) argues that a collective identity (whether it be an allegiance to a particular sports team or identification with a religious community of one's choice) will inevitably lead to a conflict with others who are outside the boundaries of that identity or belong to other communities. However, it is argued by Klugman (2009) that these sorts of identifications are still an expression of love, because without the struggle and suffering of being committed to one's team in defeat or otherwise (and amidst which it becomes more difficult to sustain positive attitudes and passion towards one's team when facing members of other fan communities) one would not reach the depths of passion and devotion, which might be ascribed to love. The faith that is required to experience this love engages a sports fan in a spectrum of emotions, ranging from pain to moments of exhilaration, and gives sports fanship a religious significance (Edge, 1997; Delaney, 2011). Similarly, although Gau and James (2013) argue that this high emotional involvement could be ascribed to an enjoyment value as it simply allows sports fans to experience pleasurable moments, they do not discount the meaning that sport spectatorship can have in a person's life, suggesting that sport could indeed be a type of humanistic religion or spirituality for its supporters, allowing one to experience pleasurable emotional states and peak experiences through a contemplation of exceptional sport performances rather than through identification with one's supported team (Gau and James, 2013). Therefore, it

would appear that sports fanship can be seen as spiritual or religious due to a number of obscure emotions it elicits.

The elements of sports fanship (team identification, vicarious achievements, emotional attachment, and group affiliation) discussed in the present section not only capture the potential significance that the phenomenon of fanship may represent in a fan's life but also allow to propose a religious/spiritual conceptualisation of sports fans' activity. However, most of the considered aspects of sports fanship represent behavioural and cognitive approach to the phenomenon, indicating that the connection between sports fanship and spirituality is largely a theoretical simulation, which needs to be empirically investigated. In accordance with that, different methodological approaches in sports fanship research have been proposed (Chun et al., 2004; Nesti, 2011), suggesting that more qualitative research in the field might be able to not only advance the current understanding of sports fanship, but also establish whether sports fanship encompasses spiritual elements for some sports supporters. Therefore, the present study has been based on a different epistemological foundation than most of the preceding fanship research, which is discussed in the following chapter together with employed data collection methods, procedures, and participants.

3. Methodology and Method

3.1 Cultural Considerations in Sports Fanship and Spirituality

Sports fans tend to be investigated primarily in terms of cultural and national backgrounds. Xing (2009) suggests that sports fans construct their meanings for consuming sport influenced by the culture and society that they are surrounded by; hence social and cultural aspects are often deeply embedded in their activity. Similarly, people's relationship with a particular sport might be significantly influenced by the nation's historical connection with that sport (Hsieh et al., 2011). For example, Correia and Esteves (2007) argue that in Portugal football is an inescapably conversational topic and a way of socialising partly due to historical circumstances and tradition. Consequently, according to Garrat (2010) sport does not only offer an opportunity for national promotion but in doing so has an ability to unite the nation by exposing the core aspects of national identity and acting as a foundation for common meanings and beliefs. Pinkus (2005) suggests that sport thus becomes an indispensable vehicle for defining a particular nation and providing people with a platform to express their national identity and pride. Such distinct expressions of nationalism are often regarded as religion of modern times (Santiago, 2009). Similarly, sport serving as a platform to showcase these expressions may carry a national set of beliefs and in some cases be regarded as a civil religion (Forney, 2007).

As we have clearly seen, historical circumstances may determine a sport that is indicative of a national identity and a cultural belief (Hsieh et al., 2007). Comparatively, a dominant religion in a particular geographical region is also a product of history and culture. Furthermore, as different aspects of sport may be more appealing in some cultures than others, religion is also open to different cultural interpretations (Sasaki and Kim, 2010). Therefore, the same religion in different cultural settings might be manifested through different practices and different worship styles (Sasaki and Kim, 2010). Similarly, these outward differences are also most obvious in sports fanship context. Chun et al. (2004) suggest that cultural values have an effect on sports fans' ritualisation processes. In their comparative analysis between Japanese and American baseball fans, it has emerged that Japanese fans performed rituals that were more synchronised whereas Americans tended to engage in individual practices and adhere to self-discipline rules (Chun et al., 2004). The latter and the former observations assume

that cultural differences appear in both religion and sports fanship predominantly on a more outward and functional foundation rather than on a personal basis. While these are external expressions and practices that relate to religion in the sense of its social and cultural functionality, it seems that religion as a spiritual and personal experience is not necessarily affected by cultural attributes.

As established in the preceding chapter, religion is understood to have functional and institutional characteristics at the same time encompassing a personal spiritual journey (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). The latter is essentially the phenomenon of spirituality framed into religious tradition, which means that while private aspects of religion are not influenced by culture, spirituality experienced outside religious foundation should not be influenced by that, either. Similarly, Ho and Ho (2007) describe spirituality as a culturally transcending phenomenon, which varies depending on personal traits rather than cultural circumstances. Although some accounts consider spirituality as a highly individual experience, which is only available to the self and is free of social, cultural, and other outside influences (Aupers and Houtman, 2006), others argue that the self and hence spirituality cannot be considered as an isolated unit as all experiences are impacted by outside variables such as social interactions and cultural values (Hedlund-de Witt, 2011).

Although cultural differences in sports fanship usually arise through outward expressions such as ritualistic practices, in some cases, attitudes concerning personal importance on sports consumption are culturally influenced. For example, Gau and Kim (2011) suggest that general attitudes towards spectator sports are affected by culturally rooted values such as collectivism and individualism as in collectivist societies people meet their social needs by engaging with their extended family rather than integrating into a community of sports fans. Similarly, motivational profiles of sports fans vary depending on the cultural influences that they are exposed to (Kim et al., 2009). Hsieh et al. (2011) conducted a study comparing Taiwanese and American baseball fans and discovered that the two groups were different at the core of their fanship as Americans displayed a higher identification with their team whereas Taiwanese respondents identified more with baseball as an object of their fanship. Such observations suggest

that cultural circumstance may have effects on how fanship is construed in a person's life.

Considering spirituality as a personal contemplation of one's lived experiences reiterates the assertion that spirituality sees the self in a cultural and social context. Similarly, sports fans are said to ascribe higher significance to their activity depending on specific cultural attributions. Therefore, if for some people sports fanship can become a means to derive spiritual meaning and value, perhaps some cultural circumstances are more accommodating than others to such occurrences. In order to address this aspect of fanship, the present study explores sports fanship within two different cultural settings. England National Football Team and Lithuanian National Basketball Team fans were selected as the two groups are considered to be nationally significant in their respective countries; hence allowing an opportunistic sample in consideration of cultural differences as far as spiritual meanings and values in sports fanship are concerned.

3.2 Construction of Meaning

Culture, as argued by Geertz (1973), is not a set of behaviours, rituals, and customs, but it is rather a structure of norms, rules, and regulations, which one has to adhere to in order to constitute one's belonging to a particular nation, tribe or community. Therefore, it may be said that culture controls people's behaviour in the same way that it holds a myriad of predetermined symbols, values, and meanings (Owen, 1995). As a result, meaning and importance of certain objects may be dependent on cultural circumstances. For example, in existing sports fanship research, loyalty tends to be understood in terms of an individual's financial commitment to the supported team or one's commitment to the brand (e.g., Bee and Havitz, 2010; Kunkel et al., 2013). That is because sports fanship is regarded as a type of consumption and is addressed within the culture of consumption. Whilst this understanding represents the meanings generated through sports marketers' encounter with sports fanship, it does not offer any insight into how fans make sense of their activity. In other words, if sports marketers equate a loyal fan to an active consumer, it does not mean that sports fans subscribe to the same understanding as their encounter with the phenomenon of fanship may be completely different. In consideration to that, the present investigation treats meaning as

a social construction rather than as an irrefutable truth by subscribing to an epistemology of constructionism.

According to constructionism, meaning is not created but rather constructed through the individual's encounter with the world (Crotty, 1998). While the world and objects that are in it might not have any specific meaning, the sense of them is made by engaging one's consciousness and interpreting the world one is presented with (Crotty, 1998). The process within which an object encounters a subject, according to Crotty (1998), relates to intentionality, which is commonly known as a phenomenological concept that defines human consciousness being always directed towards objects. Intentionality suggests that all our knowledge is built through awareness of all that is external to human mind (Koch, 1995). In phenomenological methodology, the aim of a researcher is to discover the essences of an individual's consciousness, in which personal experiences are grounded (Kafle, 2011). That is because an experience is inseparable from a person (Laverty, 2003). According to Koch (1995), everyday experiences are often taken for granted, which makes them difficult to recognise and explore; hence phenomenological enquiry commits to providing in depth descriptions of people's lived experiences (Koch, 1995). In this sort of phenomenological data people's experiences are the unifying element of all objects and subjects as a particular experience creates a context to perceive those objects and subjects in one way or another (Willig, 2008). In other words, people engage their consciousness towards a particular object or an aspect of their life in a circumstance of a specific experience.

3.3 Describing Experiences

According to Maggs-Rapport (2000), phenomenological enquiry is concentrated on exploring phenomena through meanings that are entrenched in participants' narratives; hence having a phenomenological focus in the study requires obtaining rich descriptive data reflecting on fans' past experiences lived through their fanship. To acquire these descriptions, the present investigation employed a method of phenomenological interview. Phenomenological interviews are technically defined as informal in-depth discussions (Moustakas, 1994). Diccio-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) termed an in-depth interview as a semi-structured questioning with several predetermined interview questions or themes that still allow a researcher to delve deeper into a matter under

investigation by asking follow-up questions and addressing probes. As for the phenomenological tradition, it guides an interview to be a collection of rich extensive descriptions which at the data analysis stage allow an uncovering of the essences, led by which individuals construct their understandings of a phenomenon under investigation (Englander, 2012). Therefore, it is pivotal to ensure that descriptions provided in the interviews are sufficient to unfold and understand these meanings.

Turner (2010) underlines the significance of preparation for qualitative interviews, which is suggested to be of a paramount importance to gathering a useful set of data. Question construction is one of the most important parts of this preparation. According to Turner (2010), qualitative interviews should feature questions that are open-ended, neutral, and worded clearly ensuring that they do not influence participants' answers in any way. While a set of predetermined questions was utilised in this investigation, other questions were phrased instantaneously in order to include an interviewee's own terms and meanings based on the interview flow and pre-set themes, which each interview followed, including initial involvement in fanship, reasons for sustaining that involvement, experiences that sports fanship relate to, and the most significant experience obtained through their fanship. It was important to ensure a comfortable sharing environment, where the interviewees felt safe to discuss the given topics and respond genuinely to the presented questions, and where the interviewer was able to construct questions instantly and felt confident to probe when attempting to clarify emerging themes and to elaborate the narratives. In order to create such an environment, the researcher focused on building a rapport with each participant as this is said to contribute towards a more comfortable interaction in which probes tend to emerge naturally.

Building a rapport with a respondent is paramount to the success of qualitative interviewing. Jones (2004) suggests that interviewer's social skills, which translate to genuine interest, caring, warmth, and encouragement, are able to create a heightened sense of trust that is felt by an interviewee towards his or her interviewer. Nevertheless, Sorrell and Redmond (1995) advise that rapport should be given time to be established in the interview agenda and could possibly involve a participant questioning a researcher in order to become more familiar and comfortable with a process. Therefore,

while it was essential for the researcher to approach questioning with warmth, encouragement, and interest (Jones, 2004), rapport had to be considered from the outset of the participant recruitment process, and at the pre-interview stage the recruited participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and raise their concerns about the process.

3.4 Procedures

Participants were recruited purposively acquiring trusted referrals from the leaders of supporters' clubs for the England National Football and Lithuanian National Basketball teams. Referrals were essentially treated as eligibility criteria for participation as the study aimed to avoid preconceived eligibility criteria such as financial investment and time commitment, which are most common in fanship research. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to engage with participants early on in the pre-interview stage and provide them with a better understanding of the study and the data collection process. When a trusted referral was acquired, potential candidates were contacted via email asking them to consider participating in the project and providing key information on the project itself and the interview procedure, i.e., the main objectives of the research enquiry, approximate interview duration, right to withdraw from the process at any stage, key themes that interview would focus on, and encouraged addressees to contact the researcher in case of any concerns or queries. Those candidates who replied expressing their interest and willingness to participate were asked to provide a suitable date and time for them to be interviewed and a convenient location as well as being encouraged to address any concerns they had about the process. Although done through electronic communication, this contributed to a prolonged engagement with interviewees and allowed participants to engage actively in the process by co-operatively arranging their individual interviews.

Interview location is considered to be important in allowing participants to feel comfortable, emotionally and physically safe and secure (Smith, 2008). Therefore, candidates' suggestions for their interview location were mostly approved (excluding propositions such as their home) in an attempt to create a comfortable sharing environment. The vast majority of interviews took place in participants' work places and the rest of them were arranged in either a restaurant or a coffee shop of the

participant's choice. On arrival to the pre-arranged location, the researcher enquired how much time the participant had in order to plan the interaction accordingly. On several occasions participants were generous with their time which allowed having an opening conversation naturally leading to the research topic of their involvement in sports fandom as well as contributing towards rapport building. Prior to all interviews participants were again encouraged to address any questions or concerns they had about the process, informed about their right to withdraw from the interview at any stage, and asked to read and sign a research consent form. Once participants' questions were responded to and the consent form was completed, participants were asked for a permission to commence the recording. The interviews lasted on average 72 min with a range of 50-100 min allowing interviewees to delve gradually into the depth of their experiences. Interviews were recorded onto two digital voice recorders and transcribed shortly after they had been conducted. The researcher being bilingual allowed all interviews to be conducted and later transcribed in participants' native languages, i.e., English and Lithuanian.

