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By: **Pia A. Albinsson, David D. Shows, & Unal O. Boya**

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Celebrating Together: Generational Cohort Differences in Game-Day Tailgating Rituals

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Abstract: Tailgating is an American football pregame activity prevalent on university grounds and surrounding areas. This research specifically investigates generational differences of game-day tailgating rituals at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) southeastern master level university. Survey data from 753 active tailgaters (Baby boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z) was analyzed using ANOVA procedures. Findings show that tailgaters are mostly motivated by team identification, followed by escape, and spending time with friends. However, generational differences are observed for spending time with family, identifying with the home team, and the desire to attend home games. In addition, in terms of game-day rituals, while the younger generations are more fluid/ nomadic in their tailgating locations and engage in drinking games, the older generations stick to the tried and true rituals such as setting up a tailgating spot decorated with team colors and cooking. Implications for teams, universities, and related community businesses are discussed.

Keywords: Tailgating rituals, cohort theory, U.S. collegiate football, motivating factors, consumer behavior, marketing communications strategy

Tailgating is an American pre-game ritual that takes place prior to college and professional sporting events, in particular American football games. It brings fans and spectators together as a temporary brand community that socializes and focuses around a particular team (Bradford and Sherry, 2017). Although some aspects of tailgating have been studied among American football fans (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002) and Australian Football League fans (Neale *et al.*, 2008; McDonald and Karg, 2014), most articles have been exploratory in nature. The majority of studies have not focused on specific target markets or demographics that may be of interest for a team's fan management in terms of relationship marketing, or for universities in terms of targeting current students, alumni, and local residents by offering valuable game-day experiences. As fan bases of college football is quite age diverse, there is limited knowledge of younger versus older generations' tailgating rituals. In terms of rituals, most research has focused on interviewing highly dedicated tailgaters that have supported a team for multiple years. Collectively extant research has found community, pre- and post-game rituals, and team identification to be important aspects of tailgating (McDonald and Karg, 2014; Gibson *et al.*, 2002). Other motivating factors of interest are feelings of escape and elevated positive feelings (James *et al.*, 2001; Rode and Hardin, 2017). However, limited quantitative research confirm extant findings. Therefore, this study responds to a recent call for larger quantitative studies on tailgating rituals and direct comparisons of "new tailgaters who are younger in age (e.g., current college students) and older more experienced tailgaters" (Drenten *et al.*, 2009: 105). More specifically, this article aims to uncover important differences between generational cohorts' tailgating activities at a midsize southeastern U.S. state university. The literature review begins with an overview of generational cohort theory followed by tailgating rituals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohort Theory

Community and group belonging is prevalent in tailgating. Noble and Schewe (2003) define cohort theory as groupings distinguished through the experience of significant life events that shape behaviors and beliefs. These experiences can be shaped at both the macro level (major moments in history) and micro level (interaction with family and friends). However, this study uses Ryder's (1965: 845) definition of cohorts: "the aggregate of individuals (with some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval." According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are four main generations in the United States: Millennials (Generation Y, about 79.4 million), which is slightly larger than the 75.5 million Baby Boomers (Boomers from here on) and Generation X (Gen X), which is considerably smaller at 65.72 million. Generation Z (Gen Z) is currently estimated at 73.6 million consumers.

Cohorts are important as cultural changes and major global events affect each generation during life stages and development (Parment, 2013). For example, cohorts exhibit differences in the way they view work-life balance and in consumption patterns (Parment, 2013). Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1964 in prosperous times, are now predominantly over the age of 60. They are generally wealthy, in good health, and view the world as improving over time (Wiedmer, 2015). Gen X (1965-1976) was the advent of the "latchkey kids" (Schroer, n.d.). They are generally more pragmatic, more engaged in planning, and assure that their children grow up with parentage.

Millennials (1977 to 1995) constitute the largest group since the Boomers (Wiedmer, 2015). They are more social, more confident, and many emphasize work-life balance (Wiedmer, 2015). They tend to be less independent, more socially conscious, and look for meanings in greater contexts. Finally, Gen Z (1996 to later) is the youngest generation, the Digital Natives, the plugged-in generation that is still being defined. As there is a dearth of literature on older versus younger tailgaters, rituals are reviewed from the perspectives of new versus experienced tailgaters.

