Comparing the Identity Centrality of Sport Team Identification and Sport Fandom

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Koch and Wann (2016) suggested that identification for a favorite team (one’s connection to a team, Wann & James, in press) may be more central to identity that sport fandom per se (one’s identification with the role of sport fan, Wann, 2002). For instance, although it is common for persons to publicly announce their support for teams (e.g., via tee-shirts, hats, bumper stickers), it is less common for them to publicly identify themselves as a sport fan. The current investigation was designed to test this possibility by comparing the identity centrality of team identification with sport fandom. Two forms of sport fandom were examined: 1) one’s general interest in sport and 2) his or her fandom for a favorite sport. This investigation was designed to examine a research question asking “What is more central to one’s identity, identification with a favorite team or sport fandom (general and for a favorite sport)?”

Participants (192 males; 375 females; M age = 20.54 years) completed a questionnaire containing seven sections. Section 1 requested information on age and gender. For half of the participants, the next section contained the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Respondents listed their favorite sport team and then completed the seven Likert-format items for that team. Next, to assess degree of sport fandom, these participants completed two versions of the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ; Wann, 2002). First, they completed the scale for their general fandom. Second, they listed their favorite sport to follow as a fan and completed the SFQ for that particular sport. These participants then completed three versions of an Identification Scale (IS; Smith, Grieve, Zapalac, Derryberry, & Pope, 2012). The first version of this four-item Likert-scale targeted participants’ favorite team. That is, participants were asked to list their favorite team and to complete the items for that team. The next two versions targeted their fandom. First, they completed the items for general fandom. Next, they restated their favorite sport to follow as a fan and completed the items for that sport.

The order of presentation of the questionnaires was altered for the other half of participants. That is, rather than completing assessment of identification with a team first, they completed the assessments of identification as a fan first (both general and favorite sport). After participants had completed the questionnaire packets, they returned them to the researcher, who provided them with a debriefing statement. The participants were then excused.

Items on the six scales (SSIS, SFQ general fandom, SFQ favorite sport, IS favorite team, IS general sport fandom, IS favorite sport) were summed to form indices for each scale.

To compare the identity centrality of identification with one’s favorite sport team with his or her degree of fandom (general and favorite sport), several Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVAs) were conducted. The first pair of MANOVAs investigated responses to the SSIS and both forms of the SFQ. First, to examine team identification and general fandom, a 2 (Measure: SSIS and SFQ general fandom) X 2 (Gender: male or female) analysis was conducted. This analysis revealed a significant between-subjects gender effect, F(1, 565) = 22.76, p < .001. Males had higher scores for both team identification and general sport fandom. The multivariate test was also significant as participants reported higher levels of identification for their favorite team than for their level of general sport fandom, Wilks’ Lambda F(1, 565) = 77.56, p < .001. The Measure by Gender interaction was also significant, Wilks’ Lambda F(1, 565) = 14.04, p < .001. Although males reported higher levels of identification than general fandom [t(191) = 3.47, p = .001], this difference was more pronounced among women, [t(374) = 10.29, p < .001].

The second MANOVA targeted fandom for one’s favorite sport using a 2 (Measure: SSIS and SFQ favorite sport) X 2 (Gender: male or female) MANOVA. This analysis also revealed a significant between-subjects gender effect, F(1, 565) = 14.81, p < .001, as males had higher scores for both team identification and fandom for a favorite sport.
multivariate test was not significant, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 0.81$, $p = .37$. The Measure by Gender interaction was also not significant, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 0.14$, $p = .68$. Follow-up t-tests indicated that neither males nor females reported different levels of identification for a favorite team and levels of fandom for a favorite sport [males $t(191) = 0.95$, $p = .36$; females $t(374) = 0.39$, $p = .70$].

The second pair of MANOVAs tested responses to the Identification Scales. The results of these MANOVAs mirrored the first pair. With respect to comparison of identification with a favorite team and general fandom, a 2 (Measure: IS-favorite team and IS-general fandom) X 2 (Gender: male or female) analysis was conducted. This analysis revealed a significant between-subjects gender effect, $F(1, 565) = 12.92$, $p < .001$. Once again males had higher scores for both team identification and general sport fandom. The multivariate test was also significant, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 26.84$, $p < .001$. Participants reported higher levels of identification for their favorite team than for their level of general sport fandom. The Measure by Gender interaction was marginally significant, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 2.43$, $p < .12$. The pattern of effects was consistent with the MANOVA targeting SSIS and SFQ-general fandom. That is, although males again reported higher levels of identification than general fandom, $t(191) = 2.22$, $p = .03$, this difference tended to be more prominent among women, $t(374) = 5.80$, $p < .001$.

The final MANOVA targeted fandom for one’s favorite sport by utilizing a 2 (IS-favorite team and IS-fandom for favorite sport) X 2 (Gender: male or female) MANOVA. A significant between-subjects gender effect emerged, $F(1, 565) = 10.30$, $p < .001$, as males had higher scores for both team identification and fandom for a favorite sport. The multivariate test was not statistically significance, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 0.01$, $p = .91$. Similarly, the Measure by Gender interaction was not significant, Wilks’ Lambda $F(1, 565) = 0.00$, $p = .98$. Follow-up t-tests indicated that neither males nor females reported significantly different levels of team identification for a favorite team and levels of fandom for a favorite sport [males $t(191) = 0.09$, $p = .93$; females $t(374) = 0.07$, $p = .95$].

Discussion will center on the consistent trend emerging in the results across both pairs of MANOVAs. Namely, that identification with favorite team was more central (important) than general fandom (especially true for females) but identification with favorite team was equally central to identification with favorite sport.