As far as trustworthiness of the data is concerned, post-hoc type of controls, such as respondent validation, were not employed considering that this type of procedure might invalidate the process of data analysis as participants are not supposed to recognise the data that has gone through coding, synthesis, and de-contextualisation (Morse et al., 2002). However, as addressed previously an effort was made to establish a rapport with participants, which, according to Al-Yateem (2010), does not only ease the respondent-researcher interaction but is also a means to overcome negative effects that audio recording might have on the quality of acquired data. Therefore, prolonged engagement with participants is consequently linked to a higher degree of credibility in qualitative interviewing (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Aspects such as created rapport, interview duration, gradual exploration of specific experiences, and probing resulted in acquiring rich descriptive narratives, which, as suggested by Schwandt et al. (2007), also indicate trustworthiness of the data as in-depth descriptions allow case-by-case comparisons among interviewees. According to Morse et al. (2002), methodological rigour in qualitative investigations should also be ensured by continuous reflection, which involves the researcher adjusting and modifying the research strategy in order to ensure

congruence at every stage of an enquiry. Such investigator responsiveness was particularly employed when conducting data analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were coded using the framework of an inductive content analysis as it allows a degree of flexibility in terms of rethinking data groups and categories and reshaping constructed conceptual systems. In the preparation stage, this method of analysis requires an in-depth familiarisation with a text, which is acquired through reading and re-reading of the text, and trying to make sense of the data (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007). In this case, transcribing interviews allowed the researcher to obtain a good understanding of the data which was enhanced by reading each transcript several times and making notes in the text that helped to uncover different layers of meaning in some segments of the text. Once the researcher felt confident with a level of familiarisation and understanding of the data, the second stage of content analysis was applied, which again involved recognising and making notes of different themes and patterns emerging (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007). Ascribing codes to the segments of the text in such a way enabled the researcher to recognise relevant phenomena and collect examples of those phenomena (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). It also provided a link between the raw interview data and its conceptualisation as the recognised themes were revised by merging some and dissecting others and eventually arranging them into data categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007). Twenty four initially recognised categories were arranged into eight thematic groups which were later revised by reflecting on preliminary codes and discovering common patterns and themes among some of them, allowing new thematic relationships to appear. This revision decreased the number of data categories to twenty and ascribed them to four thematic groups (1) 'Connecting with Transcendence', 2) 'Connecting with the Self', 3) 'Connecting with Others', 4) 'Connecting with the World') each of which represented a gradual process. Therefore, each data category within its thematic group acted as a structural part of the represented process of a particular occurrence in sports fandom. This conceptual system provided a basis for analytical narrative supported by the extracts from the interview transcripts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The investigation conformed to the ethical guidelines of The Faculty of Applied Science, University of Gloucestershire. All participants were aged over eighteen. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured; written consent form was acquired from each participant. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the process at any time. All collected data have been securely stored in electronic files on the researcher's computer secured by passwords.

3.7 Participants

The sample comprised five England National Football Team fans (M=48.6) and the same number of Lithuanian National Team fans (M=34). All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. As the research strategy did not have a robust set of eligibility criteria, the following section provides some information about each participant and their involvement in either football or basketball fandom.

Jonathan is a 53 year-old taxi driver who has travelled to every World Cup to support England since 1990 World Cup in Italy and has also been involved in various football supporters' campaigns. His initial interest in football was instigated by England's World Cup win in 1966.

Ben is a 49 year-old business owner who has been attending all Sheffield Wednesday matches since 1974. He joined the England Band ² in 1998 and since then has attended more than 120 international football fixtures. He claims that his passion for football came from living in the community where following football was a normal thing to do.

Adam is 50 years of age and describes himself as a full-time football fan. He grew up living in a close proximity to a football ground and played in a junior football league as a child. He has been a member of the England Band for 20 years and has attended over 150 international fixtures.

² England Band is the official supporters' band of the England National Football team. Originally the band was formed to play at Sheffield Wednesday matches. However, in 1996 the then England manager Glen Hoddle and the head of Football Association, David Davis, heard them playing for Sheffield Wednesday and invited them to play for England at the 1996 European Football Championship. Since then the band has played at all competitive England matches.

George is 41 years old, and he combines his job in finance with coaching an amateur football club. He used to go to Hillsborough to watch Sheffield Wednesday with his brothers every Saturday since he was 6 years old. He joined the England Band in 1993 and has been supporting England at most of their home and away games since 1996.

Paul is a 50 year-old business owner whose passion for football came from his father and his older brothers. He says that football and Sheffield Wednesday have been his family tradition. Paul has attended over 150 England matches as he has also been a member of the England Band for 20 years.

James is 38 years old and he runs his own business. His parents used to take him to watch basketball matches as a child, and he has always seen basketball as a way of expressing his patriotic feelings. In 2003 he had a financial opportunity to go to Sweden to support Lithuanian National Basketball Team at the European Championship, and he has now been travelling with the team for a decade.

Luke is a 37 year-old politician. He relates his keen interest in basketball back to his childhood when his whole family used to watch the finals between BC Žalgiris Kaunas and CSKA Moscow³. In 2007 he spontaneously decided to go to the European Basketball Championship to support the national team and has not missed a tournament since.

Martin is a 28 year-old geodesist who describes himself as an avid Lithuanian Basketball Team supporter. Being 6 years old, he remembers, watching the bronze medal match of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics with his father in a crowded café and being inspired by the collective atmosphere he experienced.

Liam is 31 years old and he works in finance. Although Liam has been keen on basketball from an early age, he joined the main group of travelling Lithuanian basketball fans accidentally. He attended the 2007 European Basketball Championship as a representative of one of the sponsors of the Lithuanian National Team. However,

³ The finals of The Soviet Union National Basketball League in the mid-1980s between BC Žalgiris Kaunas and CSKA Moscow served as a major inspiration for Lithuanian national revival that contributed to the establishment of the Sąjūdis National Movement and restoration of the state independence

he could not bear supporting the team from a VIP suite and got into the stand of the Lithuanian supporters.

Jason is a 36 year-old business manager. His fanship developed from watching basketball matches at bars and pubs with his friends to attending home and away matches of his hometown team. In 2009 he travelled with the Lithuanian National Team for the first time and has not missed a tournament since.

4. Connecting with Transcendence

Sports fans are often regarded as consumers who seek substantial positive benefits from their involvement in sports (Funk et al., 2012). These benefits range from positive self-concept, self-esteem to experiencing positive stress and feeling mentally well (Funk et al., 2012). To summarise the advantages provided by sports fanship, it would appear that sports fans are motivated by pleasurable experiences that they are bound to encounter through their activity. However, the core issue with such understanding of sports fans' motivation is that it has been established through a variety of pre-set measures and consumption indicators (e.g., Wann et al., 2002; Koo and Hardin, 2008; Funk et al., 2009). This research approach has restricted an emergence of new facets as well as has failed to explain the known motivational factors and their relationships with practices and behaviours performed by committed fans other than those of team related merchandise purchasing and game attendance. Therefore, while in this investigation participants appeared to be striving for pleasurable experiences as sports fans, their narratives provided some clarity of how those experiences occur, what sort of control sports fans have over these experiences as well as how important they are to sports fanship and to a sports fan as a person. The interview data revealed that while there are restrictors posing difficulties in creating an emotionally charged atmosphere, in which fans can expect experiences surpassing the boundaries of ordinary, they tend to proactively cope with those difficulties and find other ways to enhance the atmosphere and subsequently acquire highly pleasurable experiences. Although participants did not negate the importance of pleasurable moments, it became apparent that pleasure was only one element to sports fanship and that value and significance achieved through reflecting on such moments were far more imperative and led sports fans to perceive their engagement in sports as an integral part of their lives providing them with meaning and at times allowing them to experience transcendence.

A number of participants referred to the notion of 'atmosphere', indirectly suggesting that it could be an impactful factor for an overall sport spectating experience. A sports stadium atmosphere is understood as an emotional totality of a sports venue, which is affected by a number of stimuli elicited by fans, sports spectacle, and organisers (Uhrich and Benkenstein, 2010). Although empirical research regarding the specificity of sports stadium atmosphere and its effects to sports fans' motivation is scarce, researchers tend

to borrow existing underpinnings from enquiries into atmospheres in retail and other service settings, which indicate that atmosphere is a contributing factor to consumer's positive attitudes towards a particular setting (Tai and Fung, 1997). However, as suggested by Uhrich and Benkenstein (2010), sports stadium atmosphere is different to any other consumption environment due to the level of entertainment value and emotional significance it possesses. The understanding of it can be elaborated by adopting a number of conceptualisations of sports fans motivation based on sports fans' emotional involvement (e.g., Wann et al., 1999; Koo and Hardin, 2008). The given accounts underline that for emotionally engaged fans one of the pivotal motives is excitement and anxiety obtained through the sporting spectacle and their overall experience. As explained by Ben football is essentially a passion for its supporters, however, this emotional state is susceptible to certain organisational arrangements, which, as noted earlier, are one of the three stimuli affecting sports event environment:

In my experience of football: standing up, cheering it was at that time and you were getting all-seater stadiums, people would sit down in much more regimented... It's the start of the Premiership, start of TV. Somehow I felt football is being taken away from from the people, who I thought mattered, but it's a business. So I was quite disillusioned with football and probably bored. And, I say, football was very different before Hillsborough to how it is now with the Premiership. And I strongly believe that football should be about the fans being passionate, singing, and the band enabled me to, I thought, to regain the atmosphere, regain the passion, regain (I am gonna say that word) regain the spirit, which I felt from the early 90s till the Taylor Report,⁴ football was lost.

It has also emerged from the data analysis that atmosphere is enhanced by collective, formalised, and repetitive practices that sports fans engage in when spectating such as singing, standing up, and cheering on their supported team. According to Holt (1992) such behaviours do not only outwardly resemble religious rituals, but they also define the emotional quality of a fan's experience. Similarly, as it is apparent in the previous

⁴ Taylor Report is The Hillsborough Stadium disaster inquiry report. The final report was published in January, 1990 establishing that the main reasons for disaster were failure of police control and recommending that all major stadiums would be converted to all-seater model.

quote, in the absence of such ritualistic practices, the emotiveness of the atmosphere tends to be negatively affected. Therefore, sports fans' motivation to continue with their activity may decrease, when fans are faced with organisational arrangements that either prevent or obstruct them from performing their common rituals, as elaborated by George:

And then the Hillsborough disaster happened and all-seater came and exactly what's happened at Wembley, happened at every other stadium. What you had is... I used to go to a match, and I knew where my mates stood. So no matter what time I turned up, no matter what ticket I bought, I could walk in, and eventually everybody push their shoulders, and you all get your little bit of space <...>. And then suddenly – all-seater, you had to buy your ticket, which invariably means if you got thirty seats – singer, tourist, fan, child, wife, fan, singer. And you've got this segmented situation, and guess what? You only feel comfortable chanting if people to the left, to the right, to the back are doing it. It takes a special type of person to constantly chant, sing, try and make a difference if nobody else is doing it around you, and I don't just mean around you, mean, next to you. It's not easy. Even I, when I stood with my drum, all I do, I'm nervous as hell before a game, especially at Wembley... Cause if they're not gonna join in, the success of everything we do is filtered down...

Both provided transcript extracts indicate the importance of specific behaviours that sports fans are known to engage in for the benefit of the overall fanship experience. As mentioned by Ben, it was indeed his involvement in the band, which resulted in him playing a musical instrument and singing during football matches, that allowed him to overcome the difficulties posed by the altered stadium arrangements (i.e., introduction of all-seater stadiums) and reengage in football emotionally. Such observations suggest that Ben is proactive about his activity as under the changed circumstances he found and utilised new practices that enabled him to rebuild the previous level of emotiveness in the atmosphere and consequently increase his motivation. This example questions the validity of a common stigmatisation of sports fans being passive entertainment and enjoyment seekers (Gantz et al., 2008) as well as argues against sports fanship being merely a pastime.

While the previous participants' accounts suggest an interrelation between organisational arrangements, ritualistic practices, and emotiveness in sports fandom, they also reiterate that behavioural practices performed by fans enhanced their emotional involvement. With a reference to such activities, Chun et al. (2004) recognise sports fandom as ritualised experience, suggesting that singing, wearing their team colours, and chanting are practices that embody meanings and values and symbolically represent fans' cognitions and feelings, therefore, encompassing elements of ritual. Some claim rituals in sport are able to release subconscious energy; hence strengthening the emotional experience (Mazurkiewicz, 2011); whereas others suggest that (similarly to athletes) fans employ rituals in an attempt to cope with heightened emotions and an increased levels of uncertainty (Eastman and Riggs, 1994). However, such speculations neglect empirical studies suggesting that sports fans are sensation and excitement-seeking sporting event partakers (Bouchet et al., 2011; Appelbaum, 2012); hence they may be keen on embracing and releasing their emotions rather than attempting to manage them through certain behaviours. This suggests that it was important for the participants to adhere to certain behaviours whilst spectating matches in order to have a satisfactory overall experience.

In therapeutic settings, rituals are often employed to enhance emotional connection with a matter or an object of discussion which, according to Benjamin and Looby (1998), precedes a significant experience enabling one to reassess a specific matter and extend one's prior understanding. Transferring the latter approach to the sports fandom scenario, it is speculated that practices engaged in by sports supporters either indicate or intensify their emotional connection with a spectacle and the object of their fandom. In support of that, Hunt et al. (1999) hypothesise that the critical distinction between spectators and fans in sport is emotional significance, which is low within the spectating medium but considerably higher within the context of fandom. While engagement in practices such as singing and chanting during a sporting contest is not confined only to sports fans, in the case of sports fans such practices are carried out with a higher level of emotional investment as well as a more significant meaning. Similarly to therapeutic settings, employing rituals in sport can also result in experiences that encompass transcendence (Hunt et al., 1999). Speculatively, such experience may be a consequence of a high emotional investment which increases personal concern and responsiveness to

the sporting spectacle (Gantz et al., 2008). Luke explained his responsive behaviours under different circumstances, suggesting that they were a direct reaction to events on a basketball court:

If a match is going really well, and if you are psyched up, you don't really need to do much and you can even do a little bit less, because no matter what, everything is going to be okay. But when you get a really bad game, and then you feel hurt and upset, which makes it so much more difficult to support your team. On the other hand, sometimes, when it doesn't go well, you start shouting and hitting, and shouting as much as you possibly can from that helplessness and misery.