Tailgating Rituals

A ritual is “a type of symbolic, expressive activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behavior is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity” (Rook, 1985: 251). Rituals are one of the oldest of human activities and provide identity and solidarity (Neale *et al.*, 2008). Some even posit that rituals are drivers of society and community (Driver, 1996). In a study of 32 American football fans who had consistently tailgated between 5 to 68 years (with an average of 19 years), Drenten *et al.* (2009) found that tailgaters strongly identified with specific rituals. However, the commitment to tailgating rituals differed among fans (Drenten *et al.*, 2009), just as their commitment to teams vary (Mullin *et al.*, 2000). For example, someone who is new to tailgating may just walk around, attend a few games, and not see it as a year-round activity contrary to more seasoned tailgaters (Drenten *et al.*, 2009).

Apter’s (1982) reversal theory, used by Drenten *et al.* (2009), suggests that tailgaters’ motivation is dual in mode, and sometimes the motivations are seemingly contradictory. The theory proposes that consumer motivation comprises two unique “arousal preference systems:” the *telic* (the pursuit of a goal) and the *paratelic* (where the motivation is towards the sensations obtained during the pursuit). Four basic motives with dualities in tailgating rituals have been identified: involvement (preparation and participation), social interaction (camaraderie and competition), inter-temporal sentiment (retrospection and prospecting), and identity (collectivism and individualism) (Drenten *et al.*, 2009). While extant research has highlighted the importance of social interactions with friends, family, and other fans during tailgating rituals (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; James *et al.*, 2001), extant reports on generational differences are limited. An exception is Gibson *et al.*’s (2002) study, which included older University of Florida Gators’ tailgating activities as a form of serious leisure activities that leads to collective identity. By interviewing fans with a mean fan duration of over 20 years, they found that tailgaters’ family life cycle had a huge influence on their tailgating rituals. Depending on the family constellation, different tailgating activities were planned. These micro-level experiences during family tailgating events shape future tailgating rituals and traditions. In other words, tailgating rituals are formalized by repetition to gain stability and consistency (McDonald and Karg, 2014) and are not easily understood by first-timers. Rituals, therefore, have to be observed over time to be adopted, and participants have to be initiated by more experienced fans/tailgaters/family members that can teach and communicate the proper manner of doing things (McDonald and Karg, 2014).

Watching sports and sharing the responsibility of tailgating preparations are considered family traditions by some, in particular by tailgaters who plan a trip for the sole purpose of tailgating and attending a game as a family (Gibson *et al.*, 2002; Rode

and Hardin, 2017). While sharing a picture of their family, one tailgater in a previous study stated, “We do this together. We’ve been doing this for the last 35 years” (Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010: 40). The time spent tailgating allows for connecting with family members, and bonding over a team event. As current college students often attend college to break away from their parents, figure out life, and “grow up” (Heath, 1968), they are more likely to enjoy tailgating with friends than family members. Some older tailgaters, however, voice their appreciation of making new friends during the tailgating event. They make the effort to invite both fellow and opposing team tailgaters into their temporary dwellings to share food, drinks, and conversations to create camaraderie (Drenten *et al.*, 2009). This study posits older generations emphasize the importance of family while tailgating to create community and togetherness (Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010). Social interaction however, is dual in nature and includes a component of competitiveness in tailgating rituals (Drenten *et al.*, 2009). Although competition and rivalry exist among older tailgaters in terms of bigger and more extravagant set-ups, different types of competition exist among younger tailgaters who are more likely to participate in drinking games. Tailgating is a special circumstance for consuming alcohol, where overindulgence is considered acceptable and sometimes even expected as consumers take a “time out” from status quo (Glassman *et al.*, 2010). Most young people choose not to consume alcohol excessively in front of family members, as parents modeling and monitoring behavior normally reduce alcohol consumption in young consumers (Wood *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, it is posited that younger tailgaters emphasize spending time with friends in their chosen rituals (see Table 2). The following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: The importance of spending time with family during tailgating is stronger for older tailgaters such that Boomers > Gen X > Millennials > Gen Z.

Hypothesis 2: The importance of spending time with friends while tailgating is stronger for younger cohorts such that Gen Z > Millennials > Gen X > Boomers.

