Married With Children: Does Family Structure Impact Perceptions of Fan-Family Conflict?

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As we advance through adult life, we progress through common stages, typically defined by age, marital status, and the presence of children living at home (Du & Kamakura; Murphy & Staples, 1979; Wagner & Hanna, 1983; Wells & Gubar, 1966). This progression may bring about changes in values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014). Not surprisingly, these stages are often considered in marketing research to aid in explaining consumptive behaviors and decision-making processes of families (Bauer & Auer-Srnka, 2012; Fodness, 1992; Wilkes, 1995). The current study sought to extend the life cycle framework to examine how changes in family structure affect one’s ability to balance the demands of fan and family role participation.

Simmons and Greenwell (2014) defined fan-family conflict as “the extent to which engagement in the sport fan role interferes with one’s ability to fully function within the fan role” (p. 95). Perceptions of fan-family conflict may take four forms: (a) time-based, (b) strain based, (c) behavior-based, and (d) economic-based (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Simmons & Greenwell, 2014). In an exploratory study of the construct, Simmons and Greenwell found individuals possessing high identification with a team experienced significantly higher levels of time-based and strained-based fan-family conflict when compared to lesser-identified individuals. Identification, or involvement with a role has been shown to be an important predictor of inter-role conflict as individuals tend to devote more resources (i.e. time, energy, money) to those roles with which they are highly involved (Carlson & Kaemar, 2000; Carlson & Perrewe, 1999; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Further, perceptions of conflict are most intense when the pull for one’s resources emanates from two or more highly salient roles (Frone & Rice, 1987; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Role demands are not solely predicated on identification/involvement. Researchers have also considered the effect of family structure on role demands, and the extent to which family structure contributes to perceptions of inter-role conflict (Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008). In particular, prior research suggests the presence of children in the home and marital status are significantly related to inter-role conflict (Boyar, Maertz, Mosley, & Carr, 2008; Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977), and also had an impact on the amount of hours devoted to personal activities (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977). While these studies examined inter-role conflict through the lens of work and family roles, similar family structure demands have the potential to contribute to conflict between family and leisure roles (Hambrick, Simmons, & Mahoney, 2013).

The above findings illustrate family structure is an important antecedent within the inter-role conflict theoretical framework. Thus, perceptions of fan-family conflict may vary as individuals advance through their life stages and take on more family responsibilities. Bridging back to role identification/involvement, Carlson and Kaemar (2000) noted that the importance or value placed on various roles (i.e., fan or family) evolve over time making resource allocation decisions less obvious. As one’s family structure changes, so to will the resources allocated to family role demands, potentially contributing to perceptions of conflict among competing roles, such as fan of a team. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the difference in perceptions of fan-family conflict based on stages in one’s life cycle.

In the current study, age served as a proxy for life cycle stage as it is more parsimonious than modern family life cycle models that include 13 (Du & Wagner, 2006) or 18 (Wagner & Hanna, 1983) separate stages. Further, as individuals age, they are likely to progress through changes in family structure (i.e. get married/partnered and have children) that align with the progression through life cycle stages.

Data were collected from 460 respondents in attendance at a NCAA Division-I football game. Respondents were asked to complete a 31-item survey assessing perceptions of fan-family conflict, team identification, and family role
involvement. Demographic data was also collected. To ensure a representative sample, surveys were distributed to respondents in randomly selected seating sections within each ticketing price point.

Respondents were grouped into three age categories: (a) 18-34, (b) 35-59, and (c) 60 and older, which closely align with age brackets established in prior life cycle models (Murphy & Staples, 1979; Wagner & Hanna, 1983). Descriptive statistics revealed a similar progression through family structure based on age groupings with respect to marital status, children living at home, and income; as is seen in life cycle models. MANOVA was conducted to examine differences in perceptions of fan-family conflict (time-based, strain-based, behavior-based, and economic-based) based on age. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of age on fan-family conflict (Wilks’s $\Lambda = .948$, $F(8, 908) = 3.077$, $p < .01$). Subsequent univariate analyses indicated significant main effects of age on time-based FFC ($F(2, 457) = 9.258$, $p < .001$) and strain-based FFC ($F(2, 457) = 4.396$, $p < .05$). Tukey pairwise comparisons detected differences with respect to time-based FFC, between the 18-34 year old group ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.64$) and the 35-59 year old group ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.06$) as well as the 60 and older group ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.20$). The youngest group also experienced significantly higher levels of strain-based FFC ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.46$) than the oldest grouping ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.25$).

These findings conflict prior inter-role conflict research suggesting marital status and children are positively related to perceptions of inter-role conflict (Boyar et al., 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2005; Hambrick et al., 2005). Several factors may have contributed to this finding. For example, the middle and oldest age groups were not only more likely to be married and have children living at home, but they also reported significantly higher levels of involvement with their family role ($F(2, 457) = 6.605$, $p < .01$). It may be the case that given the increased demands associated with marriage/partnership and children, the older groups are more conscientious of family role demands and work harder to balance the demands of competing roles. Halbesleben, Harvey, and Bolino (2009) noted conscientiousness moderates the relationship between demands in non-family roles and the extent to which those demands contribute to perceptions of conflict. Future research should consider the moderating effect of family role conscientiousness on perceptions of conflict between fan and family roles.