

SECOND EDITION

# **Sport Fans**

## The Psychology and Social Impact of Fandom

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# CHAPTER 2

## The Process of Becoming a Sport Fan: The Psychological Continuum Model

In the first chapter, we discussed different ways to define and classify sport fans. We differentiated between sport fans and spectators, wrote about direct and indirect sport consumers, and examined the topic of sport team identification. However, an important point we have not yet addressed in depth is the notion of *how* people become sport fans, become sport consumers, and come to identify with particular teams. In this chapter, we examine the “how” of sport fandom by investigating fans’ psychological connections with sport objects (e.g., a sport, team, or player) and the process through which such connections develop.

Think about the people you see when you attend a sporting event. It is not unusual to see people dressed in clothes (including costumes) portraying their favorite team’s colors. For example, at Florida State University home football games there are two fans that cover their bodies with garnet and gold paint and glitter and refer to themselves as the “Garnet and Gold Guys.” Perhaps you also frequently wear team apparel, paint your body, or have a tattoo of your favorite team’s logo. Or maybe your fandom is a bit more subdued, and you simply have a favorite team jersey that you wear for special games. Such behaviors do not just occur spontaneously. A person does not just wake up one morning and decide to have the star symbolizing the Dallas Cowboys tattooed on his or her arm (or other body part for that matter). A person needing clothes does not randomly purchase multiple items of team apparel from among all the clothing choices available. Rather, a person *becomes* a sport fan and connects to sport objects through individual and social psychological processes. One theory that helps us better understand these connections is the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001, 2006, 2016). This framework and its application to the process of becoming a sport fan is the focus of the current chapter.

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) was introduced as a conceptual framework to organize and advance our understanding of the psychology of

**TABLE 2.1** Psychological Continuum Model 2001 (Funk & James, 2001)

Stage of Connection	Key Psychological Characteristics
<b>Allegiance</b>	Intrinsic consistency Commitment to a sport (or team); persistent (positive) attitude toward a sport (or team); attitude resistant to change; attitude impacts cognition; intrinsic influences most important
<b>Attachment</b>	Intrinsic features Formation of a strong, positive attitude to a sport (or team); emotional complexity to a sport (or team); sport (or team) has personal importance and meaning
<b>Attraction</b>	Extrinsic and intrinsic features Selection of a favorite sport (or team); interest in sport (or team) impacted primarily by situational influences or dispositional influences
<b>Awareness</b>	Extrinsic features Knowledge that sport (or team) exists, but no particular interest; distinguishes between sports (and teams), but no particular interest; knowledge influenced by socializing agents and media

sport fans, particularly their interest in and connection with a sport object (Funk & James, 2001). The PCM contains four stages categorizing the connections people form within the realm of sport fandom: Awareness, Attraction, Attachment, and Allegiance. The PCM was conceptualized as a hierarchical model. Thus, people are expected to move through each stage (presuming there is movement), with each level representing a different degree of attitude formation and involvement toward a sport object. Psychological and sociological processes are thought to facilitate or inhibit movement among the stages. The PCM is illustrated in Table 2.1 as a bottom-up vertical progression. As a person advances to a higher stage, the psychological connection is expected to become stronger (i.e., stronger attitudes and greater involvement). In the paragraphs that follow, we take a brief look at the four stages. It should be noted that although the PCM explains connections to a variety of sport objects, for simplicity we will often frame our discussion around a fan's connection to a team.

## Awareness

The first stage of the PCM, Awareness, occurs as an individual first acquires the knowledge that a sport object exists. For example, the second author knows that the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp minor league baseball team plays in Jacksonville, Florida. However, he has never attended a game and really does

not have any other knowledge about or interest in the team. From a sport consumer perspective, he does not purchase merchandise, tickets, or consume the Jumbo Shrimp brand in any fashion. He is aware of the team but does not have any particular interest in it; he is simply not a fan of the Jumbo Shrimp. Similarly, although prior to reading the previous sentences you may have had no knowledge of the Jumbo Shrimp, you are now aware the team exists. At this stage, a person's connection with the sport object (the Jumbo Shrimp in our example) is essentially cognitive. That is, a person has knowledge and awareness of the focal object. This knowledge and awareness emanates from the sport fan socialization process, a topic that we will examine in much more detail in later sections.