Extant literature shows that some consumers tailgate to escape from their normal everyday routines (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; James *et al.*, 2001). Escape is defined as “Removal from daily activities or change in daily routine, break from normal schedule” (Rode and Hardin, 2017: 47). For example, Drenten *et al.* (2009: 99) found that “tailgating offered spontaneity and freedom from the controlled conformity of everyday life.” Escape is one of the four realms of consumer experience, the intersection between immersion and active participation (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Defining the experience, escape is more than entertainment, as the consumer purposefully participates in the creation of the experience through rituals and has an input into its ultimate resolution. Participation in activities allows for co-creation of the experience. In their survey of RV Tailgaters (mostly age 46 or older), Rode and Hardin (2017: 52) found that tailgaters escape “stress by spending the weekend on a college campus, enjoying family and friends, and watching their favorite team compete for a win.” Others have found that performances of rituals can lead to a higher sense of freedom, feelings of love, and participation (Driver, 1996). As Gen Xers and Millennials are in the midst of their working careers (Wiedmer, 2015), they are experiencing more of the daily grind and find themselves “immersed in their work and personal lives” (Rode and Hardin 2017: 52), compared to both Boomers (of which many are retired) and Gen Z (current students), they will therefore experience stronger feelings of escape.

Hypothesis 3: Tailgating as Escape is experienced stronger for younger generational cohorts such that Gen X>Millennials>Gen Z>Boomers.

A sense of belonging or togetherness in a community or something larger than yourself often occurs among tailgaters (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010).

For example, rituals help create brand communities centered on specific teams (Bradford and Sherry, 2017; McDonald and Karg, 2014). As newer tailgaters may not have been completely initiated into specific rituals, a lesser team identification and community affiliation may be experienced (Driver, 1996). While Drenten *et al.*'s (2009) study explicates the four dual motives based on interview data, this study expands on involvement, social, and identity aspects of tailgating through quantitative measures. Drawing on the above, this study suggests that tailgaters who are Boomers and Gen Xers have the strongest sense of belonging (i.e., community affiliation), as they are more likely to have tailgated for more seasons.

Team identification is defined as “the sense of oneness with or belongingness to a team” (Matsuoka *et al.*, 2003: 246). Tailgaters who have tailgated for multiple seasons (sometimes decades) and are in a better financial situation to purchase season tickets are more invested both emotionally and psychologically (Mullin *et al.*, 2000) and should therefore experience stronger desire to attend games and stronger team identification. Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that the level of team identification in fans explains the tendency to attend games during nice weather (e.g., fair-weather fans) or “die-hard fans.” Having a strong team identification and access to season tickets may explain one aspect of the desire to attend home games. Another aspect could be current students who often receive free game tickets or are eligible to enter raffles for tickets, in which they should also display a strong desire to attend home games and identify with their college team. Involvement in campus activities, such as collegiate sports, ties students closer to the overall campus community (Clopton, 2009).

Hypothesis 4: Older generation tailgaters (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Community Affiliation such that Boomers>Gen X>Millennials>Gen Z.

Hypothesis 5: Current students (Gen Z) and older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Desire to Attend Home games such that Gen Z>Boomers>Gen X>Millennials.

Hypothesis 6: Current students (Gen Z) and older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) will experience higher levels of Team Identification such that Gen Z>Boomers>Gen X>Millennials.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the factors that motivate different generational age groups in their participation of tailgating and the rituals they practice while tailgating before college football games. In particular, the study investigates the differences among **Boomers**, **Generation X**, **Millennials** (Generation Y), and **Generation Z** in their motivations, tailgating rituals, and practices. After informal in-depth interviews with twenty-eight informants (tailgaters) and a review of relevant literature, a set of six motivational factors leading to participation in tailgating and nine