Martin also supported the notion of responsiveness hypothesising that what actually occurred, whilst spectating, was a transformation, which translates one's emotional experiences to physical actions:

Yeah, I feel like those emotions, they then transform into these physical feelings somehow those emotions translate physically... I don't know how, maybe through adrenaline, because you're feeling tense, and all the emotions and desires are coming out spontaneously.

Often a high level of emotional involvement in sporting competition is understood as fans' attachment to both their supported team and the spectacle itself (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Therefore, arguably Luke and Martin's accounts represent sports fans being attached to their team and consequently developing a tight connection with a spectacle, which on some occasions translates into physical responsiveness. An emotional attachment not only provides a distinction between spectators and fans but also serves as an underpinning to a number of attempts at conceptualising sports fanship. However, the majority of such attempts explore emotional attachment as a motivation for fans to continue their engagement in sport, without much consideration of how that directly affects instant fanship experiences (e.g., Koo and Hardin, 2008; Bee and Havitz, 2010). However, in the present investigation it emerged that emotional attachment, which can be developed through (and be enhanced by) ritualistic practices, contributed to fans' experiences as it allowed them to immerse themselves entirely into the moment. For

example, Adam noted how difficult it sometimes is to control one's actions when being in such an emotional state:

Yeah, I get completely engrossed in it all, and during the game I'm like buzzing. And you can shout at the others a bit too much to get playing. So, yeah, I've learnt that about myself. Yeah, too much passion, cause you want it so much to go right. You do, you get completely engrossed in it all, and you do want it so much.

Martin also recognised moments of being completely immersed in a particular emotional state elicited through the sporting spectacle and attempted to compare such occurrences with reading a good book or watching a film:

Yeah, I mean, you even forget everything around you what is happening. And you are, I don't know. I don't really know what you could compare it to; maybe it's like a good book or a film. Perhaps, you could compare it to that, in a sense that you get immersed in a good book and then everything around you disappears, and then you are involved in that, you're participating in that particular emotion.

Although comparisons made between spectating sport and reading a book or watching a film are mostly ascribed to considerations of sports fanship as a pastime (Hill and Argyle, 1998), the latter understanding does not focus on entertainment value but rather draws some similarities with the conditions to achieving peak or flow experiences as one of the most recognised characteristics of such occurrences is the sense of being entirely immersed in an activity at hand (Kelly, 2011). Furthermore, it has been noted earlier that sports fans are often motivated by seeking emotional sensations (Appelbaum et al., 2012), and more specifically Chun et al. (2004) have speculated that some sports fans' experiences can indeed entail that level of enjoyment and sensation of complete involvement ascribed to peak experiences. As well as feeling a sense of being entirely immersed in an activity or emotion, true enjoyment was also expressed by participants. For example, Paul when asked to describe how he had felt in the moments, which he identified as most memorable throughout his football fanship experiences, suggested that it was the feeling of elation:

Well, elation, I think... You can be elated, you know, whether, you know, team's done well or not, probably that is elation, I think that's the easiest way, it's not an emotion that's easy to describe, really...

Similarly, Adam described it as a state of satisfaction:

When everything goes right, it's probably you feel, you feel ecstatic and beaming from here to there, your body is tingling, and you've had a great time. It's just the best satisfaction feeling that I've ever had anyway, give or take a few things <...>.

Hunt et al. (1999) suggest that on rare occasions transcendent experiences can be inspired by a sporting spectacle. Moreover, drawing on participant narratives which seemed to correspond with the definition of peak experience, happenings of a spiritual nature in sports fanship are assertable. Such claims are based on empirical investigations proposing significant positive correlations between spirituality and peak experiences found in the context of competitive sport (Dillon and Tait, 2000). Due to the contextual relationship between such findings and the current investigation, it is feasible that elements of spirituality can be recognised in some of the participants' accounts. However, a sense of satisfaction or a high level of enjoyment was not the central elements to all interviewees' narratives. For example, Liam highlighted obscurity as the main motivational factor to maintain his involvement in sport as well as an element separating fanship activity from any other event in his life:

I can't even imagine whether you could compare it to something, to some other experience in life. Really don't know. And the most interesting thing about it is that, you know, sometimes someone wakes up after half a year and uploads their pictures from Championships to Facebook <...>. And it happens so that you end up looking at those pictures half a year after that happened, and it all seems so stupid. You just think all these adults with painted faces, they are doing something in an empty arena (obviously our stand is full), and we are shouting something and, you know, and all those emotions. Why is that? What is this? And you try and describe this experience to someone who has never experienced that – it would be really difficult.

Arguably, the former descriptions of the most memorable moments reflecting on emotional heights and the level of satisfaction achieved are comparative to the earlier highlighted aspects of (and conditions to) peak experiences. As that creates a context for spiritual consideration in sports fanship, it appears as though that Liam's narrative does not lend itself to these speculations. However, as established in Chapter 2, experience does not have to fit into the framework of peak experience in order to encapsulate significance or spiritual nature in one's life (Ingersoll, 1994). Spirituality is defined and measured by transcendence, which is essentially surpassing one's limitations, a former frame of reference or a prior state of being (Benjamin and Looby, 1998). The element of obscurity noted in Liam's description proposes that some fanship experiences surpass the participant's daily life as he cannot relate to it when being outside the environment relevant to his involvement in sport. Furthermore, Paul highlighted the obscure element in his most memorable fanship experiences and captured transcendent aspects of it when subscribing to a sense of elevation:

Well, I can't remember how it happened, no, I remember the emotion, I remember being exhausted, I remember having, you know, I think the sensors become, become elevated <...>. Well certainly the feeling, feeling is there, and you know it's just all the people might just think is when you become very very emotional, but for me something slightly different, something that is slightly more obscure, more ambiguous. You know, external, some form of force. That maybe... Yeah, and I suppose I am saying that football is just a mere vehicle <...>.

This description allows transferring sports fanship from the realm of emotions to the milieu of transcendence and consequently spirituality. As suggested by Paul, to him football was a catalyst for achieving the state of being which surpasses the boundaries of emotiveness and is indeed connected to the force beyond oneself. Such understanding can be termed within the accounts of transcendence as it illustrates one's ability to be elevated to a different state of being (Christoffersen, 2011).

Most importantly, when participants reflected on their experiences, whether it was the most significant victory or a description of a common fan experience, most of them exhibited a high level of self-awareness. For example, Adam analysed his body's

physiological reactions to the emotional state, and Paul attempted to conceptualise his experiences discounting the word 'emotional' as too narrow and unfitting to authentically identify the significance and, most importantly, the nature of what he had encountered. Self-awareness, as suggested by Helminiak (1996), is the core of the human spirit as it allows one to understand and reflect upon one's past enabling an individual to shape the future. Therefore, transcendence is arguably a consequence of a personal contemplation. According to Benjamin and Looby (1998), 'transcenders' are individuals who constantly strive for surpassing their basic needs, and that is not only about taking control of one's future but also about consciously seeking to experience forms of transcendence; hence engaging in the process of contemplation in order to increase a level of self-awareness. Such conscious aspirations were evident amongst both football and basketball fans, suggesting that sports fandom can be a means for some people to connect with transcendence. For example, Martin, when asked about his motivation to maintain his involvement in basketball, suggested that it is an impulsive and uncontrollable pursuit of the same emotional state that had driven him to continue:

I feel that that emotion... I just think that all people are selfish inside; well not necessarily selfish, but, I mean, I think you're set to strive for that feeling, that emotion, when you feel good, and so you want to experience that one more time, so you continue to watch basketball. And to describe that particular feeling – it's really difficult <...>. I mean yeah, it's this hook, this drug, this thing, desire to experience, don't even know, it's an adrenaline, when everything mixes together.

In support of this understanding, Liam suggested that basketball fans strive for a specific experience, which is significantly different from any other venture in life; hence it could not be fully understood by anyone outside their environment:

But it's important to mention that people who get involved, who try this once, usually they remember that really positively and they want to do it again and that's why our group keeps on growing and growing and growing. So it means that this sort of experience you can't really gain it somewhere else, and it just becomes your lifestyle.

The latter quote also underlines continuity of this pursuit captured in the word 'lifestyle'. It suggests that whilst sports fans aim to attain valuable moments in their lives, which possibly encompass transcendent and spiritual significance, those moments influence their lives on a long-term basis. Adam deepened the understanding of such an assertion, claiming that his happiness was embedded in his involvement in football and simultaneously highlighting a continuous nature of this state of wellbeing:

I suppose it's about happiness. How happy you are, and I don't mean momentarily, I mean, in life. So, yeah, my wellbeing is better for me because of football, and being involved in, and everything about it, and it wouldn't be same without it. I probably would be unhappy, you know, wouldn't know what to do with myself.

Based on these data, it emerges that sports fandom for some people may become a means to experience transcendence. Engaging in such processes means being more aware of (and more susceptible to) mystical happenings and open to such experiences (Helminiak, 2005). Sports fans have been previously noted to believe in transcendent and mystical occurrences in sport such as team curses while being reluctant to accept non-rational reality outside sport (Wann and Zaichkowsky, 2009). It appeared in the present investigation that football and basketball fans tended to strive for experiences which seemed to provide them with opportunities to transcend their common reality. Although the depth and significance of such instances ranged from reflection of an increased level of emotiveness to encountering or being affected by an external force, transcendence, according to Helminiak (2005), is essentially entering a different state of being, which can take a variety of forms. Therefore, it would appear somewhat unavoidable that people, sports fans, in this case, may reflect on their experiences differently. However, viewing fans' experiences as transcendent supposes that, what sports fans are actually seeking by their engagement in sport is a connection with transcendence. As noted by Helminiak (2005), committing to a concern of transcendence defines spirituality, meaning that activities, rituals, and practices people engage in, when pursuing such experiences, are their unique expressions of spirituality. As indicated by the participants, sports fans may consciously engage in practices that together with an occasion are able to co-create emotional significance translating into transcendent experience.

Some may claim that such a pursuit of transcendence is an expression of one's lifestyle but not spirituality as it does not induce any form of sacred or sacredness (Hill et al., 2000). However, as argued by Ingersoll (1994), connections with transcendence and personal growth can come in a range of different forms, including events that may seem common and ordinary for some. Treating the notion of spirit as an integral human part, spirituality is affected and nurtured by any activity or experience that a person perceives to be significant in his or her life (Helminiak, 2005). Respondents ascribed substantial value to their engagement in sport, suggesting that emotions and experiences encountered when carrying out their fanship activity were exceptional and often unique. Such in-depth reflections provided by the participants indicated a high level of contemplation leading to a greater self-awareness and, as a result, in some cases transforming earthly happenings to transcendent experiences.

To conclude, the chapter has indicated that both English and Lithuanian participants appeared to have experienced highly pleasurable moments through their participation in respectively football and basketball fanship. These moments have been assigned to highly emotive stadium atmosphere and various ritualistic practices engaged in by fans, which enhance sports fans' emotional attachment to the spectacle, enabling them to, at times, participate in events comparative to peak experiences. These events have also been described by participants as unique to the fanship context and involving a sense of obscurity, which has been associated with transcendence. Furthermore, participants' narratives have revealed that both football and basketball fans engage in conscious pursuit of such experiences, not only proposing high levels of self-awareness but also recognising a mark of a spiritual concern expressed through their commitment to achieving transcendence. As the central element of this engagement appeared to be one's ability to self-reflect, the following chapter attends to the aspects of sports fanship that are concerned with one's inner self and, therefore, affecting human spirit.

5. Connecting with the Self

Human spirit (as an integral part of the human mind) engages an individual in a process of self-reflection, based on which a person makes value judgments (Helminiak, 2005). Therefore, spirituality is simply an ability to transcend one's circumstances, such as upbringing, socialisation, and enculturation, and to become more connected with the self (Heminiak, 2005). Similarly, on some occasions spirituality is regarded as a connection with oneself (Chilly and Carlson, 2004) and as a process of uncovering one's true self, an authentic core within a person (Aupers and Houtman, 2006). Some may suggest that understanding spirituality as a journey within oneself contradicts its central idea of committing to transcendence, which is essentially a pursuit of experiences that surpass the earthly order of things (Benjamin and Looby, 1998). However, the previous chapter has indicated that transcendence may simply be a perception acquired upon individual contemplation of a specific experience. This proposes individual's willingness to integrate one's spiritual capacity to different parts of one's personality, which is explored in this chapter. While it has been established in the preceding chapter that some sports fans recognise transcendent experiences in sport, the present enquiry also elaborates on how this is aided by sports fandom being an activity that for some people allows a deeper connection with the self. The data revealed that there are different stages to this process, which starts with seeking a different environment, where one feels less adherent to certain norms posed by society and culture, and progresses into a personal realm, in which one feels more true to the self and more capable of expressing parts of one's personality that tend to be neglected under normal circumstances. This personal undertaking peaks at achieving a true connection with the self, which is a momentary feeling, when one's actions are being merely determined by the self.