## Attraction

The second stage, **Attraction**, is reached when a person progresses from simply knowing that a sport object exists to learning details about the object, other sports and teams, the rules of play, and different levels of the sport and potentially making the conscious decision to view a team as a favorite (Funk & James, 2001). At this stage a person begins to develop positive thoughts and feelings toward the object that are triggered when the individual recognizes that hedonic and dispositional needs may be fulfilled through sport consumption behavior related to the object (Funk & James, 2006). For example, if you find yourself in Jacksonville, Florida, and you are seeking a fun activity, and if you happen to like baseball, you may think attending a Jumbo Shrimp game could be entertaining. You have positive thoughts and feelings about the sport of baseball and may view attendance at a game as an opportunity to have an enjoyable experience. Thus, at this point, you would be operating at the **Attraction** level, the second stage within the PCM.

## Attachment

A person reaches the **Attachment** stage "when he or she has formed a stable psychological connection to a sport or team" (Funk & James, 2001, p. 132). A key distinction of the **Attachment** stage is that a person's connection to a team is based on the intrinsic importance of the relationship. That is, the team has a special, personal meaning to the individual. The difference between **Attraction** and **Attachment** stages can be illustrated in the following example. Imagine that a child's favorite sport team is The Ohio State University football team because her father is a fan of the Buckeyes. If the father were to suddenly decide that the Buckeyes were no longer his favorite team, it is possible the daughter might choose another favorite as well. For the child, there was an attraction to the team, but the connection was based on her relationship with her father, not with the team. However, if the Buckeyes take on personal importance to the daughter (beyond simply her relationship with her father), the team now has emotional and/or social psychological meaning to her, and she will have an attachment to the team regardless of her father's interest.

but decide to attend games and talk about the team as you make new friends and attempt to fit in to your new environment. As you become established and form relationships with others, you may no longer follow the team. You had an attraction to the team but never formed an attachment. Essentially, the team served its purpose (assisted in your acclimation to your new surroundings), and following the team is now no longer needed. Given the lack of attachment, the connection to the team can be easily severed. However, if you maintain your fandom for the team even after using it to gain connections with others, you are clearly attached to the team for intrinsic reasons beyond simply using the team as a catalyst to form relationships.

## Allegiance

The final stage, *Allegiance*, represents the strongest psychological connection. According to Funk and James (2001), the term *allegiance* is used “to describe the construct of loyalty” (p. 134). At this stage an individual possesses an “attitude that is resistant to change, stable across context and time, influences cognitive processing of information, and is predictive of behavior” (Funk & James, 2016, p. 250). A fan at the *allegiance* stage invests significant emotional, psychological, financial, and temporal resources in the favorite team. From a sport consumption viewpoint, a fan at the *allegiance* stage will likely exhibit consistent and enduring behaviors such as purchasing team merchandise, attending or watching games, and talking positively about the team.

## Understanding the PCM

In the paragraphs to follow, we provide a deeper examination of the PCM and its four stages. Such a presentation is designed to give the reader a deeper comprehension of the connections fans feel with sport objects. However, before continuing, it warrants mention that although the original presentation of the PCM provided a framework for understanding connections with a sport object (Funk & James, 2001), the authors soon revised the framework to provide additional information about movement among the stages, as well as inputs and outputs that operate within each level (Funk & James, 2006). The revision helps us better understand “how the psychological connection between an individual and a sport object progressively forms through particular internal social-psychological mechanisms” (Funk & James, 2016, p. 250). The revised PCM has the unique characteristic of integrating the advantages of a stage-based model and a continuum-style approach “to create a theoretical hybrid, a stage-based continuum model that serves as a framework to study the developmental progression of a psychological connection to a sport, sport-based object, or leisure activity” (Funk & James, 2016, p. 251).

## Awareness

When thinking about the *Awareness* stage, Funk and James (2001) suggest two questions are likely to come to mind: (1) when and (2) how do people become

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ware of sport objects? The answer to the first question is that we become aware of sport and sport-related objects continually throughout our lives. From the very first years of life we are exposed to sport as part of the process of learning about the world around us. And we continue to learn about different aspects of sport at other times in our lives. For example, unless people were of Scottish descent, they were likely not familiar with the sport of curling prior to its inclusion in the 1998 Olympic Games. Furthermore, new sports emerge (e.g., indoor soccer, roller hockey, snowboarding, and many of the action/extreme sports), and new teams are added to existing leagues.