ritualistic tailgating behaviors were identified to be included in this study. The six factors that play a role in motivating tailgaters to participate included in this study are: (1) The opportunity to interact socially with **family**, (2) The opportunity to interact socially with **friends**, (3) The opportunity to **escape** from the daily routine, (4) A sense of **identifying** with the team, (5) The strength of **desire** to attend home games, and (6) A sense of **community** affiliation. The first five of these six constructs of motivational factors used established scales. The first three (e.g., family, friends, and escape) were used by James *et al.* (2001), whereas the team identification scale adapted three items from the eight-item Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann and Branscombe, 1993). The five items that were eliminated dealt purely with professional soccer. The desire to attend home game scales was adapted from Funk and Brunn's (2007) strength of motivation scale. Drawing on Gibson *et al.* (2002), a new three-item scale was constructed by the authors to measure the sixth motivating factor, community affiliation. The nine ritualistic tailgating activity variables identified in the interview data included: (1) Setting up a tailgating spot, (2) Decorating the spot with the home team's colors, gear, and flags, (3) Visiting others' tailgating spots, (4) Playing corn hole, (5) Playing throw and catch football, (6) Playing drinking games, (7) Dancing, (8) Watching pregame sports on TV, and (9) Creating own rituals. Single item rating Likert-scales were used to measure the extent to which each generational cohort engaged in these activities.

Questionnaires were administered via Qualtrics. Seven-point Likert items were used for both multiple-item scales (except for Team identification where semantic differential scales were used) and single-item rating variables with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability analyses showed acceptable levels of reliability with Cronbach's alpha levels above 0.70. See Appendix A for scale items and Cronbach alphas. A convenience sample of over 900 respondents was collected by contacting tailgating fans at various campus locations of a Division I FBS university. The majority of respondents completed the questionnaire on site, others agreed to receive the survey link via email and complete it after the game. This process resulted in 753 usable surveys. The differences in the means of both multiple-item and single-item variables among the tailgaters in the four generational age groups were analyzed by the one-way ANOVA procedure in SPSS using Post-hoc Duncan tests when applicable.

RESULTS

Sample Composition

The resulting sample was evenly divided between females (394; 52.3%) and males (359; 47.7%). Furthermore, the sample included 372 in the Gen Z age group (49.4%), 149 Millennials (19.8%), 131 Gen X (17.4%), and 97 Boomers (12.9%). The Gen Z subsample constituted mostly students attending the university of the home team (299; 80.4%). A reliability analysis was conducted on all six multiple item scales measuring the motives for participating in tailgating. The sample consists mostly of fans loyal to the home team and attend home games on a regular basis (650; 72.1% of valid responses), 583 (71.3% of valid responses) stated that they tailgate with seven or more people, and 221 (27.1% of valid responses) enjoy tailgating more than the game itself. Most tailgaters (651; 79.6% of valid responses) use sites on campus to tailgate, about 85% (648 of 765 valid responses) start tailgating at least two hours before the game, and 384 (50.2% of valid responses) cook on site or bring food from home while a small number (32; 4.2%)

do not eat while tailgating. Alcoholic beverage consumption is common among tailgaters with 460 (60.1% of valid responses) preferring beer while 173 (22.6%) prefer liquor or mixed drinks. Country music is preferred by 259 (33.9%) of the tailgaters.

Table 1
Factors Motivating Participation in Tailgating

Hypothesis	Motivating factor	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Boomers	p-value	Summary of result
H1	To interact with family	3.14 ⁴ (0.62)	3.67 ³ (0.64)	5.40 ² (0.47)	5.80 ¹ (1.13)	0.000*	Supported
H2	To interact with friends	5.72 (0.96)	5.70 (0.87)	5.61 (1.13)	5.58 (0.99)	0.580	Not Supported
H3	To escape from the daily routine	5.58 (0.98)	5.45 (1.12)	5.74 (1.15)	5.67 (1.06)	0.169	Not Supported
H4	Community Affiliation	5.30 (1.22)	5.09 (1.23)	5.24 (1.26)	5.52 (1.06)	0.084	Not Supported
H5	Strength of desire to attend home games	5.39 ² (1.34)	4.90 ¹ (1.62)	5.03 ¹ (1.47)	5.20 ^{1,2} (1.31)	0.002*	Partially Supported
H6	Identifying with the home team	6.00 ² (0.81)	5.70 ¹ (0.93)	5.81 ^{1,2} (0.93)	5.91 ^{1,2} (0.71)	0.004*	Partially Supported

Group means with standard deviations in parenthesis, *Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (Duncan); Means not sharing the same superscript are significantly different at 0.05.