The journey towards becoming connected with the self commences from reducing outside influences (Pecchenino, 2008), which translates into discharging feelings and emotions that are forced by societal constructs, cultural norms, and routine engagements. In sociological accounts of sports fandom, it has been noted that sport is capable of providing fans with cathartic experiences, meaning that a high level of emotional attachment to a sporting spectacle or a sports team may act as a catalyst for releasing unwanted emotions and reducing tensions (Cottingham, 2012). Conversely,

some viewpoints suggest that negative emotions and tensions may be generated due to a high team identification and vicarious involvement in sports spectating, in which case aggressive behaviour becomes a vehicle to rebuild a healthy emotional balance (Branscombe et al., 1992). However, watching sport can also be regarded as a stress reducing activity (Spreitzer and Snyder, 1983). Similarly, in the current investigation participants often described their activity as a way of releasing their emotions and built up tensions. For example, James suggested that an outcome of any basketball game, regardless of his supported team's performance, was a feeling of balance and a regained sense of calm:

For me it's this; in the beginning you run down and then this calmness comes even though the team has lost. But even so, there is this peak moment and then this sort of ease, and you are feeling balanced, calm, and then you come back home without any tensions. Of course, sometimes you feel sad. Probably, yes. Sometimes you can feel sad, but you don't cause any trouble <...>. It is just this place, where you can be yourself, do some chanting, shouting. You can release your emotions... And you wouldn't do that anywhere else like on the street or at home.

Similarly, Paul understood his involvement in football as a conscious effort to release emotions hypothesising that it was probably his job that increased the need for a weekly stress reduction, which he found in football:

So, I worked in finance. So, if you worked in a factory, let's say, you were a blacksmith; you could take a lump hammer and belt a piece of metal, couldn't you? It was a really good way of releasing emotions. A lot of people, I think, see football or a sport like football as a way to take out their emotions, to kind of almost dump the trash... It's a release, it's a time of your week, when you get to be with your friends, when you can let your guard down, you can be yourself <...>. It was a great way to release all that: the frustrations of the week or whatever that'd happened, it was a great way to spend time with your mates and get stuff off your shoulders.

These accounts refer to an emotional release that is specifically attached to a process of spectating a match and momentary emotional states elicited and generated through that

process. Thus, it would appear that sports fanship can be a coping mechanism employed regularly to regain emotional equilibrium. However, other participants revealed that 'release' was a foundation rather than an end result of fanship. In psychology-based investigations into sports fans motivation, 'escape' often emerges as an element inspiring people to engage in sport on the basis of distancing themselves from their daily routines and everyday experiences (Gencer et al., 2011). In some literature the notions of 'escape' and 'emotional release' are treated as overlapping, hence both can be accommodated under an umbrella term of 'diversion' (Funk et al., 2009). In the current investigation it appears that participants tended to see 'escapism' as an aspect of fanship that was wider and encompassing multiple elements, one of which was 'emotional release'. Luke, for instance, closely related the notion of escape to their group of fans all travelling together abroad to support the team:

Again, there are a few things, when the championship takes place abroad, it creates another factor which is that people who go there, they completely change their environment. I mean, there's a complete change in environment, and there is a total disconnect from everything, from days, weeks, months. People have such a good rest there. I mean; their minds can rest from all the routine stuff...

Luke also elaborated his narrative by indicating how a change in environment occurred, suggesting that it was a natural process, which did not require any artificially generated stimulus:

When a trip starts, there is this feeling, when in a few moments (if we're on a coach, for instance), there is this feeling that the whole coach just sort of recharge. So imagine we are now in the same place, where we always start our journey. Well, usually, unless we are flying out directly from Vilnius. And so once the coach leaves Vilnius, you can feel this aura, this feeling. Here you can see, how people say goodbye to their families, how they hug it out, but you can also feel that they are doing that in a rush. <...> But that happens naturally. And then, as I said, three minutes on the coach, I mean, who gets a beer, who has some lemonade or something else – the first toast and the trip starts and then all the constraints and obligations of some sort disappear, and you can really

sense that. And of course, usually over the course of the first evening people tend to relax regardless of where they are...

Liam elaborated on the idea of losing some of the constraints of one's lifestyle, suggesting that the change in environment provided a sense of indeterminacy, which is a motivational factor for some fans due to its capacity to provide adventurous experiences:

In that period of time whilst championships are taking place, you change people, change environment. Here we spin around in the same circles of friends, acquaintances, colleagues, your close friends, and here you go away really for two to three weeks with complete strangers. So, invariably it means that every day will be an adventure, because you don't know what it is to come which causes this big indefiniteness.

The observations of Liam agree with the claims that devoted fans have a tendency to detach from the boundaries of time and place in the context of travelling with their team (Agas, 2012), that causes changes in cognition, behaviours, and emotional states. This need for adventure may arise from dissatisfaction and boredom with their personal lives, and the possibilities that are offered by sports fandom evoking one's imagination and enabling people to temporarily forget about their troubles (Wann et al., 1999). Some researchers argue that due to the opportunities for 'emotional release' provided by fandom activity, there are long term benefits associated with involvement in sport, such as mental wellbeing (Wann et al., 2008; Funk et al., 2009). Similarly, in the preceding chapter, Adam's narrative suggested that his wellbeing was better because of football. The diversion that sports fans are seeking whether it is a weekly match attendance or a trip to a sports tournament is primarily mental as they are looking to experience something different as well as emotionally stimulating (Gencer et al., 2011), and in the pursuit of such experiences they are potentially able to sustain their mental wellbeing.

Although striving for mental wellbeing is a legitimate psychological explanation to sports fans' motives for their activity, participants tended to subscribe to a different terminology when elaborating on 'emotional release' and 'escapism'. For example,

Jason claimed that to him basketball fanship had become a part of life that was distinct and completely disconnected from everything he did on a day to day basis:

Well there are many small things, I say, there can be various things... I think that it is some sort of separate part of life. Perhaps, it only takes up five per cent of your life, but it is completely detached from the real life, I mean, things that I do every single day.

Ben shared the same understanding, suggesting that he was a different person when in the context of football subscribing firmly to the belief that football was a separate world, a reality that was distinct from his personal relationships. Therefore, in this social reality he looked and behaved differently:

I think they are very separate worlds, to the extent that I'm even called by a different name in the football world, and I think I am a different person for following football or watching football than I am with my family. I think, if some people or my family members or work colleagues saw me in the football world, they almost wouldn't recognise me. Seriously, because, I mean, I run my own business, I used to be a teacher, and I am married with kids. So if you suddenly present an image of this person with a football shirt waving, probably unshaven, in shorts and in the middle of somewhere, you know, "who's that? I recognise him".

It is clear that some respondents related to their activity on the basis of distinct reality, the underpinning reason for such viewpoints has not, however, been expressed. Interestingly, Jason elaborated his initial idea about basketball being a separate part of his life, suggesting that the paramount aspect of basketball fanship to him is that although it is only a small fraction of his life, it is his own world, where, he believes, he can have an impact:

Somehow they are perhaps separate things, they are those two sides to life that are basketball, and the other side is my family, my job... These are completely separate things <...>. Well, basketball is perhaps that part of life, where you are able to detach in a very real sense from your work, your family... It is a part that's entirely yours, and where you can change things.

Ascribing a high level of significance to sports fanship suggests a considerably high degree of emotional attachment that is felt towards an object of fandom (Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012). However, the crucial factor of this significance is that the separate reality of sport is regarded as private and personal, this has been addressed by a large segment of literature and previous empirical research surrounding sports fanship and a formation of social identity (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010; Cottingham, 2012). Moreover, it is often argued that sports fans choose to associate themselves with a successful team or an athlete consciously in order to better people's perceptions of them and to enhance their self-esteem (Gencer et al., 2011). However, in the conducted interviews, although opinions varied on the importance of winning, the predominant understanding appeared to be that whilst sporting victories provided peak emotional states, the process of being involved was a more prevalent motivational factor as indicated in the following quote by Ben:

I mean, I know some people now who find it difficult to go to work if Wednesday lose, cause they have to have to talk to other football fans, and they find it difficult, because they feel it personally, it's like an injury to them, it's like self-respect lost. I know this is gonna sound pompous, but I have probably grown away from that, probably matured away from the winning being that important. And I think as they get older, a lot of sports fans, football fans realise that their team ain't gonna win, even Brazil or Spain, your team isn't gonna win every single game, and so you'll probably learn like, you learn to get enjoyment from other things.

Reysen and Branscombe (2010) have identified a distinction between social and personal identity in sports fanship research, suggesting that while the former is focused on an individual's self-concept, the latter is concerned with values and meanings derived from the activity. Although the current investigation does not discount the social side of sports fanship, it appears that devoted fans' self-worth or self-concept is not necessarily affected by the supported team's performance. Moreover, analysing the following quote from Ben, it illustrates that the 'social' and 'private' in sports fanship can overlap:

I think it's very important to me, what people think of me in my community and that's why I got involved in football, cause it was a voice. So I think, my character, my personality, I brought to football, and football has helped me to express parts of my personality that I couldn't express anywhere else.

Although the social aspect of fanship seems to be prominent here, the private element is also apparent as the participant notes that through football he is able to express parts of himself which cannot be expressed elsewhere, suggesting that football provides him with a platform for self-expression. Koltko-Rivera (2006) underlines that self-actualisation is essentially finding a role in one's life, in which a person feels able to fulfil one's potential. As noted earlier by Jason, he understood basketball as a small part of his life where he believed he could make a difference by having an impact on the team's performance; hence it allowed him to engage in self-actualisation. Benjamin and Looby (1998) suggest that self-actualisation is not only a pursuit of development and personal growth; it is also a quest for spiritual wellness. The latter approach allows transferring sports fans' pursuit of diversion from the speculations on mental wellbeing to spiritual identity construction.

Understanding and actualising different identities is a gradual process of forming one's spiritual identity and enabling one to gain the sense of self, which encompasses all the diverse identities of the person (Pecchenino, 2008). Arguably, the concept of sports fanship being a separate world or an opportunity to gain awareness of unknown parts of one's personality suggests that involvement in sport can contribute to forming a full sense of self which, according to Pecchenino (2008), defines a person's spirituality. In other words, sports fanship may enable some individuals to uncover their true self and gain an authentic understanding of what is true and meaningful. This approach resembles the doctrine of self-spirituality, which claims that spirituality is internal, and it serves as an authentic self allowing one to behave without being influenced by society, culture, and history (Aupers and Houtman, 2006). Consequently, Paul related to these considerations, suggesting that being in a group of fans supporting the team in some moments he had felt able to be free of social controls and experience a connection with himself:

Because if we're talking about education: and as soon as you're born you are educated what not to do, and you're told all these controls: "these are the controls now, and this is right and wrong, that's kind of okay if you do that. But that's particularly wrong". And sometimes you can forget that if you're in the crowd and you fixed onto, you know, as a supporter, if you're part of the collective, sometimes not always but sometimes you can just forget, who you are supposed to be within your society, and you just become more at one with you even if you're part of the group of people...

On the one hand, the occurrence described here might be ascribed to high emotiveness elicited by the sports stadium environment, crowd, and the moment as well as compared with the notion of 'escape' in the sense that it enables one to blend into the crowd and act differently to what is expected due to their social role (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2011). On the other hand, 'escape' and a momentary resistance to social norms acquired through one's involvement in sport may be more of a vehicle rather than an end result; hence the concept fails to comprehensively theorise the latter account, in which the participant subscribes to feeling connected with the self. Operating mindlessly in accordance with the rules and constraints posed by society and culture limits one's capacity not only for self-expression but also for simply understanding the self, therefore, losing these controls means allowing one to grow as a person (Narknisorn, 2012). Similarly, Paul elaborated on his experience of losing the trappings of the society and culture, and suggested that in such occurrences he had felt enlightened by the set of circumstances enabling him to feel more connected to himself:

I think, only in the context that that's maybe supporting and the result and the circumstance has managed to enlighten you... <...> Well, I suppose I just think that the more enlightened you become, is you become more connected to yourself that's just probably what I believe...

Similarly to the participant's observation, some describe spirituality as the ability to surrender to a greater unknown reality (Mack, 1994). Such claims result in spirituality being understood within the terms of personal growth (Mack, 1994; Benjamin and Looby, 1998; Stanard et al., 2000). According to Helminiak (1996) psyche and spirit are the two parts of human mind, whose healthy relationship allows an individual to excel.

However, psyche sometimes restricts the spirit from being expressed by confining a person to a certain framework, which is constructed by a particular set of circumstances such as social roles, cultural values, and one's upbringing (Helminiak, 2005). However, being able to transcend these circumstances is not only an experience of personal growth but also a mark of spirituality (Helminiak, 2005). As revealed by the collected data some sports fans consciously sought to at least momentarily or temporarily untie themselves from societal and cultural norms, and the latter Paul's narrative provides an indication that such practices may result in sports fans being momentarily more aware of themselves; hence learning something new about themselves. Spirituality is widely acknowledged to be a private and personal experience, within which an individual feels closer to the self, as a number of spirituality definitions include either connection with the self or the notion of uncovering one's true self (Aupers and Houtman, 2006; Hyman and Handal, 2006). Although spirituality is essentially a private experience which is determined upon one's individual contemplation, spiritual self is constructed and enhanced in relation to others and the world rather than in isolation (Hedlund-de Witt, 2011).

This chapter has addressed the concepts established by previous enquires into sports fanship such as 'mental diversion', 'emotional release', and 'escape'. However, participants' narratives extend the current knowledge of sports fanship by suggesting that while engagement in sport can act as a stress releasing and emotions stimulating activity, for some sports fans it is a distinct part of life where they feel capable of expressing themselves as well as contributing to achieving a common goal. Therefore, it appears that the quest for mental diversion is actually a pursuit of a temporal relief from societal constraints and norms, and it creates an environment, where person's actions are more connected to his or her true self. Being aware of such experiences, which some participants were, is an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. However, it is crucial to understand that the self has to be open to embrace (and reflect on) new experiences in order to be able to continuously grow. That means that the self has to be considered in relation to others. Therefore, the following chapter addresses one's connection with others in a sports fanship context.