To answer the second question on the process through which people become aware of sport objects, think about the statement “learning about the world around us and our place in it” written in the previous paragraph. Such learning is referred to as **socialization**. Socialization is impacted by the cultural influences and environment in which a person resides. As a process, socialization involves learning the attitudes, values, and actions believed to be appropriate for members of a particular society (Kenyon & McPherson, 1974). Thus, **sport fan socialization** occurs as we learn about attitudes, values, and actions related to specific sport objects. This learning happens via **socialization agents**, that is, those individuals or institutions that expose us to the values, behaviors, and ideals of sport.

For example, think about your favorite team. Perhaps your family liked this team, and you were exposed to the team through family conversations. Or maybe you learned about the team from a close friend or peer, or as a child you played on a team with this name. Individuals like family members, friends, coaches, and others in our lives teach us about sports, teams, and sport fandom in general. Participating in organized sports through community leagues and school programs can also be informative. Additionally, teams engage in promotional activities to stimulate consumer awareness, that is, to ensure that consumers know about a sport product. Activities such as advertising, special promotions, and free admission for children are used to increase awareness. And we would be remiss if we did not mention the impact of media, particularly in the “digital age” with increasing access to sport news and information. Each of the aforementioned individuals (e.g., family and friends) and institutions (e.g., schools and the media) are important agents in the process of sport fan socialization. Sport socialization is a critically important process, and an impressive volume of research has been devoted to this topic. As a result, we will examine this issue in greater detail in a separate section following our discussion of the stages of the PCM.

Knowing that sports and teams exist is indicative of Awareness. At this stage, however, a person is not necessarily a fan of a particular sport or team. As one learns more about the sport object in question, he or she comes to recognize (consciously or otherwise) that hedonic and social needs may be fulfilled by supporting teams and by attending and watching sporting events. Such learning may result in movement to the next stage, Attraction.

## Attraction

Once a person has learned about a sport object (i.e., Awareness), he or she may

and thus, move to the Attraction stage of the PCM. One interesting point about the Attraction stage is that the individual may or may not be a fan at this juncture. That is, we have to consider why the person is interested in the pastime. In essence, this stage focuses on factors that motivate fan interest in sports and the teams/athletes that play them. The motives that underlie fan interest are a critical piece of the puzzle for understanding one's connection to sports and teams. In fact, because of the importance of this topic and the large volume of research dedicated to it, we will address fan motivation in a future chapter devoted solely to this area.

At a more general level, two key processes associated with the Attraction stage involve experiencing the hedonic and social-situational aspects of sport (and team) consumption. That is, fans are motivated by and attracted to something pleasurable or socially stimulating about sport fandom.

**Hedonic Need Fulfillment** There are a number of potential elements of sport fandom that could be enjoyable for those interested in the pastime. There is excitement, drama, and aesthetically pleasing performances, and even the potential for escape, all of which may contribute to a pleasurable experience. Everyone (your authors included) prefers to have pleasurable experiences and to have fun. This desire is the essence of **hedonic need fulfillment**; one's attempt to satisfy a craving for pleasurable experiences. Sport fandom is one means through which people can satisfy their desire to have fun. For instance, think about the special events associated with sporting contests, such as pregame concerts and postgame fireworks shows, and the variety of promotional giveaways. Hey, *everyone* likes a free T-shirt (some people will seemingly do anything to catch one at a game). Such activities are enjoyable because they are fun, pleasurable experiences.

The preceding description illustrates that sport fandom can be a means through which people experience hedonic need fulfillment. However, this does not guarantee that someone seeking such fulfillment is connected to a particular team or other sport object. For example, imagine a person who attends a baseball game one night, yet the following day chooses to go to a movie or concert instead of another game. In this instance, the rationale for attending the game may have been to have a pleasurable experience more so than because of a connection to the team. If asked, such a person might say she or he is a fan of the team, but if there is not an abiding interest in following a specific team, the individual is really a mere spectator.