Factors Motivating Participation in Tailgating

As reported in Table 1, the ANOVA results and comparisons of the motivators to tailgate show different patterns across the four generational cohorts. The opportunity to have social interactions with family as the reason for participating in tailgating exhibits the highest level of significant variation among the means of four generations (F-value = 112.591, p<0.000). Though all four age groups differ from each other in

post hoc paired comparisons with the highest average mean among the Boomers (5.80) followed by Gen X (5.40), Millennials (3.67) and Gen Z (3.14), the desire to spend time with family is much stronger among the two older generations (Boomers and Gen Xers) than the two younger ones, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. (See Table 1 for standard deviations). No significant differences were observed between generations on the opportunity to get together and spend time with friends (F-value=0.654, $p=0.580$), therefore Hypothesis 2 is not supported. Although *Escape* had the third highest overall mean among all respondents (5.59), there was no significant difference between generational cohorts (F-value= 1.682, $p = 0.169$), thereby Hypothesis 3 is unsupported. No significant differences exist among the four generational age groups with respect to feeling a sense of community affiliation (F-value = 2.223, $p=0.084$); therefore, H4 is unsupported. The strength of desire to attend home games (F-value= 5.112, $p = 0.002$) and identifying with the home team (F-value= 4.532, $p = 0.004$) exhibit significant variations among the four cohorts as well. Post hoc tests show that Gen Z tailgaters have the highest level of desire to attend home games (5.39), closely followed by Boomers (5.20), and differing significantly from Gen X (5.03) and Millennial (4.90) tailgaters; therefore, Hypothesis 5 is partially supported. The motivational factor that shows the highest scores in all four generational age groups is identifying with the home team. However, the post hoc analysis displays the only significant difference is between Gen Z (6.00), the highest scoring cohort, and Millennials (Gen Y) (5.70), which partially supports H6. While no group differences for Team Identification and Spending time with friends were observed, they had the highest overall group means (5.89, and 5.6) together with *Escape*, making these three motivating factors the highest of the six for all tailgaters.

Ritualistic Tailgating Behaviors.

As the results show in Table 2, additional analyses compared ritualistic tailgating behaviors across the four generational cohorts. The ANOVA tests show that the four generational cohorts exhibit significant differences in setting up tailgating spots (F-value= 29.972, $p<0.000$); decorating their tailgating spots with university colors, gear, and flags (F-value=17.931, $p<0.000$); visiting other peoples' tailgating spots (F-value= 16.119, $p<0.000$); playing corn hole (F-value=8.707, $p=0.000$); engaging in drinking games (F-value= $p<0.000$); dancing (F-value=15.401, $p=0.000$); and creating their own tailgating rituals (F-value, 3.074, $p=0.027$). No significant differences were found with regard to throwing/catching football (F-value=2.126, $p=0.096$) and watching pregame sports on TV (F-value=1.104, $p=0.347$). Regardless of the significance of differences, the two ritual tailgating behaviors that are relatively more popular among all four cohorts are playing corn hole and visiting others' tailgating spots.

Post-hoc tests reveal similar behaviors among contiguous generational groups. An interesting result from the study has been the similar clustering of behaviors between Boomers and Gen X and clustering between Millennials and Gen Z. Boomers and Gen X show similar patterns when it comes to setting up tailgate spots (5.51, 5.34), decorating tailgating spots with university colors, gear, and flags (5.33, 5.08), visiting others' tailgating spots (5.01, 5.18), engaging in drinking games (3.71, 3.82), dancing (3.99, 4.05), and creating their own rituals (4.74, 4.82). Gen Z and Millennials show similar behavior patterns that are significantly different than the other two generations with regard to visiting other people's tailgating spots (5.90, 5.68), engaging in drinking

games (5.85, 5.53), and creating their own tailgating rituals (4.40, 4.32). As a cluster, Boomers and Gen X are more likely to set up their own tailgating spots and decorate with university colors, gear, and flags when compared with Millennials and Gen Z, who are more likely to visit other peoples’ tailgating spots, engage in drinking games, and participate in their own tailgating rituals (Glassman *et al.*, 2010). Gen Z (5.85) and Millennials (5.53) are more likely to participate in drinking games than Gen X (3.82) and Boomers (3.71). Additionally, Millennials and Gen Z have higher levels of agreement with not tailgating if there was a campus-wide ban on the consumption of alcohol (5.05, 4.80) than Gen X (3.57) and Boomers (3.39). For standard deviations, see Table 2.