6. Connecting with Others

A heightened sense of community and facilitation of new social connections have been indicated as central elements of sports fandom by the previous studies (Wann et al., 2011). It has also been noted that community feeling is not necessarily or not merely enhanced by social relationships acquired within a group of sports fans as emotional connection with a fandom activity as well as a specific object of fandom can act as an enabling factor with regards to general feeling of connectedness (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Whilst the data was corroborative of such understandings, it proposed some new insights into fans' perspectives on the importance and meaningfulness of group affiliation elements in their experiences. The data ascribed to this category suggest that, in the context of national sports teams' supporters, nationalism and national pride become a common denominator, which provides shared meanings and values for fans to relate to and to be connected by. This social connectedness built on shared meanings translates to social cohesion and is understood by some sports fans as a form of faith. Participants also referred to close personal relationships gained through their involvement in sport which provided the conditions to experience a feeling of togetherness and subsequently enabled one to feel as a co-creator of collective energy.

Attending sports events and identifying with a particular sports team is indicative of a person's association with meanings and values that the team is believed to represent (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2011). Lock et al. (2012) identify that often sports fans select a team to support on the basis of its perceived positive influence on their social identity. This is based on a presumption that a self-concept of as sports fan is likely to be affected by their team's performances, for example, a win is seen as an enhancer of self-esteem (Gencer et al., 2011). However, as acknowledged in the preceding chapter, during the current investigation fans appeared to be able to sustain their self-concept as well as to be consistent in terms of their level of identification with the team regardless of their team's performance. Arguably, this occurs primarily as an emergence of shared meanings being built on a foundation that is both more significant and more stable than achievements. In the investigation conducted by Lock et al. (2011) on sports fans' identification with teams that were new and did not have history or achievements for the allegiance with them to be seen as beneficial, it was found that, in such case,

identification may occur primarily on the basis of team's origins. In the case of national sports teams, as appeared in this enquiry, team's origin is the key basis for team identification overriding well-established contributors such as star players (Lock et al., 2011) and becoming the prime value represented by the team as indicated by George in the following quote:

Because your will to win and your will for success to be there, I think... We're very forgiving, and because the shirt is the shirt, and eleven people actually wear it, and if different, if the different eleven turned up from the England Team who played last week and none of those lads would be playing the following week – don't matter... It's the country, isn't it?

Through identification with a particular team sports fanship can become a means to express various facets of one's identity such as professional, regional, ethnic, and national (Bernache-Assollant et al., 2011). Therefore, it is evident that symbols (e.g., outfits, flags, songs, and chants), aiding this expression are employed. According to Bernache-Assollant et al. (2011), in a sports stadium environment symbols in the form of objects and actions are exhibited as they enable groups of sports fans to transmit their ideas, beliefs, and identities to wider audiences. For example, while in the previous quote George highlighted that the main basis for his allegiance with the England National Football Team was his national identity; he delivered this message through a symbol of the national team shirt. However, sports fans employ symbols to not only communicate their identities but also to relate to other fans supporting the same team (Boyle, 2001; Xifra, 2008). Similarly, James indicated that he sees fans of the Lithuanian National Basketball team as like-minded people who connected to the same symbols, which encompass significant values and meanings:

Like-minded people are those people in our group, who, perhaps, paid their last little bit of money to go to the championships <...>. And, I think, that they've got that in their hearts: that flag, that national emblem, that anthem, that team <...>.

It appears in this quote that the national basketball team is perceived to be a symbol of the nation together with the national flag and national emblem, hence it is proposed that

national team supporters may connect to their sports teams in the same way they relate to their nations as well as that a sports team can for some people become a means to connect and to identify with their nation. Similarly, the notion of symbolic values has been elaborated by England National Football Team supporters, for example, Ben indicated why it was of a great importance to him that English flag was flown at the England football games as opposed to a British flag:

I passionately believe that England flag should be flown, you know, the Saint George's cross, and that football was uniquely English, and something England has given to the world, and that should be celebrated <...>.

Both presented narratives indicate that in the case of national team supporters, national identity transforms into a fan identity. Lock et al., (2011) have noted that fans tend to match their existing social identities when relating themselves to a sports team, which is even more evident among fans of national teams. According to Pinkus (2005), supporting a national team is a predictor of a heightened sense of national pride as well as an enhancement of national identification. Sports teams can be a catalyst for national identification as sport is capable of not only making national symbols and values more accessible, but also, participants believed, that sport provided them with an opportunity to contribute to their nations. Arguably, such views arise from what is defined by Pinkus (2006) as 'national promotion', which is known to be delivered by sport performances in a very expressive and enforcing manner. Consequently, sports fans are thought to perform rituals which exhibit their support to their team with an intent to encourage the players to perform better (Eastman and Riggs, 1994) and also to define themselves as members of a particular nation, which is an indispensable element of a sporting contest, and one that offers a visible and distinct representation of participating nations (Pinkus, 2005). This was a recurring opinion expressed in the interview data, suggesting that sports fans' motivation, when supporting a national team, is founded upon a belief that their role is contributory to their country's image. As indicated by George, football enabled him to deliver a positive message about his country and in that way co-create its identity:

We saw that in Montenegro last month, there's a pride in that flag at the minute, because they are still fresh and still independent, and they're still showing the world

that they matter. Well, England need that identity, I think, or I feel, they do, and that's what come down as a fan, wherever we are in the world I want to see that. It's not about wars; this is about us as a country and the identity. I want people to realise that, that St George's cross, that Union Jack, that three lions exemplify something good and brilliant about the people that are in it. That's me probably extenuating the positives of the country with all the crap that's going on in it, but you don't really wanna tell people about the crap... You wanna tell people about the good and leave a brilliant impression. I think that's what drives me to be an England fan, making sure people have a lasting impression that these guys, this country, you know, they've got pride. Not only they do great things, but they're passionate about it.

Whilst such perceived contributions may enable one to feel more connected with a nation as an entity, they may also make one feel a part of a nation as a cohesive group of individuals. Sport is often linked with an ability to enhance a general sense of community (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Some investigations show that sports fans tend to regard themselves as members of a larger community even though they do not physically belong to any fan clubs or similar organisations and do not have any interpersonal connections with other supporters (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). This is an important element in the context of national team fans as sport is able to enhance distinctiveness in national identity, subsequently elevating national pride and patriotism (Pinkus, 2005). As suggested by Garratt (2010), patriotism could be a factor enabling social cohesion as identifying with a nation or with what is understood to be a representative attribute of a nation heightens a sense of relatedness to others who subscribe (or are believed to subscribe) to the same identification. Respondents largely supported such theorisation, suggesting that their activity provided them with “that sense of community, which human beings need, which you probably don't get elsewhere” or saw elements of tribalism in their activity, others claimed that it enables one to “feel a connection with your nation” as “the whole country are behind” supporting the team and are “united by the common idea, common goal”. Therefore, the data analysis recognised that such binding and relational facets ascribed to a fanship activity as well as an emotional affiliation directed to one's community or nation, when involved in fanship, may be indicative of a high level of perceived social cohesion.

Social cohesion is often linked with civil religion which, according to Xifra (2008), comes from an understanding of religion as a societal mechanism providing common meanings and values for people to relate to and to consequently feel more a part of a larger unit such as a community or a nation. Interviewed fans acquired common meanings and values from their national identities. Interestingly, nationalism has been regarded as a form of civil religion due to its capacity to convey a collection of symbols and beliefs that are indicative of a particular national identity (Santiago, 2009). Arguably, sport can be a part of this equation as it is not only regarded as a form of secular religion (Forney, 2007; Xifra, 2008) but also understood as an important contributor to a heightened sense of nationalism (Pinkus, 2005). Although within the context of this study, it largely appeared that the combination of sport and nationalism provided a sense of social cohesion among participants, some interviewees went further in echoing the literature regarding feelings of connectedness as a basic element of any religious expression. Jason explained that, in his opinion, basketball in Lithuania was often anecdotally regarded as a form of religion due to its ability to unite the nation in a way that traditional forms of religion are incapable of doing:

That came from perhaps that this elementary religion, I don't know precisely what it is Catholicism, Christianity, I don't really understand these things, but I feel it is when people are united by something. I see religion like that, when people are being united. Therefore, I think that because in Lithuania basketball is watched by everybody, basketball unites the whole nation, you can say that. I think that a larger part of the nation is united by basketball than by a particular religion <...>. Therefore, I feel that basketball is the first religion, because it unites people, exactly, basketball unites people...

This quote clearly recognises basketball as a unifying element, capable of uniting a large segment of the nation and, whilst religion was chosen as a term defining this phenomenon, arguably the participant's view only relates to religion at the level of its social functionality. Such an approach resembles some of the accounts of civil religion but is not comparative to traditional forms of religion which, according to Zinnbauer et al. (1999), as well as encompassing social, communal, and institutional aspects, are also faced (and related to) through personal and private accounts. In other words these functional aspects of religion do not conform to spiritual elements of religion.

Spirituality, while still concerned with an individual's connection with others (Saroglou and Munoz-Garcia, 2008), is an experience involving an individual's inner self (Aupers and Houtman, 2006). However, as noted earlier, it is paramount in spiritual accounts to consider the self in relation to others (Hedlund-de Witt, 2011) as experiences that are shared with others may offer opportunities for reflections upon which the self can develop and thrive. Although the interview data were rich in various references to a general sense of collectiveness and connectedness, fans from both national backgrounds also spoke about close personal relationships that they had acquired through their prolonged involvement in either football or basketball fanship. As previous enquires into sports fans acknowledge, sport fanship is a way of creating and nurturing social connections (Wann et al., 2011). The present investigation found that fans value their friendships gained within the fanship environment as well as (in some cases) deeming them to be different from the relationships outside fanship as illustrated in the following quote by Jonathan:

But friendships really differ, it's like camaraderie, it's like when you go abroad, you're not a gang, cause gang is a wrong word, you're like a group of people who are together. You look out for each other. If one of you was pick-pocketed, we'd all tip in our pockets and make sure that the guy was okay...

Jonathan's observation identifies a strong connection and a level of care that fans feel towards each other as well as openly suggests that friendships within this group of fans are different. Although it does not explain what are the main points of distinction between friendships created through involvement in football fanship and those established in other environments, Luke claims that there is a different level of trust between the people who support the same sports team, which is not as easily accessible in other paths of life:

I've gained quite a few really good friends and acquaintances through basketball <...>. I mean, it is a different level of trust that you have with other fans, with who you pull together in a difficult situation related to basketball. I feel like it's usually the case that I happen to have good relationships with people from the world of basketball.

Other fans also indicated that they felt most comfortable among their friends from sports environments. For example, George explained that he saw his group of football fans as a family with their specific socialisation that may not be understood by people outside of their group:

We are a bit odd, but there's a specific, there's a big banter about us, you know, we're so comfortable in each other's company that we spend so much time together, and the break we get from our lives in this little cocoon. We just end up being just like a family together.

Improved social skills are believed to be a consequent factor of involvement in sport (Appelbaum et al., 2012). However, participants' accounts extended this idea suggesting that being a sports fan may provide one with an opportunity to meet like-minded people and create significant personal relationships. Socialisation acquired through sports fanship has been acknowledged as beneficial to one's psycho-social wellbeing (Wann et al., 2011). It is suggested that the personal connections that sports fans have within a group of fans may enhance their emotional connection with the crowd as a collection of people supporting the same team. The distinction that could be drawn between this connection and social cohesion is that social cohesion is a perceived level of connectedness with others, which is generated through collectively understood symbols and values (Xifra, 2008), whereas emotional connection or this instant feeling of togetherness is an immediate and more impactful sense of identifying with a collectively expressed emotion. As suggested by the participants, the feeling of togetherness is a momentarily felt "real bond with people" or a feeling that "you've got synergy with everyone around; everybody's thinking the same way". That can be defined in terms of collective effervescence, which is also understood as momentary sense of collective emotional energy enhanced by symbolic meanings and group solidarity (Cottingham, 2012). Similarly to transcendent experiences, collective effervescence also requires a degree of self-awareness and reflection (Cottingham, 2012). Martin exhibited these attributes by not only acknowledging a state of shared emotions but also defining it as the spirit of basketball:

The spirit of basketball is, I mean, this similar or the same state, I mean, emotional state, which is experienced by all the people around you and not necessarily around who are watching the same match and rooting for the same team at the same time. I

mean, that emotional state creates the spirit, I think. That spirit is like this knowing that a person next to you is as happy as you are about the points that have just been scored or as sad as you are about the shot that has just been missed. In that sense, it is this common inter-human communication method.

In his explanation Ben also included symbolic meanings such as ‘wearing the same shirt’ as well as underlined how this emotional state could be elicited by an outstanding team’s performance and experienced under the circumstance of winning:

It’s like celebration and passion, and enthusiasm, and yeah you know they’ve just done something fantastic, and the people who have done something fantastic were the players on the pitch, but there was this like shouting of emotion that you can’t get on the television, you have to be there, you have to all be together, you have to all be wearing the same shirt to sort of experience that. So you have to be part of a group, a gang, a community to sort of have that same shared emotion.