**Social-Situational Aspects of Sport** A second general driver of behaviors for those functioning at the Attraction stage concerns the **social-situational aspects of fandom**. Consider the earlier example of the child who roots for the same team as her father. Following the team, talking about the team, and watching games with her father are all useful ways for her to connect with him. In this instance, the father (or the relationship with him) is the focal point, not the team. Moving to a new location and supporting a local team as a way to fit in would be another example of social-situational attraction. In each of the aforementioned examples, the team is secondary to the focal point of establishing relationships with others. Once again, an individual may state that she or he is

a fan of the team, but the question remains as to whether or not there is an abiding interest in following the team. If not, the connection to the team is still quite tenuous at this stage.

A large portion of work in sport marketing focuses on consumers at the Attraction stage and the ability to move people to this level. The special events, promotions, and price discounts associated with sporting events (particularly at the minor league level) are mechanisms for satisfying hedonic needs and the need to belong. However, when teams become the focal object and take on intrinsic importance to an individual, that person has progressed to the stage of Attachment.

## Attachment

Once a person has reached the Attachment stage he or she has formed a meaningful psychological connection with a sport object, such as a particular sport or team (Funk & James, 2006). Of interest here is an understanding of what, precisely, is involved in a “meaningful psychological connection.” As mentioned in our overview of the four stages presented above, at the Attachment stage a person’s connection to a team is based on the intrinsic importance of the team rather than extrinsic factors such as satisfying hedonic and/or social needs. Intrinsic importance occurs when a team has a special meaning to the fan and becomes a part of the individual. You may be wondering how a team becomes “part of an individual.” This occurs as a person assimilates the team within her or his self-concept. That is, the person derives value from thinking of her or himself as a fan of the team. It is at this point that a person comes to identify with the team. Being a fan of the team becomes more central to the individual’s social identity, and he or she takes greater pleasure in being a supporter of the team (Doyle, Kunkel, & Funk, 2013).

For example, sport teams have particular characteristics that are thought to be representative of the team. One such team would be the Pittsburgh Steelers from the NFL, a team that has often been promoted as a hard-working, blue-collar team. For someone that values a strong work ethic and derives worth from being a “regular Joe,” the Steelers may serve as a symbolic representation of those values. The team is thought of as a positive symbol, and through association with the team, a person derives positive self-esteem (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Thus, one’s connection with a sport object involves the person’s social identity. Hogg and Abrams (1988) explain that social identity is “defined as the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership” (p. 7). As a fan of a team, a person may view his or herself as a member of a group that supports the favorite team. That is, being part of the fan group provides a sense of belonging.

Recall what is happening at the Attraction stage. At this point in the process, the person is interested in following a team and attending games primarily due to the influence of hedonic need fulfillment and the psychological features of a social situation. When the individual has progressed to the Attachment stage, he or she likely still enjoys the hedonic need fulfillment and social pleasures



accompanying sport fandom (e.g., still appreciates ticket discounts and special events). However, these elements are no longer the driver of attitudes and behaviors. Rather, the team has come to represent particular values or ideas that are important to the individual. From a sport consumer behavior perspective, individuals reaching the Attachment stage are quite likely to be consumers; they attend games, purchase merchandise and apparel, and engage in positive word of mouth when talking about the team (Funk & James, 2001). Additionally, as the connections and positive sentiments toward the team strengthen, a person may progress to the stage of Allegiance.

## Allegiance

The Allegiance stage involves the notion of loyalty, that is, a commitment or devotion to a favorite team (or other sport object). At this stage of the PCM, a person's attitude toward a team is persistent, is highly central to one's social identity, influences cognitive processing, and is predictive of behavior (Doyle et al., 2013; Funk & James, 2016). Fans reaching this stage often attempt to promote the team to others (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012).

For fans at the Allegiance stage, the thoughts and feelings they have toward a sport object such as a favorite team are going to be quite strong. The concept of strength concerns the accessibility of the thoughts and feelings in one's memory. When a sport object such as a sport team is important to a person, she or he can easily access memories and feelings about it (Funk & James, 2001). For example, memories such as the team winning a championship or watching a memorable play are readily available in the person's memory. These cognitive and affective experiences stay with us, that is, they persist over time. As a result, attitudes toward the team become resistant and hard to change. When a person has a strong connection to a favorite team, it is difficult for the individual to change how he or she thinks and feels about the team because the role of team follower has become a central and valued part of the person's identity (Funk & James, 2001; Wann, 2006a). It seems that no matter what happens, be it poor team performance or unlawful acts by a player or coach, the individual does not waver in his or her allegiance (Kwon, Trail, & Lee, 2008; Spinda, 2011).