Table 2
Ritualistic Tailgating Behaviors

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	p-value
Setting up own tailgating spot	3.87 ³ (2.04)	4.45 ² (2.02)	5.34 ¹ (1.83)	5.51 ¹ (1.57)	0.000*
Decorating spot with home team colors	4.04 ³ (1.98)	4.58 ² (1.89)	5.08 ¹ (1.86)	5.33 ¹ (1.55)	0.000*
Visiting other people’s spots	5.90 ² (1.22)	5.68 ² (1.33)	5.18 ¹ (1.63)	5.01 ¹ (1.60)	0.000*
Playing corn hole	5.83 ² (1.42)	5.85 ² (1.43)	5.49 ² (1.67)	5.02 ¹ (1.75)	0.000*
Playing drinking games	5.85 ² (1.59)	5.53 ² (1.72)	3.82 ¹ (1.84)	3.71 ¹ (1.89)	0.000*
Dancing	5.04 ³ (1.78)	4.48 ² (1.90)	4.05 ¹ (1.71)	3.99 ¹ (1.86)	0.000*
Creating own rituals	4.40 ² (1.77)	4.32 ² (1.88)	4.82 ¹ (1.62)	4.74 ^{1,2} (1.64)	0.027*
Playing throw/catch football	4.93 (187)	5.30 (1.64)	5.05 (1.85)	4.73 (1.78)	0.096
Watching pregame TV	4.08 (2.03)	4.27 (1.94)	4.18 (1.87)	4.46 (1.79)	0.347

Group means with standard deviations in parenthesis, Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (Duncan): Means not sharing the same superscript are significantly different at 0.05.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study on tailgating motivations and rituals make both theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on tailgating and spectators in the college football context. Interestingly, while previous research has reported feelings of escape, community and togetherness, and spending time with friends and family as the most important tailgating motivations (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; James *et al.*, 2001; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010), the highest motivating factor in this study is identifying with the home team for all cohorts. Identifying with a team can provide fans with a “we feeling” and possibly tie in to a sense of belonging, which was captured with the author-

developed community affiliation measure (Gibson *et al.*, 2002). As the community measure is a new multi-item construct, this construct needs further validation in tailgating and other contexts. Closely related to togetherness and community is who you choose to tailgate with, such as family and friends (Drenten *et al.*, 2009; Gibson *et al.*, 2002; James *et al.*, 2001; Kerstetter *et al.*, 2010). For perhaps obvious reasons, younger groups prefer to tailgate with friends while older groups prefer family (or a mix thereof). The younger groups may attend a college far away from family and therefore not have the option of tailgating with family; in addition, their chosen behavior (e.g., excessive drinking) at tailgating may not be conducive to combine with family members (e.g., parents or younger siblings). In addition to belonging, team identification can provide a sense of pride in the team and university. Kerstetter *et al.* (2010: 41) listed pride as meaning or purpose to tailgate right after a sense of “being together with family and friends, and socializing.”

The results regarding community and escape mirror previous research findings as all cohorts find this important. In terms of escape, there was no difference between the four cohorts. As the results show, escaping everyday life was rated as an important motivating factor to tailgate more so than attending the game itself, confirming James *et al.*'s (2001) findings from a larger northern university. A possible assumption of the clustering of the observed behavioral similarities is that Boomers and Gen X tend to be more pragmatic than Gen Z and Millennials. They could be more into the traditions of their alma maters, more reluctant to engage in the consumption of alcohol beyond their personal limits, and more loyal to their teams, including staying for games regardless of the weather conditions (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). They also are more likely to tailgate with fewer people and not engage in visiting with other tailgaters. Gen Z and Millennials are driven by a different perspective. With less individualism and greater enjoyment of social interaction, Gen Z and Millennials may have greater satisfaction by simply enjoying the situation. These cohorts are more likely to engage in drinking games, which encourage greater consumption (Glassman *et al.*, 2010). In addition, they are more likely to enjoy visiting other tailgating groups and are usually in the company of larger gatherings of friends. Study results show that they are less likely to stay for the whole game if there is inclement weather and avoid tailgating entirely if they cannot consume alcohol.