An important aspect of sports fanship highlighted in the preceding quote by Ben is that a sports spectacle is a co-creator of an emotional togetherness as the achievement of the supported team suddenly becomes the success and the source of positive emotions for all their fans. Similarly, sports fans tend to be described as active seekers of vicarious achievements, understanding their team’s success as their own accomplishment (McDonald et al., 2002; Wu et al., 2012). This tends to be defined as a motivational factor for fans’ engagement as they are deemed to seek positive emotional gains from their experiences (McDonald et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2009). However, as noted earlier, some claim that fans’ engagement in rituals, when cheering on their team and explicitly declaring their allegiance, may enhance their team’s performance (Eastman and Riggs, 1994). Participants also expressed an understanding that rather than being vicarious partakers, they were direct contributors to their team’s performance, and, as illustrated by George, athletes may also be seen to agree with their contributory role:

We sang a passionate ‘Great Escape’, cause it can be a bit fluffy ‘Great Escape’ at times, but it was pure passion from the minute Beckham got sent off to the minute they walked out of the ground, and those players lived and breathed, every time we needed to step in volume wise as fans, we found another notch, we got to ten, we went to eleven and twelve. And them lads gave everything there, absolutely everything, and

camaraderie after the game then they came over... You know, you could see there was that immense bond between fan and player, because it meant to them what it meant to the fans and there was a mutual: "thanks for what you've done on the pitch" and it was, "thanks for that you've done off it, cause it helped us"... So yeah, that's what it is...

Furthermore, Adam elaborated that by being together and visibly supporting their team fans have a capacity to inspire the players:

Everybody's been together, we've all supported them, generated it all, and that's about it really, I think. That's the main thing everybody's been together, we've blown them out of the water. We inspired the players.

As identified here, on some occasions respondents felt it necessary to relate their perceived input in the team's performance with fans being emotionally united, suggesting that it was a collection of energies that was able to have an impact on the course or an outcome of a match. While in the context of team dynamics in sport and spirituality that would be understood as an act of selflessness, within which an individual becomes a part of an entity (Miller, 2008). As briefly underlined in the preceding chapter, the process of self-actualisation also requires understanding the self in relation to others or to a greater perspective; hence this surrendering to a collectively shared emotion illustrates a pursuit of a cause beyond the self, which indicates an event of self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). According to Koltko-Rivera (2006), self-transcendence is the highest degree of self-actualisation exceeding the boundaries of self-fulfilment and engaging an individual self in aiding and co-operating with others. The following quote by Paul explains how this act of surrendering the self and co-operating with others occurs:

Well, I don't know really, I think when fans are together, maybe as a collection of energy, you know. If you believe in energies, and everyone has body energy, if you put that collective together, then maybe it becomes something slightly different, maybe it transforms into something slightly different <...>. On occasion, a group of people can be like a dynamo, like a pack of batteries and they can produce something from the stand that is slightly different, something, some form of energy that maybe can be translated onto the field to do something else, to produce something else.

This instance extends the earlier introduced concept of the self as well as suggests that for some sports fans sport is not only capable of providing them with a sense of community and an opportunity to acquire close personal relationships with like-minded people (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010), but also, on some occasions, allows an individual to connect with others on a subconscious emotional level and produce collective energy which would transcend onto the field of play. Such events address the social side of fanship and elevate it to the spiritual milieu, suggesting that the latter collective emotional experiences are deeply contemplated and engaged in by some sports fans on a very personal level.

The present chapter has discussed how, in the case of national sports team's supporters, common national symbols and values can be showcased by a sports team and consequently enhance a sense of connectedness among people. Although it has appeared that this element of sports fanship may be related to religion (which has been particularly prominent in the Lithuanian context), this association is based on a single aspect of religion, i.e., facilitation of social cohesion. However, participants' narratives also addressed a momentary connection that could occur with other fans in the crowd and generate a type of collective energy. This has been pointed out as a potentially spiritual happening as it involves an individual submitting oneself to a collective endeavour in a belief that it can positively influence the performance of the supported team. Therefore, the following chapter contemplates how fanship may allow one to fully actualise the self as it appears that through fanship one not only engages with others but also do that purposely and with a clear direction.

7. Connecting with the World

Fans are often described as loyal admirers of the object of their fandom (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Consequently, loyalty tends to be one of the traits defining sports fans as well as distinguishing them from spectators (Reysen and Branscombe, 2010). Empirical enquiries into sports fans which feature loyalty are mostly focused on regular match attendance, purchasing team related merchandise, and generally being committed to the brand of one's supported team (Bee and Havitz, 2010). Although these behaviours underline loyal consumption, and studying them benefits the understanding of sports fans' consumption patterns, according to Chun et al. (2004), sports fans are meaning-seeking individuals whose activity is not confined to common consumption behaviours. In support of that, it has emerged in the present investigation that fan loyalty is not merely a consumption behaviour advocated through a high level of psychological connection with a sports team. Participants' narratives indicated that sports fans' loyalty and commitment may be based on the belief that the encouragement and support they provide have a real value to their teams' performances. This conviction seemed to have been embedded in the lives of some of the participants who acknowledged it as their purpose, which allowed them to feel happy in their lives.

Data revealed that sports fans' should not only be defined regarding their financial commitment as participants did not associate their loyalty and commitment felt towards the supported teams to the money spent on their fanship activity but rather dwelled on being committed to encouraging and cheering their teams on even at times when results seemed to be hopeless. Terms such as belief, faith, trust, and miracle featured heavily in participants' narratives, when explaining such occasions. Due to this (and similar terminology employed in the context of sports fanship) religious comparisons arise (Wann et al., 2001). For example, Jason made a reference to an anecdotal comparison between religion and basketball common to the Lithuanian context, suggesting that his commitment and resistance came from understanding basketball as his basic faith:

Well, because some say that it's our second faith. It isn't second for us, basketball is our first faith, and that's why I work the same way from the start to the finish in matches, regardless of how the team is playing. Of course, regardless. The team playing well, I mean, whatever that is a great three-pointer or a nice combination and a dunk

just fires you up even more. Well, I can imagine if it is three, five minutes left in the fourth quarter, trailing by twenty points, I imagine, that what's only left to say, "thank you" to the team and do some less intense chatting, but I really can't remember that it has ever happened, I mean, that you could obviously see that.

Referring to the notion of the second faith, which was indicated in the previous chapter in regards to civil religion, social cohesion, and common values (and meanings that sports fans, in this particular case, Lithuanian basketball fans relate to) this account suggests that fans' commitment is primarily based on their identification with the team regarding specific values and meanings that the team is believed to represent. While in the previous chapter the meanings of national symbols have emerged as representatives of a common set of beliefs, committing to the team also appeared to be a way to demonstrate loyalty to those beliefs. Moreover, it seems that the most accessible way to manifest this commitment was through symbols, for instance, flags or rituals such as chanting. In the following extract Liam described what it meant to take a national flag down before a basketball match had finished even though there was no logical basis to be expecting a victory:

Probably a boy around twelve years old and you understand it is one and a half minute on a clock. We're losing and that's it! I see him already taking his flag down. "God" – I thought – "I would kill him", you know. It was this feeling that I understand he is a child, but let's not give up, and he's already ready to go home taking his flag down as if it's not going to happen. And it was this sort of emotion that, I mean, I understood he was a child, that he didn't get it, that he had his own assumptions, he was thinking that the team was going to lose. But no, let's not give up, we can't do that, you know, perhaps, it's from this that I understand that there's probably no chance, but you do only pack up (that's what we think) only after a match has finished. I mean, there's gonna be enough time for you to get those flags down and pack up. You are going to do this once the match has finished, but let's not capitulate now, let's not surrender – so that was this emotion when that child gave up that you want to tell him, "what are you doing?" even though you do understand that that's the end <...>.

Interestingly, Liam here revealed how he had felt taken over by emotions which not only prompted high emotional attachment to the team and to the spectacle but also a

high level of identification, because when the team was facing a defeat he stayed committed to them. Such cognitive and behavioural patterns in sports fanship literature are ascribed to fans who possess high levels of team identification, arguing that low levels of identification result in CORFing (cutting off reflected failure), meaning that such type of fans will aim to dissociate from their teams after defeats and poor performances in order to protect their identity and control a level of self-esteem (Campbell et al., 2004; Kwon et al., 2008; Bernache-Assollant et al., 2011). However, in cases of a high degree of loyalty and identification, fans engage in a set of attitudes and behaviours known as BIRFing (basking in spite of reflected failure), which recognise the type of reaction to a defeat that does not involve an attempt to disassociate from the team and all what it represents but rather sustains one's connection and high levels of loyalty (Campbell et al., 2004). Although sports marketers suggest that such behaviours and attitudes are engaged in hoping for rewards (Campbell et al., 2004), participants' narratives advocate that such consistency in attitudes is primarily related to a strong association with the supported team. In the existing research concerning sports fans a sense of relatedness to a sports team is regarded as team identification (Wann et al., 2001). This concept is understood as a fan's psychological connection with a team as well as the degree to which fans see the supported team as an extension of their own identity (Wann et al., 2001). Therefore, unwavering loyalty, exhibited by participants in this investigation, may be ascribed to high levels of team identification which is indicated in the following quote by Liam:

Really, at that time you feel, you know, like you are a part of the team. And, yes, it is fair to say that you feel like the sixth player. So, yes, there are five players playing on the court officially, but, in the actual fact, there are six players playing.

This extract indicated Liam's allegiance to his national basketball team and suggested that he felt as a part of the team. According to Lock et al. (2012) team identification is a gradual process and hence can be conceptualized through Psychological Continuum Model (PCM). PCM recognises allegiance as the highest level of psychological connection one can have with a sports team (Funk and James, 2001). The term 'allegiance' has been borrowed from consumer behaviour research, and within the sports consumption context is said to represent fans who are persistent in their attitudes towards their team, resistant to change even when conflicting information is

encountered, biased in their cognition towards the team, and exhibiting patterned behaviours concerning the object of their fandom (Funk and James, 2001). Interviewed participants were loyal supporters of their teams and engaged in routine practices towards them, and they felt a strong association with their teams, which was built primarily through a national set of values. However, when asked about their continuing support to their teams specifically at times when the team's performance did not elicit positive emotions, most participants were philosophical about it referring to highs and lows in sport and in life as well as noting the importance of having a generally positive outlook.

Positive moods are said to be elicited by various leisure activities including belonging to a sports club (Hills and Argyle, 1998). It has also been established that whilst a large number of leisure activities are capable of enhancing positive moods, only a membership of sports group out of investigated categories appeared to result in an overall happiness (Hills and Argyle, 1998). Although this study focused on sport groups, whose members engaged in physical exercise rather than in a merely spectating role, the points of attachment can still be seen in the notion of belonging, as discussed in the preceding chapter it is a critical element to sports fanship together with relaxation, which could be related to the element of 'escape' addressed in Chapter 5. Moreover, as suggested by Luke, positive outlook within his group of basketball supporters was exactly the reason for his motivation in terms of continuing his involvement in sports fanship:

"He did this, and he did that, didn't make a shot" and similar... In our group, it happens very rarely unless they did something so stupid that... But in principal critique in our group doesn't happen, and that drives me. There are so many negative aspects, emotions in Lithuania, in particular, and in life generally, you know, in the world you get that negativity, so this allows you to refresh yourself; I'd say to listen to some good news.

Luke's observation again indicated high levels of commitment and loyalty to the team, suggesting that critique towards the players and the team is practically non-existent in his group of Lithuanian National Basketball Team supporters. However, more importantly the narrative proposed that being a fan may have its inherent emotional

benefits. Although similar observations have been made in previous research (e.g., McDonald et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2009), these have been primarily utilised to advocate fan loyalty and commitment to a supported sports team or an athlete. Furthermore, previous investigations tend to associate perceived emotional benefits of sports fandom to instances of winning (Gantz et al., 2006). However, the preceding extract from the interview with Luke suggested that elicitation of positive moods occurs in sports fandom context regardless of the team's performance. Similarly, Ben provided an opinion which negates sport being entertainment and winning being the most important thing and proposes that being a fan is about being loyal, committed, and passionate, and that disappointments in sport are always followed by celebrations:

The reality is, sport, football isn't entertainment and is not about the winning, it's about this community, it's about this commitment, that passion, and it's about loyalty, it's about those intermittent periods of celebration, I mean, if you get relegated and you come back up – it's a celebration, even if it's only to the Championship – it's a celebration.

Similar views on highs and lows in sport were expressed by the majority of participants supporting the idea identified earlier that whilst for fans defeats were not necessarily easy to experience, their motivation and positive emotions acquired through their activity were not merely based on that. Interviewed football and basketball fans tended to see themselves as active partakers of a sports competition, who engage in certain behaviours and practices for a purpose:

The whole point is encouraging and inspiring, and being positive is the whole thing. Being positive regardless, cause we had people <...>, who weren't as positive as they should be and they don't last, they just don't, they just don't get it, because you can't do what we do unless you're a positive person and they've just drifted off. They don't get don't get why, they are not driven, because they haven't got the positivity that's needed so they just drift away. <...> they have to get what it's all about, about encouragement, about support, about yeah. There's a guy <...> that feel like I have to explain that to him now, and I'm thinking at the same time if I'm having to explain this to him, he doesn't really get it, you know, because he'll shout something that's negative about a player and we don't do it, we just don't do that <...>.

This conceptualisation about encouragement developed by Adam quite explicitly underlines why belonging to a group of football fans entails more than just the pursuit of positive emotions and rewards based on exhibited loyalty. The latter quote suggested that sports fanship is to a degree about meeting like-minded people, who not only share the same positive outlook (the expressions of which are captured by sport) but also have a shared purpose in the context of sport. As proposed in Chapter 4, sports fanship may encapsulate commitment to transcendence as the participant accounts revealed their conscious pursuit for pleasurable experiences. According to Helminiak (2005), conscious engagement in practices and behaviours that are thought to instigate transcendent experiences has a spiritual dimension. The activity of inspiring and encouraging the supported team, addressed by Adam in the preceding quote, could indeed represent one of those practices that sports fans commit to seeking to experience transcendence. In support of that, George indicated that the purpose of his role as a football fan contributing towards creating a positive atmosphere for athletes:

Yeah, I'm a great believer that if you want somebody to achieve, you've got to help them achieve. And I don't think that any environment that's negative will help anyone achieve anything other than a negative result. I don't care, what it is, whether it's football or work, if the environment is positive and people are comfortable, and they know they gonna be encouraged, and they can try something without fear, they'll be better than a person who's nervous about making a mistake... So, I think, positive atmosphere is absolutely vital anywhere, and atmosphere can be one-on-one or it could be eleven people with hundred thousand. It doesn't matter...