Fans are able to resist changing their attitude toward a favorite sport object (particularly a favorite team) in part due to biases in cognitive processing (Wann & Grieve, 2005; Wann & Schrader, 2000). For example, consider how you respond when your favorite team loses. Do you tend to blame your team or something else (e.g., the officials, bad luck, poor weather)? Researchers explain that most allegiant fans focus blame on objects other than the team in an attempt to protect the part of their identity built around the team (Wann, 2006c; Wann & Dolan, 1994a). When there is negative information reported in the media about your favorite team, how do you respond? Do you resist or reject these unflattering reports, reinterpret the information in a way that seems positive, or use selective perception to avoid information that conflicts with your thoughts and feelings? Again, researchers suggest that you are likely biased in your perceptions in a manner that favors your team as you attempt to cope with threats to your fan-related identity (Wann, 2006a, 2006c). For example, Funk

(1998) found that people with a strong attitude toward a team had more thoughts, recalled more facts, and demonstrated biased thinking when responding to prompts about a newspaper article compared to those having a weaker attitude toward the team. Sport fans develop and utilize an impressively wide range of these “mental gymnastics” to protect their fan-related identity. In fact, in Chapter 10 we will examine a number of strategies fans utilize to cope with team-related identity threats.

Another critical point about fandom at the Allegiance stage is that a strong positive attitude toward a team not only influences cognitions and perceptions but also has the capacity to influence behavior. It should seem logical that if a team is considered an important and central part of one’s identity, then following the team should be a priority. Fans follow teams in many ways, including watching games in person or on television, reading information about the team, purchasing merchandise, and wearing team apparel. Importantly, these behaviors persist over time (for many, over a lifetime). In the context of sport consumer behavior, those characterized by allegiance are highly desirable to sport marketers because those reaching the Allegiance stage invest considerable amounts of monetary, temporal, and emotional resources to follow a team.

## Summarizing the Psychological Continuum Model

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) is valuable as an explanatory framework for describing the process involved in becoming a fan. Additionally, the PCM is a useful model for describing the impact of connections with sport objects on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. We will refer to the PCM throughout this book as we address other topics pertaining to sport fandom. For instance, in Chapter 5 we will return to a discussion of the PCM by focusing on how the framework has been used in the study of sport consumers, particularly the efforts that have been undertaken to develop a tool that may be used to “stage” (or position) individuals along the continuum.

## Socialization Into Fandom

As noted earlier in this chapter, socialization is vital in the process of becoming a sport fan. We explained the pivotal role socialization is believed to play in the PCM, particularly at the Awareness stage. Beyond the parameters of the PCM, however, socialization merits further discussion in relation to sport fandom.

In Chapter 1, we presented information about the pervasiveness of sport, noting that its prevalence is evident in a variety of ways. For instance, the volume of fans that (repeatedly) attend sporting events at the professional, intercollegiate, and interscholastic levels is staggering. Additionally, sport is a primary source of programming for network, cable, and satellite television providers. The number of sport-related Internet sites, print media, and video games also illustrates the importance, and value, of sport in our society. Given the degree to which individuals are bombarded with sport, it seems reasonable that most

persons end up being fans of the pastime. However, although survey data indicate that most individuals do indeed consider themselves sport fans (Jones, 2015; Luker, 2014), others have absolutely no interest. Some people seem immune to the influence of our sport-crazed society. How is it that so many persons come to love sport while others pay little or no attention to it (or, in the case of some people, actually loathe sport)?

Our starting point to answering this question is to acknowledge that the value attached to sport fandom is learned. A person does not simply wake up one morning and decide that she or he is a diehard fan of the Murray State Racers and thus proceed to spend \$1,000 on team apparel and memorabilia. In this section our purpose is to illustrate that people learn to become sport fans through the process of sport fan socialization and, where possible, examine the role of various socializing agents.

