

Exploring Reverse Socialization Of Sport Fandom From A Generational Perspective

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Aim of the research

The purposes of this exploratory research are to identify and understand the factors that influence the intersection of sport fandom and parenting. Specifically, we explore the unique intergenerational factors associated with the connection between sport fandom and parent-child relationships.

Literature review

Sport fandom scholars have identified a need to explore the potential complexities of how children reverse the socialization process and shape their parents' sport fandom (Gantz, 2012; Hyatt & Foster, 2015). Thus, exploration of generational influences on the reverse socialization process of sport fandom is necessary for theoretical development in this area.

When examining fandom, in general, across generations, Harrington and Bielby (2010) discuss four age-based issues that have received varying attention from fan scholars; fandom and life milestones, changes in the fan (self) over time, age norms within fandom, and changes in the fan object over time. They state, "while age norms clearly operate within fandom, it is less clear how they fluctuate over time and in the context of the changing cultural status of fandom" (p. 442). Given the recent vast technological changes in sport media communication, the way in which parents and children experience sport fandom has also changed (Dotson, Clark, Suber, & Dave, 2013). Further to this, family dynamics around sport have shifted over the last decade, which alters how parents engage with their children and sport (Kay & Spaaij, 2012; Trussell & Shaw, 2012).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

Participants were recruited in two regions of Canada; Ontario and Saskatchewan. Twenty parents (16 men and four women, aged 32 to 55) were interviewed either in-person or via an online video platform for between 20 and 55 minutes. We utilized an interview protocol that highlighted exploration of the parent-child influence on sport fandom. We asked participants to reflect on sport fandom in relation to their parents (last generation or past relationships) and their children (this generation or current relationships). The coding process was based on Merriam (2001) and Rossman and Rallis (1998). Coding began after the first few transcripts were completed, and continued as the remaining interviews were transcribed. The concept of reverse socialization across generations was present in the data and two overarching themes regarding the role of intergenerational factors on the intersection between sport fandom and parenting emerged from our analysis.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

Regarding reverse socialization from a generational perspective, our participants discussed very little influence on their own parents' fandom. However, several noted their own children influencing their sport fandom. This may be a result of changing cultural status of fandom (Harrington & Bielby, 2010), given that participants also discussed their children influencing their grandparents' fandom. This suggests the impact of millennial children on multiple generations of people.

The unique role of "mother" within the fandom socialization process differed across generations. When participants discussed the relationship between sport fandom and their own parents (last generation), many focused on their father's role in shaping their fandom. Only two participants noted their mother's influence within this relationship, and mothers were often discussed as observers within the family-sport fandom context. Conversely, when participants discussed their own children (this generation), they identified more active engagement of some mothers in socialization of sport fandom within the household. This shift in mothers' role within sport is supported within the literature (Spaij & Anderson, 2010; Trussell & Shaw, 2010).

Within the millennial generation, children were active members in defining their own sport fandom, or subsequently defining their parents' sport fandom. This may be a consequence of their generation, as many millennial children have access to a wider array of sport teams due to the blitz of sport media platforms over the last decade (e.g., Dotson et al., 2013). Further, the promotion of rivalries in the family dynamic seems to be a generational factor (Kraszewski 2008; Schimmel & Harrington, 2007) that warrants further exploration within the reverse socialization of sport fandom process.

These findings will be of interest to sport consumer behavior researchers who have typically conceptualized sport fan socialization in terms of older family members teaching kids to love certain sports and/or teams (Kolbe & James, 2000; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010; Wann, 2006). Our findings suggest that socialization and reverse-socialization into sport fandom may have generational aspects that have evolved over the last 10 to 15 years. This trend has implications for our conceptualization of sport fandom.

References

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