It not only appears that loyal sports fans seek positive emotions, but they see themselves as generators of such emotions, hence they are active participants of a sporting contest, whose role is to support and encourage their team. Furthermore, George's narrative proposed that fans' contribution to a sports competition could encompass concern for others as he voiced his belief in helping others to succeed. Although it seems to be a simple proposition to advocate behaviours of BIRFing and a consistency in the exhibited levels of loyalty, Benjamin and Looby (1998) suggest that concern for others is a mark of self-actualisation. As identified in Chapter 5, some interviewed fans viewed their activity as a part of their lives, where they are able to make a difference and by doing so realise themselves. Based on that, it was noted that sports fanship for

some people may indeed become a platform for self-actualisation (McDonald et al., 2002). Similarly, Ben (when asked to define football in his life) suggested that: “It’s not a hobby because it’s more of a calling; it is more of a vocation”. This statement quite representatively illustrated how the interviewed fans saw their engagement in sport as the majority of them highlighted that they believed (or as some expressed, would have liked to believe) that their involvement, was truly beneficial to the supported team and could indeed enhance their team’s performance. As suggested by Luke, this belief was his motivation to support Lithuanian National Basketball Team:

You go there and you root, and you feel that you are helping them to carry that burden on their shoulders. If I didn’t feel that way... Here the pressure could be put, if I didn’t feel personally that what I do helps the team, I wouldn’t have such motivation.

Jason claimed that there is a symbiotic relationship between the team and the supporters, suggesting that one inspires the other at certain points of the match:

Well, there is a mutual inspiration, we do inspire the team, we spur them on at certain points in a match, try to chant more intensively... In any way, they are inspired. I mean, when you are supported, and when you are not – it makes a big difference. That’s why they say that it’s best to play at home, and we are trying to create a home atmosphere even though the team plays away, when we are away with the national team. I think that we do inspire them. That’s how I see it. And as far as the players go, they do, of course, inspire us very much <...>.

Specifically here Jason refers to creating a ‘home’ atmosphere at all times even when the team plays away, which indicates the difference between playing home and away matches. Although there is a paucity of research concerning crowd support in sporting competitions, home advantage theories tend to consider this element as one of the factors why some sports teams perform better at home (Carron et al., 2005; Pollard, 2006). However, these investigations are mainly concerned with crowd size, density, and noise, and their results do not provide any common consensus as to whether crowd support can play a significant role in a team’s performance (Carron et al., 2005). It appears as though there is no common pattern to crowd support being effective, and it is a factor within home advantage theories that is largely dependent on situation, specific sport, and, on some occasions, stadium environment (Carron et al., 2005). On the other

hand, Eastman and Riggs (1994) claim that players are thought to make a greater effort when feeling a genuine support from fans.

Despite these various views on crowd support, for interviewed fans the effectiveness of their input appeared to be a matter of belief that their chants, their songs, and all the different rituals they engaged in (and in general their presence and genuine encouragement) were able to materialise into something that allowed the supported team to play better. For example, Adam noted that this belief (which had evolved into his philosophy in life) was embedded in him by his father. As a boy playing football at school he recalled that his father's visible and loud support helped to turn some matches around:

So all he was trying to achieve. And he would encourage me, and he was a big believer support helping. So at the football team, he speaks of the... When I was a kid, football team at school, he came down one time, and we were losing, when he got there, and he started shouting and cheering, and we turned it around and won. So, he says, that's because of the support that happened. So whether it's a bit of that... Well, it must have been. And I do believe that, well, in anything in life if you're encouraged rather than just left to wander, you'd do better than if you're not <...>.

Similarly, George referred to crowd support in football using analogies from other life situations which indicated a philosophical outlook on his role as a fan as well as a bigger idea and purpose behind his fanship activity:

I think what they are, they are representing whatever they are representing if they've got twenty odd thousand people, fifty, sixty, three thousand people cheering their move in a positive way, it can only help them. It's like anything in life when a child starting to learn to walk, you don't worry about falling downs, do you? You pick them up and start again... You encourage them to take that nervous step to a firm step, to this step, and then the joy, and then they run and fall, you know. I think, that's the same in football as human beings you encourage the positives and you get more out of somebody, cause guess what we all would be crawling about as a race if our parents didn't say don't be daft, brush yourself and start again... We wouldn't walk, because we would be frightened of the fall, so we'd invariably crawl... But we don't, we walk, don't we,

because you do get encouraged, and that's nature. Any animal gets a nudge and a wink and a kick-up the ass to get walking. Alright, as human beings we take longer than an elephant to walk or whatever animal, but that's about nurture, giving somebody the confidence to do something that seems absolutely impossible so from us being three month-old to a year-old look at the development, how quick we develop that isn't for anything other than encouragement and a nudge and a kick. So positive energy and positive thought brings best out of people...

The latter Adam and George's narratives indicated that their involvement in sport related to other paths of life as through sport they contemplated how important encouragement is in life. According to Helminiak (2005), reflecting and interpreting encountered experiences in life is the central attribute of the human spirit. Furthermore, as recognised earlier, fans' commitment to encourage and inspire their teams did not only exhibit a concern for others but also indicated their conscious pursuit of self-actualisation and transcendence. Most importantly, while fan loyalty is often ascribed to a high level of team identification (e.g., Bee and Havitz, 2010), participant narratives in the present study extended this understanding, suggesting that it is not only a team or a sport that sports fans connect to, but it is also the activity itself, which provides some with an opportunity to achieve wellbeing in their lives, as indicated by Adam, in the following quote:

For me, it sounds a bit sad, but it's everything. It's what; it's what I live for really. Yeah without it, I can't imagine my life without it at all, you know. It's like I said about kids, I'm married, but obviously my wife's quite important, but yeah, yeah, is just about everything <...>. Well, it's the bigger purpose definitely, yeah I get out of it satisfaction by encouraging the others, but, I think, the purpose is to, job in itself, if you like If it's a job, it is to encourage the others. So you get a bit of... The purpose is to generate support and encourage others – that's the job that happens. I get the wellbeing (is generated from that) and everybody's happy. If that doesn't happen, you get a bit down.

Adam noted that football had become the central part of his life ensuring his wellbeing. The key aspect addressed in his narrative was that wellbeing to him was related to the purpose of encouraging others. That is important, because it suggests that the participant

here refers to eudaimonic rather than hedonic wellbeing. According to Van Dierondock and Mohan (2006), while hedonic wellbeing represents a mere attainment of pleasurable experiences, eudaimonic happiness is acquired through having a purpose and a clear direction in life. Participant narratives revealed that sports fanship could be a source of eudaimonic wellbeing for some people as it provided them with a purpose of encouraging and inspiring others to do better. While some may argue that this purpose is only relevant to fanship environment and has no bearing on fans' everyday lives, the pervasiveness of this inclination to help others achieve has been noted in a number of participants' accounts. Furthermore, eudaimonic wellbeing, according to Ho and Ho (2007) is associated with spirituality on the basis of personal growth and a feeling of self-fulfilment achieved through having a purpose and actualising oneself through achievement.

The present chapter has addressed participant narratives indicating their high levels of loyalty and commitment. It has been noted that whilst existing sports fanship literature and research tend to focus on loyalty to the team, in this investigation it has emerged that fans are also loyal and committed to their activity. This commitment is, however, not necessarily instigated by seeking emotional benefits such as pleasurable experiences presented by the supported team's successes. Participants' narratives suggested that regardless of their team's performance they were able to obtain emotional benefits from their experiences, because they approached fanship as a purposeful act, which enabled them to sustain a high level of commitment to their teams and the activity itself at all times. The key purpose of both football and basketball fanship appeared to be encouraging the supported teams to perform better. In some cases, the purpose of encouraging others to achieve transcended to other spheres of life, proposing that sports fanship may be a source of contemplation for some. It has also emerged from the data that having this purpose and conviction relate to fans' overall wellbeing. A spiritual dimension has been indicated in such accounts as eudaimonic wellbeing, exhibited by some respondents, is dependent on an individual having a purpose and being engaged in self-actualisation as well as contemplating a greater perspective in life.

8. Conclusion

Drawing on existing literature in the area, the present study has aimed to elaborate the current understanding of sports fanship by delving deeper into fans' experiences and interpreting them in the context of spirituality. The relationship between sports fanship and spirituality was based on the premise of the emergence of new alternative spiritual paths, the connection between sport and spirituality on an athletic basis, and overlooked functions of sports fanship, such as a platform for self-actualisation and a source of wellbeing. Although the elements of sports fanship were discovered by previous studies employing correlational analysis, in the context of a phenomenological outlook adopted in this enquiry, they were not discarded but rather pragmatically accepted as a premise for investigating sports fanship with a specific focus on human experiences. Phenomenological interviews conducted with English football and Lithuanian basketball fans not only enabled to understand how sports supporters connect to their activity and their experiences on a personal level, but also acquired an insight into cultural attributes and the effects they might have on that connection. Approaching these experiences with spirituality as a frame of reference has elaborated the notions of self-actualisation and wellbeing in sports fanship context, and surpassed anecdotal comparisons between sports fanship and religion.

Spirituality was considered from a psychological point of view and regarded in this enquiry as an integral human ability to reflect on former experiences and by doing so transcend one's prior understandings of (and former reflections on) the self. It has been argued that a common understanding of spirituality as a connection with the sacred that can occur either inside or outside institutional religion is primarily built on the Judeo-Christian tradition, discounting, for example, Buddhism as a religion or spiritual path as it does not have a divine figure (Van Dierendonck and Mohan, 2006). While this conceptualisation acknowledges that spirituality could be experienced through a religious path, it has emphasised that human spirit is not something that a person chooses to acquire or not, but it is rather a part of a human mind, which, if nurtured, can lead to personal growth (Helminiak, 1996). This occurs through harmoniously engaging human psyche and spirit in the process of reflection (Helminiak, 2008), which is essentially uncovering one's true self (Aupers and Houtman, 2006). However, this connection with the self occurs through encountering and reflecting on different

experiences and transcending the former frame of reference (Benjamin and Looby, 1998). Therefore, the present study suggests that spirituality is indeed a heightened level of self-awareness, which allows one to recognise spiritual essences in ordinary human experiences.

The interview data revealed that sports fans' experiences related to the understanding of spirituality on a number of levels such as connection with transcendence, connection with the self, connection with others, and connection with the world. However, all of these aspects appeared to work cohesively in providing an in-depth account of sports fans experiences. In line with previous fanship research (e.g., Funk et al., 2012), it appeared that fans were motivated by the pleasurable experiences, which they gained through their activity. Nevertheless, while sports fanship has been known to encompass positive emotions, the study reveals that on some occasions emotional engagement of sports fans is so intense that it is able to elevate fans and transcend their former state of being. Moreover, sports fans continuous involvement in their activity appeared to be determined by these instances as interviewed supporters expressed a deep commitment to strive for such experiences. Consequently, sports fanship may become for some a means of personal growth achieved through committing to transcendence, which is a conscious pursuit of experiences that surpass one's former state (Helminiak, 2005). This identifies sports fanship as a purposeful act, which one engages in to connect with a greater perspective in life. Similarly, for some participants their involvement in sport meant a purpose in life which they committed to through their loyalty to the team and their role as supporters, which capacitated them to feel as actual contributors to the team's results elaborating the understanding of vicarious achievement as a common attribute of sports fans motivational profiles (e.g., McDonald et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2009). Sports fanship as a purpose in life enhanced the position that sports supporters sought transcendence and personal growth rather than a mere satisfaction of pleasurable experiences. Therefore it was suggested that sports fanship was able to be a source of eudaimonic wellbeing. Such wellbeing is concerned with having a direction and meaning in life and is, therefore, defined as spiritual (Van Dierendonck and Mohan, 2006; Ho and Ho, 2007).

According to Van Dierendonck and Mohan (2006), the main aspect of eudaimonic wellbeing is a greater awareness of inner self. ‘Connection with the self’ emerged as one of the data categories, within which it appeared that sports fanship not only enables one to escape temporarily from the boredom of their daily life and to release built-up tensions, when emotionally immersing oneself in a sporting spectacle (e.g., Wann et al., 2008; Funk et al., 2009; Gencer et al., 2011), but also that the different environment and circumstances of sporting competition allow some fans to express themselves and act more in accordance with their true self. The latter was found to capture sports fanship as a spiritual experience due to it being able to provide some sport supporters with a greater connection with their true self. However, neither spirituality nor sports fanship is encountered in isolation. Although sports fanship creates an environment (which similarly to spirituality) is able to transcend someone’s upbringing, enculturation, and socialisation (Helminiak, 2005), within this medium the self is still surrounded by others; hence should not be considered in isolation. ‘Others’, in a sense of other sports fans, appeared to be a comprehensive part of sports fanship. Participants’ narratives revealed that fans deeply contemplate their connection with others and see their fellow supporters as like-minded people who have similar values and beliefs. This finding was in a sense corroborative with previous investigations into sports fans that determined sports fanship as a medium through which social connections can be created and maintained (e.g., McDonald et al., 2002; Armstrong, 2008; Koo and Hardin, 2008; Funk et al., 2009; Lock et al., 2011). However, some participants exhibited a level of empathy which could have been ascribed to higher levels of spirituality in a sense that spirituality being highly concerned with contemplation and reflection allowed one to better understand others (Van Dierendonck and Mohan, 2006). Furthermore, this deeper connection with others was seen to grow to a subconscious awareness of a collective energy which was generated on some occasions of a sporting contest and transferred onto the field of play. This finding suggests that self-awareness, which is a process generated by the inner self, and which precipitates transcendence, is also a contributory element to connecting with others and becoming a part of a greater perspective.