As we move through the following sections, it will be useful to remember the general premise of socialization: it involves the process of learning to live in and understand a culture or subculture by internalizing its values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms. James (2016) articulated these concepts well when he wrote that socialization is “the process through which we learn what it means to be part of society and how to live and act within a given society” and that “individuals, groups, and institutions that are part of, and which create the social context in which we learn attitudes, values and roles are socializing agents” (pp. 264, 265). With respect to sport fandom, we are specifically concerned with the process by which individuals learn and accept the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of the sport fan culture (e.g., the notion of “never giving up,” the jargon, terminology, rules of specific sports, players’ statistics, and so forth). Examining sport fan socialization not only furthers our comprehension of how individuals become sport fans and form connections with specific sport objects, it also highlights the importance of cultural differences in fandom.

## Research on North American Sport Fan Socialization

Much of the early work on sport socialization dealt with individuals becoming active sport participants. For example, in the 1970s scholars reported that during their elementary school years children learned about and were primarily influenced to participate in sport by family members (Kenyon & McPherson, 1974). As parents raise and teach their children, these interactions often include encouraging children to value sport and to become actively involved. However, as children grow, other socializing agents such as peers and the media become more influential (Kenyon, 1968; McPherson, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973).

Social scientists began to show interest in the process of sport fan socialization in the 1970s. During this time period, although a small number of authors had written about the process (e.g., Kenyon & McPherson, 1974), few empirical studies were conducted. That changed when McPherson (1976) completed what is likely the first comprehensive examination of sport fan socialization. He believed that four sources (i.e., socialization agents) would be primarily

responsible for teaching the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of sport fandom. These were family, peers (i.e., friends), schools, and community. To test the impact of these agents, McPherson asked Canadian adolescents to complete a questionnaire assessing the influence of each. The findings revealed that males and females reported different patterns of sport fan socialization. Specifically, males were most often influenced by their peers, followed by family and schools. The community did not appear to be a significant agent in the sport fan socialization of males (see also Smith, Patterson, Williams, & Hogg, 1981). As for female participants, family had the greatest influence, followed closely by peer groups. The community was also found to have a significant impact on the socialization of females, but to a lesser degree than family and peers. Schools did not appear to be a significant agent.

Although McPherson's (1976) work was valuable and shed light on the process of becoming a sport fan, it is quite dated. Cultures change with the passage of time, and so do the institutions and pastimes residing within them. To investigate the possibility that sport fan socialization had transformed in the years since McPherson's work, the first author and his colleagues conducted a replication and extension of McPherson's research, the results of which were presented in the first edition of this text (Wann et al., 2001). To maintain consistency with McPherson, we investigated the influence of the same four socialization agents. However, in our work, participants (United States college students) also answered an open-ended item in which they listed the person (e.g., father, aunt, etc.) or entity (e.g., school, media, etc.) that had the greatest single influence on their becoming involved with sport as a fan.

For males, the pattern of sport fan socialization remained consistent from the 1970s to the late 1990s. That is, similar to McPherson's (1976) findings, males were most strongly influenced by peers, and they were least likely to have been influenced by their community. Such was not the case for the female participants, however. Rather, although McPherson found that schools had the least amount of influence on female fans, respondents in our sample indicated this was the most powerful socialization agent. We surmised that this change for female fans may have been partially due to Title IX, a federal law that prohibits sexual discrimination in institutions receiving federal funding. Begun in 1972, Title IX has had a widespread impact on high school and college athletics because it requires that schools provide equitable opportunities to females. Consequently, the number of women's sport teams at the high school and collegiate levels increased dramatically (Oglesby, 1989; Snyder, 1993). Perhaps this increase in participation led to a greater prominence of female sports in school settings, thereby arousing greater interest in sport among the female student body. Thus, there may have been an added influence of Title IX, namely, the increased role of schools in the socialization of female sport fans.

Responses to the open-ended item on the single most influential agent were also quite informative. One's family was listed as exerting the greatest influence on socialization into fandom, as more than half of the male and female participants listed a family member as the individual who had the greatest impact. Within the family category, fathers were clearly the most influential agent (for males and females alike); they were named by over one-third of the sample (see also Thompson & Forsyth, 2012). However, although our data revealed the powerful



Family Members, and in Particular Fathers, Can Be Powerful Agents of Sport Fan Socialization

influences of family as a socializing agent, the impact of one's family (including parents) likely decreases as one transitions from youth to adolescence and adolescence to young adulthood (Casper & Menefee, 2010a; Yoh et al., 2009).