While there may be generational differences creating these similar groupings, it may also be a function of age. Boomers and Gen X are older than Millennials and Gen Z. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking games, and perhaps are less physically active, making them less likely to visit other tailgaters. They also have greater life experience than Millennials and Gen Z, which makes them more likely to have lived through the fan experience's peaks and valleys, and therefore, more likely to maintain loyalty in difficult circumstances. Follow-up research could pursue attempting to answer whether the observed differences are a function of different generations or a function of different age groups. Such research should be conducted longitudinally in intervals corresponding to generational changes. Instability in scores in corresponding age groupings in longitudinal studies would indicate generational variations.

The current study results are consistent with Drenten *et al.* (2009) and the link with Apter's (1982) reversal theory and expand current academic understanding of tailgating behavior by linking consumer behavior (rituals) during the events with possible motivations of four generational cohorts. Consumers can have telic motivations (where

the primary mover is the pursuit of a goal), which are found in the behaviors of Boomers and Gen Xers. This group is more likely to pursue setting up a tailgating spot and to decorate it in the totems of the university, including the colors and flags. They are more likely than Gen Z and Millennials to attend and stay at the games regardless of inclement weather. Despite the devotion to their tailgating rituals, they get more enjoyment out of actually attending the game versus the tailgating experience, which can be implied that tailgating is not an end in itself.

The Millennials and Gen Z group, however, fit the definition of consumers with paratelic motivations where experience in the pursuit of the goals is an end in itself. They enjoy visiting other tailgating spots and sampling other tailgating experiences. They participate in drinking games and consider drinking important enough to not tailgate if the university has a campus-wide ban on alcohol consumption, and they prefer to pursue their own tailgating rituals. If the experience turns unpleasant, such as inclement weather, they are less likely to attend or stay at the game (Wann and Branscombe, 1990). Perhaps most telling is they profess to enjoy tailgating more than watching the actual game. It should be noted, however, that while this research aims to understand generational differences in tailgating rituals, it does not purport to make any generalizations about brand loyalty. There is not an implied greater loyalty to the university or the team by those with telic motivations versus paratelic motivations.

For practitioners, this research helps in crafting a greater focus for marketing communications towards these cohort groups. For university students who have just graduated and those fans that fit the Millennials and Gen Z cohort, the university should consider messages that embrace the experience of attending a game. These include the experiences of meeting other cohort members on campus, frequenting tailgating experiences, and include in the messages that, while alcohol consumption should not be encouraged, communicate that it is allowed and accepted. The university should also consider in their budgets creating their own tailgating experiences, such as setting up spots for playing corn hole and other activities. Universities should also consider setting up spots on campus where the game could be experienced even during inclement weather. For Boomers and Gen X, there should be an emphasis on the appreciation of their loyalty and some way of rewarding their tailgating behavior, such as contests and awards for their tailgating efforts. Marketing communications towards Boomers, Gen X alumni, and others should promote the pursuit of sharing of comradery before the game experience. It should also attempt some sales promotion to encourage new Boomer season ticket holders to come and pursue tailgating before the game.

For commercial vendors in the university area, this research also helps to focus their efforts on pursuing those cohort groups that would enjoy their atmospherics. Retail establishments that wish to appeal to the younger cohorts should craft their messaging around the paratelic motivations of the experience, including expressing ways tailgaters can continue the same experiences after the game. Those wishing to appeal to the older cohorts could consider messaging that mentions immersion in post-game discussion, such as game replays and sports-talk. Specific breakfast, lunch, brunch, and/or dinner combination promotions by local bars, restaurants, and hotels could be targeted towards different cohorts, as they may want to experience the game-day in various ways. Alcoholic beverage brands can team up with local businesses to sponsor game-day related events. Therefore, knowing the beverage and music preferences of tailgaters can be utilized by sponsors and local businesses to host competitions and give-aways of

