Sport Identification, Ethnic Identification, and Acculturation of Latinos in the United States

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The Latino community is the fastest growing segment of the United States (U.S.) population, as well as the largest minority segment. The U.S. Census projections in 2000 estimated the Hispanic or Latino population would be approximately 41.3 million people in 2004 (U.S. Census, 2005). The Selig Center estimated that this segment of the population would control over $700 billion in spending power in 2005 (Humphreys, 2005). Marketers, constantly seeking to target the next market niche, have recognized the growth potential and the purchasing power of the Latino community and therefore have focused their efforts on capturing the attention of this segment.

A review of the consumer behavior literature revealed an increase in research investigating ethnicity due to the shifting ethnic landscape in the United States as a result of immigration. Furthermore, sport management and marketing research has failed to examine the dimensions of Latino consumption behavior and fan identification. Our study attempts to provide insight into the sport identification of Latinos in the United States, as well as the overall concepts of ethnic identity, acculturation and the relationships among these three concepts. These ideas will facilitate the understanding of why Latinos are fans of sport.

Pollock (1993) suggested that identification and its resulting product, identity, are theoretical, psychological formulations based on external and internal observations. In previous research, the study of ethnic identity has focused on two primary theories: Tajfel’s (1981) social identity theory and Erickson’s (1968) identity formation theory. Within these two theories lies the concept of ethnic identity that is essential to understanding the members of any ethnic group (Phinney, 1990).

Previous sport consumption research examined sport identification in terms of both social identity theory (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Funk, Riding, & Moorman, 2003; James & Riding, 2002) and identity theory (Madrigal, 1995; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). Based on the concepts of the multiple role identities of identity theory, Trail, Robinson, Dick, and Gillentine (2003) expanded the concept of team identification to include not only identification with a particular team, but also integrated identification with a coach, the community, university, players, level of sport and type of sport. Numerous researchers have studied either points of attachment or some aspect therein, showing support for multiple points of attachment (Fink et al., 2002; Funk et al., 2003; Kwon & Trail, 2001; Kwon & Trail, 2003; Robinson, Trail & Kwon, 2004; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail et al., 2003; Wann, Bayens & Driver, 2004; Wann, Dunham, Byrd & Keenan, 2004). Specifically, both Robinson and Trail (2005) and Trail, Robinson, et al. (2003) showed that attachment to sport in general, and attachment to a specific sport existed. However, within the sport management and marketing literature, research designed to study identification and sport consumption has failed to study the relationships among ethnic identity, acculturation, sport identification, and sport consumption, with perhaps the exception of a study by Pons et al. (2001).

We proposed four different models to examine the relationships among ethnic identification, acculturation, and sport identification: Model A in which acculturation (represented by level of identification with the dominant culture in the United States; dominant ID/U.S. ID) and identification with one’s own ethnic group (ethnic ID) combine to influence an individual’s identification with sports (sport ID); Model B in which acculturation (U.S. ID) fully influences the effect of sport identification for Latinos without the direct influence of an individual’s identification with his/her ethnic group; Model C in which ethnic identification fully influences identification with sports without the direct influence of acculturation; and Model D in which acculturation and ethnic identity both influence sport identification independently.

The purpose of our research was to examine the relationships among ethnic identity, acculturation, identification with sports in general, and identification with specific sports (i.e., identification with American football, baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer) for Latinos living in the Southeastern United States. We tested the psychometric properties of the ethnic identity, acculturation, and sport identification scales to establish internal consistency and construct reliability of our measurement scales. In addition, we tested the proposed four models.

The total sample included Latinos and non-Latinos (N = 373). However, only respondents that self-identified themselves as Latinos were included in the analysis. The Latino participants (N = 300, which exceeded the recommended value of 195 to achieve a power of .80 for structural equation modeling; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) were living in the Southeastern United States. Data collection took place in various community locations including three Latino style restaurants, a Latino
outdoor music festival, and doctors’ office waiting rooms.

The questionnaire was comprised of portions of three scales: the revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Roberts et al., 1999), the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS; Zea et al., 2003) and the Points of Attachment Index (PAI; Robinson & Trail, 2005). All of the items for each scale were measured using the same response format; therefore, the items were randomly placed on the questionnaire in one section. The final version of our questionnaire contained 27 items ranging from - strongly disagree." (1) to - strongly agree." (7). Various demographic variables (e.g., age, gender) were also included at the end of the questionnaire. All of the items were translated from English to Spanish and back-translated from Spanish to English as recommended by Brislin (1986).

The RAMONA Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to test a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the total measurement model, and the four structural models (A, B, C, & D) were tested individually for goodness of fit. RAMONA was used to obtain Steiger’s (1990; Steiger & Lind, 1980) root-mean-square-error (RMSEA, represented by ŸOa), chi-square test statistic (ýO2), and the chi-square test statistic per degrees of freedom (ýO2/df). In addition to the model fit indices and model analysis, internal consistency measures (Cronbach’s alpha coefficients), average variance extracted measures (AVE), and discriminant validity measures (correlation between any two constructs) were used to examine the model’s constructs.

Overall, Models A, B, and C were good fitting models across the various sports and sports fans in general. Even though our four models fit the data well, in general, ethnic identity had little or no influence on identification with sports in general or identification with the specific sports examined with the possible exception of hockey. For Latinos as a whole, a moderate relationship existed between their ethnic identity and acculturation. Additionally, acculturation only explained a fair amount of variance for identification with American football while in all other sports, acculturation minimally influenced sport identification.

From a practitioner’s standpoint, marketing campaigns should focus on an individual’s motives for attending sporting events and points of attachment to a team and to a sport instead of identification with an ethnic group. However, identification with the American culture does have a small influence on one’s identification with American football, baseball, basketball, and sports in general. Marketing campaigns may want to target Latinos who are highly acculturated in order to maximize sport consumption behaviors. Sport marketers should not create marketing campaigns solely based on the assumption that Latinos or any ethnic group are necessarily fans of any particular sport (e.g., soccer).