Football or Family: An Exploratory Examination of the Relationship Between Fan Identification and Inter-Role Conflict

Jason M. Simmons, University of Tampa
T. Christopher Greenwell, University of Louisville

Abstract 2012-212

In a given day, an individual may identify with a wide variety of roles, each with its own unique set of demands that have the potential to either complement or conflict with one another. Common roles include that of parent, spouse, student, employee, or customer (Madsen & Hammond, 2005). The difficulty one experiences in balancing his/her role demands is known as inter-role conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). The current study is concerned with fan-family conflict, a type of inter-role conflict, which refers to the extent to which engagement in the sport fan role interferes with one’s ability to fully function within the family role.

Inter-role may take three forms: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1995). Within the context of fan-family conflict, highly identified fans have been found to devote more time to their team/fan role than fans low in identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and engage in higher levels of support behaviors such as attendance and media consumption which require commitments of one’s time (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; James & Trail, 2008; Matzuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). The tendency for highly identified fans to maintain/enhance their social identity through in-group/out-group comparisons or success/failure attributions (Dimmock, Grove, & Eklund, 2005; Mann 1974; Wann & Dolan, 1994; 1994b), also suggests some degree of strain associated with the sport fan role. Regarding behavior-based conflict, dysfunctional fan behaviors such as blasting or aggression have also been linked to those individuals sharing a stronger psychological and emotional attachment with their team (Dimmock & Grove, 2005; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Such behaviors stand in stark contrast to those typically associated with family role behavioral requirements.

The sport fan role also represents an economic activity in that the behaviors associated with being a fan (i.e. game attendance, merchandise/media consumption, personal seat licenses) require a financial commitment. Research has shown, when compared to fans low in identification, highly identified fans attend more games, devote greater dollar amounts to the team, and consume higher levels of team-related media and merchandise (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; James & Trail, 2008; Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Therefore, a fourth type of inter-role conflict, economic-based, was introduced and examined.

Inter-role conflict has been studied extensively within the context of work and family roles (e.g. Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Frone & Rice, 1987; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Lapiere et al., 2008), and to a lesser extent, leisure and family roles (e.g. Fick, Goff, & Oppliger, 1996; Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002; Goff & Fick, 1997; Goff, Fick, & Oppliger, 1997). Despite the characteristics of the sport fan role outlined above, prior research has yet to examine inter-role conflict among sport fans and their families. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to examine the differences in perceptions of fan-family conflict (time-based, strain-based, behavior-based, and economic-based) between fans of varying degrees of identification with a sports team.

The sample consisted of 466 respondents in attendance at a NCAA Division-I intercollegiate football game. Stratified random sampling was utilized to ensure the sample was representative of the entire population. A 16-item scale was created based on Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams’ (2000) and Gutek, Searle, and Klepa’s (1991) measures of work-family conflict to assess perceptions of fan-family conflict. Trail and James’ (2001) 3-item Team Identification Index was utilized to measure fan identification. A third construct, family involvement, was measured using a modified 4-item version of Kanungo’s (1982) job involvement questionnaire.

For purposes of understanding how fan identification impacted perceptions of fan-family conflict, respondents were categorized into one of three groups based on their level of fan identification: high, moderate, and low. MANOVA results revealed a statistically significant multivariate main effect of fan identification on fan-family conflict (Wilks’s Λ = .895, F(8, 920) = 6.55, p < .01). Follow-up analyses revealed significant univariate main effects of identification...
on time-based conflict ($F(2, 463) = 6.07, p < .01$), strain-based conflict ($F(2, 463) = 8.47, p < .001$), and behavior-based conflict ($F(2, 463) = 3.44, p < .05$). In terms of time-based FFC, a Tukey post hoc analysis revealed a significant between-group difference between highly identified fans ($M = 2.35, SD = 1.44$) and fans low in identification ($M = 1.87, SD = 1.15$). A similar pattern was revealed with strain-based FFC where highly identified fans ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.34$) and moderately identified fans ($M = 2.24, SD = 1.28$) reported significantly higher levels of strain-based conflict than fans low in identification ($M = 1.73, SD = 1.16$). In terms of behavior-based conflict, a significant difference was detected between moderately identified fans ($M = 2.36, SD = 1.40$) and fans low in identification ($M = 1.95, SD = 1.24$).

Findings from the current study suggest engagement in the sport fan role may have consequences at home, even if they are unintentional. Although results from this study revealed perceptions of fan-family conflict were relatively low overall, significant differences were detected in time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based fan-family conflict based on one’s level of identification. Sport fans, particularly those whose fan role is highly salient to their self-concept, should be cognizant of the effects of their fan role on alternative life roles. Inter-role conflict has been found to have a negative impact on various family outcomes measures including family satisfaction (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Chiu, 1998; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006), life stress (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001), life satisfaction (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Chiu, 1998; Dixon & Sagas, 2007), spousal well-being (Burke et al., 1980), and overall health (Cooke & Rosseau, 1984; Winter, Roos, Rahkonen, Martikainen, & Lakelma, 2006). This study offers a first look into the nature of fan-family conflict (time-based, strain-based, behavior-based, economic-based), which should aid sport fans, and their families, in making affective, behavioral, and cognitive adjustment to minimize the effects of fan role engagement on performance with the family domain. Recommendations for families and future research will also be discussed.