tailgating equipment, such as branded cornhole, footballs for tossing, etc. Finally, it should be mentioned that recent marketing research has reported that about 30 percent of general tailgaters don't attend the game and engage in "homegating," i.e., engaging in tailgating behaviors within the comforts of home or an establishment unaffiliated with the stadium area (Delicato Family Winery, 2018). Interestingly, this is consistent with the percentage in the current study, in which 72 percent of the sample attended the game after they tailgated while 28 percent did not attend. This constitutes a significant market segment with potential for brands to engage in these fans (Delicato Family Winery, 2018). Recently, various branded events, such as "Sailgating" sponsored by Wendy's for University of Washington tailgaters in the Seattle's Husky Harbor and "Brunchgating" sponsored by Bota Box in New York City have aimed to tap into those tailgaters who may not continue on to the game. Sponsored activities such as these can tie brands closer to their segments. Future research by broadening the scope of tailgaters, homegaters, and overall fan experiences can help marketers provide greater value to their experience to the betterment of both the university and the communities in which they operate.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations need to be mentioned. First, this research is a cross-sectional descriptive study of tailgating rituals confined to a mid-sized university in the southeastern part of the U.S., where football traditions are strong and span generations. However, there are much larger universities and much smaller ones as well. Furthermore, this research confides to the gameday experience. It should be noted that there are more examples of tailgating experiences that include consumers arriving during the week of the game, enjoying the gameday experience, and not leaving until sometime after the game is over (Rode and Hardin, 2017). These fans should be considered when researching the fan experience of tailgaters. Second, this study did not investigate tailgaters' social media usage or behavior. Therefore, social media usage during tailgating, game, and post-game should be examined, as this is likely to be prevalent for today's tailgaters. Third, recently after data collection ended, it was announced that the university stadium would offer alcohol sales during the next season. Alcohol sales would begin two hours prior to kick-off and end at the end of the third quarter. This follows a general trend of a gradual relaxation of rules prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol on U.S. college campuses over the last ten years. Currently each conference and each campus have their own rules (Clouse, 2019). The sales of alcohol in stadiums could change the behavior of Millennials and Gen Z tailgating activities by giving them an additional incentive to attend the game and further change post-game rituals as well. Future research needs to compare tailgater behavior, including drinking behavior, at universities with and without alcohol sales at the stadiums. Fourth, the measurements used for items measuring attending home games and team motivations had not previously been used in a US football tailgating context, which further contributes to the understanding of tailgating rituals by different cohorts. In addition, future studies should validate the community measure developed by the authors to see if similar results are found in tailgaters at colleges of various size. Finally, with the advent of Covid-19 changing the focus on experiences, a continued study of generational cohorts and their tailgating activities should yield beneficial knowledge on how to meet the needs and desires of these consumer groups. Related to rituals affected

by Covid-19, future research could investigate what effect age has on tailgating activities. With current recommendations to avoid crowds, in particular for some age groups, how will this affect consumption of future sporting events? Life experiences happen on both a social and personal level. This research finds a significant clustering of cohort differences between those groups that are younger and those that are older. Future research should attempt to include this in their surveys.

Appendix A

Scale items

Escape (*James et al., 2001*), $\alpha=0.847$

Tailgating provides me with an escape from my day-to-day activities.

Tailgating provides a change of pace from what I regularly do.

Getting to tailgate at football games gives me a break from my regular routine.

Family (*James et al., 2001*) $\alpha=0.957$

Spending time with family is why I tailgate.

I tailgate because it is an important activity for my family.

The main reason I tailgate is to enjoy time with my family.

Friends (*James et al., 2001*) $\alpha=0.747$

I tailgate because it gives me an opportunity to spend time with my friends.

Tailgating is a way to be with friends I don't see very often.

Tailgating allows me to be around friends I don't otherwise spend time with.

Team Identification (*Wann and Branscombe, 1993*) $\alpha=0.766$

How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of App State football? (Not at all a fan – Very much a fan)

How important is it that App State wins? (Not important – very important)

I wear _____ (University team colors) to support the

_____ (University) team. (Never – Always)

Desire to Attend Home Games (*Funk and Brunn, 2007*) $\alpha=0.869$

I regret when I am unable to attend _____ (University team name) home games.

I feel that attending _____ (University team name) home games is vitally important to me.

I am really interested in attending _____ (University team name) home games.

Community Affiliation (*developed by the authors of the current study*) $\alpha=0.836$

I tailgate to feel part of something bigger than myself.

I tailgate because it gives me a sense of belonging.

I tailgate because it makes me feel part of the _____ (name of university) community.

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