The study initially set out to not only advance existing understandings of sports fanship in relation to spirituality but also to determine the level of cultural variations between fans of the England National Football Team and the Lithuanian National Basketball

Team. However, whilst the data identified some cultural differences and circumstances that seemed to have affected participant outlooks on their fanship, these were slight contrasts, which did not have any particular significance to the overall conceptualisation of the data. For example, whilst Lithuanian fans expressed a commitment to their team through a belief in their team's ability, English supporters (when asked about issues of loyalty) responded with a focus on being positive about their team and their country under any circumstance. This was not, however, seen as a central issue concerning the research questions but rather understood as a circumstantial difference, which emerged due to the contrasting performances of the England Football Team and Lithuanian Basketball Team. Another difference, which is important to note, was that although social cohesion was recognised by both participant groups, only Lithuanians compared it to a form of faith or ascribed it to a religious function of uniting people. Nevertheless, such expressions were not consistent across the narratives of the Lithuanian participants and were likely to have been influenced by the prominence of the comparison between basketball and religion in Lithuanian media rather than fans' personal experiences. Furthermore, even those participants who subscribed to this comparison explained it through social cohesion, loyalty, and commitment to their team – aspects that were largely universal to both English and Lithuanian narratives. These observed variations between the two groups of participants were deemed as predominantly circumstantial and were not concerned with the main problem of the study, i.e., the construction of meaning through sports fanship. Hence they have not been consistently addressed. Some of these differences might have emerged as a consequence of linguistic and semantic discrepancies and inaccuracies in translation, suggesting a cross-language method as a potentially limiting factor to this study.

Although the highlighted differences were not impactful considering the main concern of the study, the culturally diverse sample was still beneficial as it instigated assumptions that personality traits had more significant effects on an individual's contemplation of their sports fanship as they were able to either enhance or diminish spiritual qualities latent to fans' experiences. Similar to the notion of self-awareness and its positive effects on enhancing one's spirituality (as discussed previously), it emerged that the more self-reflective fans were the more spiritual characteristics appeared in their narratives regardless of their nationality. This observation suggests that in future

before continuing with cross-cultural research in this area, the effects of personality traits to spiritual experiences in sports fanship should be addressed. Therefore, a method of case study is recommended for future enquiry as collating more substantial accounts from a number of sports fans on their experiences, behaviours, and cognitions would allow a clearer picture of sport fanship as well as a more detailed comparison of sports fanship and the spiritual meanings it represents on both personal and cultural levels to emerge. Furthermore, future cross-cultural phenomenological research into this subject could focus on specific emotional states, such as wellbeing, transcendence, acting in accordance with one's true self, which appeared (in the present enquiry) to be generated by one's involvement in sports fanship and concerned with spirituality. Conducting phenomenological interviews around a single aspect of the phenomenon (in order to compare culturally diverse groups of sports fans) may afford a greater insight into cultural influences impacting spiritual expressions in sports fanship.

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Appendix A – Research Information Letter in English



Research Project on Spirituality in Sports Fanship

I am a research student at the University of Gloucestershire and I am currently conducting a comparative study on English football and Lithuanian basketball fans regarding spiritual aspects of their fanship. This study aims to explore sports fanship from a fan's perspective focusing on meanings and values that sports fans attach to their experiences. Also, it seeks to understand to what extent these meanings and values are shaped by cultural backgrounds.

For this purpose, I am looking for England National Football Team supporters willing to participate in the study. The interview gathering your views will take approximately 1 hour. Questions will be related to your initial and continues involvement in fanship and your past experiences as an English football fan. Convenient interview location and time will be discussed and agreed with each participant individually.

Participants' personal details will not be revealed in the final research report in accordance with University regulations on confidentiality and anonymity. It is participants' right to withdraw from the research process at any stage.

If you would like to participate in the study or wish to acquire more information on the research project, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address below.

Many thanks,

Elena Balcaite

MSc by Research student at the University of Gloucestershire

elenabalcaite@connect.glos.ac.uk

Appendix B – Research Information Letter in Lithuanian



Gerbiami Lietuvos krepšinio sirgaliai,

Aš esu magistro studentė University of Gloucestershire. Mano magistro tiriamojo darbo tikslas yra palyginti Lietuvos nacionalinės krepšinio rinktinės ir Anglijos nacionalinės futbolo komandos sirgalius, nagrinėjant jų vertybes, jų veiklos prasmingumą ir dvasingumą. Ši studija tai pat siekia pristatyti sporto sirgalius iš kiek kitokios pusės, paneigiant dažną stereotipą, kad sporto sirgaliai nesiskiria nuo pop kultūros fanų.

Šiam tikslui, aš ieškau nuo šešių iki aštuonių Lietuvos krepšinio sirgalių, kurie norėtų, galėtų ir turėtų laiko sudalyvauti interviu, kuris truktų nuo valandos iki pusantros valandos. Interviu data, tinkamas laikas ir patogi vieta būtų sutarta su kiekvienu dalyviu individualiai. Interviu yra planuojami tarp kovo 18d. ir kovo 28d., tačiau jei noretumėte sudalyvauti tyrime, bet šis periodas jums nėra tinkamas, prašau vis tiek praneškite

Dalyvių anonimiškumas ir surinktos medžiagos naudojimas tik tyrimo tikslams yra užtikrinami. Taip pat norėčiau pabrėžti, kad dalyviai turi teisę atsisakyti tęsti savo dalyvavimą tyrime, bet kurioje tyrimo dalyje.

Jeigu galėtumėte ir turėtumėte laiko sudalyvauti tyrime arba norėtumėte daugiau informacijos apie šį tyrimą prieš nusprendžiant, prašau informuokite mane elektroniniu paštu:

elenabalcaite@connect.glos.ac.uk

Ačiū, kad svarstote dalyvavimą šiame tyrime.

Elena Balčaitė

MSc by Research student at the University of Gloucestershire

Appendix C – Research Consent Form in English



Informed Consent Form

Title of Project	Spirituality in Sports Fanship: The Case of English Football and Lithuanian Basketball Fans
Investigator	Elena Balcaite, MSc by Research student Faculty of Applied Science, University of Gloucestershire elenabalcaite@connect.glos.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Yes No

I agree to the interview being audio recorded

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

Printed Name _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Appendix D – Research Consent Form in Lithuanian



Informuoto Asmens Sutikimas

Projekto Pavadinimas	Sporto sirgalių dvasingumas: anglų futbolo ir lietuvių krepšinio sirgalių palyginimas
Tyrėja	Elena Balčaitė, Tyrimų magistro studentė Faculty of Applied Science, University of Gloucestershire elenabalcaite@connect.glos.ac.uk

Aš patvirtinu, kad skaičiau ir supratau laišką, informuojantį apie šį tyrimą, ir turėjau galimybę klausti klausimų.

Aš suprantu, kad mano dalyvavimas yra savanoriškas ir aš galiu atsisakyti tęsti dalyvavimą bet kuriuo metu be konkrečios priežasties.

Aš sutinku dalyvauti tyrime.

Taip Ne

Aš sutinku, kad interviu būtų įrašytas.

Aš sutinku, kad anonimiškos citatos būtų publikuotos galutiniame darbe.

Vardas _____

Data _____

Parašas _____

Appendix E – Recruitment Emails

"Balcaite, Elena" <s1212163@connect.glos.ac.uk>

29 January 2013 14:04

To: [REDACTED]
prasymas

Sveiki, [REDACTED]

Čia Jums rašo Elena Balcaite (kažkada prieš pusantrų metų ėmiau iš Jūsų interviu savo bakalauro darbui). Šiuo metu rašau magistro studiją, kurioje Lietuvos krepšinio sirgaliai yra lyginami su anglų futbolo fanais. Kovo antroje pusėje busiu Lietuvoje ir tuo metu norėčiau padaryti 6-8 interviu su lietuvių sirgaliais ir labai norėčiau Jūsų pagalbos. Būčiau labai dėkinga jeigu Jūs pats sutiktumėte sudalyvauti ir taip pat paklaustumėte kelių savo bedražygiu, ar jie nesutiktų sudalyvauti (jei jie sutiktų ir Jūs perduotumėt man jų email'us, aš, žinoma, pati su jais sukontaktuočiau). Taip pat, norėčiau paprašyti Jūsų leidimo panaudoti kelis Jūsų sirgalo dienoraščio straipsnelius surinktos medžiagos analizėje, kas būtų labai vertinga mano tyrimui. Suprantu, kad prašymai gan dideli, bet aš ir mano tutorialai dirbam link to, kad šitas darbas ir mano bakalaurinis būtų publikuoti. tai, manau, būtų visai smagu, kad lietuviai sirgaliai būtų žinomi ir tarp akademikų. Nepaminėjau, kad interviu truktų apie valandą (neilgiau nei pusantrų, prižadū).

Elena

"Balcaite, Elena" <s1212163@connect.glos.ac.uk>

15 February 2013 16:03

To: [REDACTED]
Research Project on Spirituality in Sports Fanship

Dear [REDACTED]

I am a research student at the University of Gloucestershire and I am currently conducting a study on spiritual aspects in sports fanship. For this research I am looking to interview 6-8 England National Football team supporters and as I have been trying to find ways to reach the targeted population I have come across your website. Looking through your website I thought that you must be devoted England football fans and would have plenty of interesting experiences to share from different tournaments you have been to. Therefore, I was wondering if you and members of your band would be interested in participating. Participation would involve a one-to-one interview and things like convenient location and time would be discussed and agreed with each participant individually (but obviously I would be more than willing to venture out where it is convenient for you).

If you would be willing to help me, I could forward you the research information letter which could then be emailed to other members of your band (or if you think there is a better, easier way of doing this - I am open to your suggestions). Please also let me know if you would like to acquire more information about my study before responding to my request.

I am looking forward to your reply.

Kind regards,

Elena Balcaite

"Balcaite, Elena" <s1212163@connect.glos.ac.uk>

25 February 2013 12:20

To: [REDACTED]
Magistrinis Darbas apie sporto aistruius

Sveikas, [REDACTED]

Čia tau rašo Elena, tavo emailą gavau iš Austėjos. Tai, manau, ji tau minėjo apie mano magistrinį darbą, kuriam šiuo metu ieskau dalyvių.

Mano darbo tikslas yra palyginti lietuvių krepšinio sirgalius ir anglų futbolo fanus nagrinėjant fanų dvasiškumą, veiklos prasmingumą. Trumpai, darbas bandys pristatyti sporto fanus iš kiek kitokios pusės nei dažnas stereotipas, kad jie nesiskiria nuo pop kultūros fanų, ar kad jų aistra sportui yra patalogiška.

Būtų smagu, jei surastum valandėlę laiko tarp kovo 19d. kovo 29d. sudalyvauti mano tyrime, kas reikštų kažkur valandos trukmės interviu. Anonimiškumas yra, žinoma, užtikrinamas ir visi dalyviai turi teisę pasitraukti iš tyrimo bet kuriame tyrimo etape.

Tai tiek, trumpai. Prašau parasyk, jei, manai, kad surastum laiko ir noro sudalyvauti ar jei noretum sužinoti daugiau apie tyrimą prieš nusprendžiant.

Ačiū

Elena

"Balcaite, Elena" <s1212163@connect.glos.ac.uk> 

25 April 2013 13:30

To: 

Research Project on Spirituality in Sports Fanship

Dear 

I am a research student at the University of Gloucestershire and I am currently working on research project that is concerned with spiritual aspects of sports fanship. I have now interviewed a number of England National Football Team supporters; however I am struggling to find the last one or two participants in order to complete the sample. I found your email on the Football Supporters' website and I thought I see if you could possibly help me out. All I am looking for is at least one or ideally two England National Football team supporters who would be willing to participate in the project (it would be brilliant if either you or/and someone from your environment found the time to participate). Participation would involve an hour-long interview, however, I am flexible in terms of interview duration and if an hour is too much to ask I am happy to compromise. As far as interview location is concerned, I am more than willing to come and meet participants wherever is most convenient for them, I also promise a box of chocolates for each participant.

I am attaching the research information letter to this email; however if you would like more information about my research prior to making your decision, please do let me know and I will try and answer all your questions or concerns you might have. I would really appreciate if you let me know either way.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Elena



[Research Pr...r.doc \(19 KB\)](#)

Appendix F – Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- What was your initial interest in football/basketball?
- How did you start following the national team?
- How did your interest develop into being a fan/attending matches/travelling with the team?
- What experiences does football/basketball relate to for you?
- What are the most important elements of spectating a football/basketball match for you?
- Why do you continue on supporting your team?
- What role do your fellow fans play in your experiences?
- What does football/basketball/your team represent to you?

Appendix G – Interview Times/Dates/Lengths

Interview	Date	Time	Length
1	19th March, 2013	9am	01:35:09
2	19th March, 2013	2pm	01:17:20
3	21st March, 2013	9am	01:06:17
4	21st March, 2013	5pm	00:57:19
5	27th March, 2013	10am	00:50:36
6	4th April, 2013	1pm	01:28:40
7	4th April, 2013	3.30pm	01:04:40
8	16th April, 2013	9.30am	01:40:35
9	16th April, 2013	2pm	01:03:37
10	3rd May, 2013	9am	01:05:23