Another interesting result involved the gender of the socialization agents (Wann et al., 2001). Gender of the agent was detectible in slightly over half of the cases (e.g., father, sister, aunt, etc.). An examination of these agents revealed that they were far more likely to be male than female. Thus, it was evident that both male and female fans were more likely to be socialized into the sport follower role by males. Although one might believe that other women would have a stronger influence on the sport fan socialization for females, such was not the case. Similarly, Farrell et al. (2011) summarized their work on female sport fans by stating "the most robust theme to emerge was the profound male influence in the spectator lives of women" (p. 190). The fact that males wield such a dominant influence in the process of sport fan socialization should not be taken lightly. Rather, it likely aids in the persistence of the male hegemony associated with sport in general and sport fandom specifically, a topic that is examined further in Chapter 11.

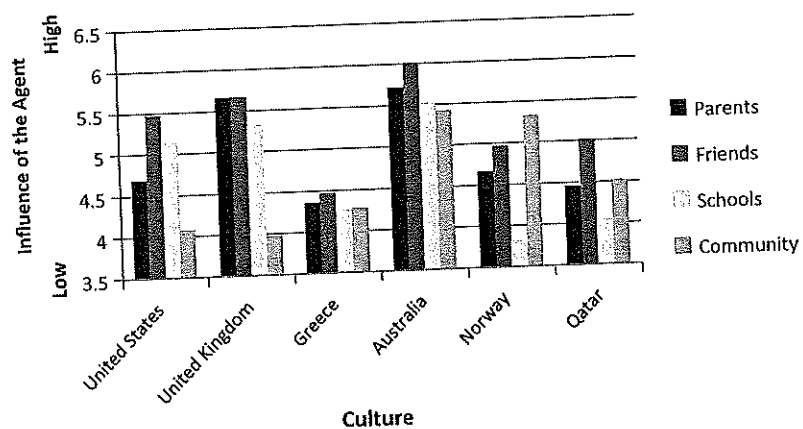
## Cross-Cultural Research on Sport Fan Socialization

Thus far, our investigation of sport fan socialization has focused on people from North America. However, sport fandom is a worldwide phenomenon. Thus, it

**PART I** ▶ How and Why Fans Follow Sports

important to consider whether the socialization process varies among persons from different cultural groups. For instance, the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms held by European soccer hooligans would almost assuredly differ from those held by North American golf fans. Given this, it is important for researchers to conduct cross-cultural work to determine how the sport fan socialization process differs across various sociocultural contexts. Fortunately, such a line of investigation has been undertaken. In fact, we now have information on the sport fan socialization process from persons living in a variety of regions, including Norway (Melnick & Wann, 2004), Greece (Theodorakis & Wann, 2008), Australia (Melnick & Wann, 2011), Qatar (Theodorakis et al., 2017), and the United Kingdom (Parry et al., 2014). To remain consistent with the work conducted by Wann et al. (2001), persons in each of the aforementioned studies reported on the influence of the four key socialization agents on their becoming a sport fan. Taken together, these studies highlight both cultural differences and similarities in the socialization process.

The influence of the four agents is depicted in Figure 2.1. Several points become apparent when looking at the figure. First, friends were consistently rated as a critical socialization agent across all cultures sampled. In fact, it was the highest rated agent for five of the samples and the second highest for the other. Second, there was little variability among agents in the Grecian sample, suggesting that each source had a roughly equal level of influence. Third, some countries differed markedly in the influence of communities and schools. For instance, although community was least important for the persons in the United States and United Kingdom samples, it was quite influential for those in Norway. Conversely, schools were far more powerful as socialization agents in the United States and United Kingdom than in Norway. As Melnick and Wann (2004) noted, this pattern of effects is reasonable when one considers the sport cultures



**FIGURE 2.1** The Influence of Agents of Sport Fan Socialization Across Six Cultures. Note: The Y-axis represents the influence of the agent, with 3.5 being the lowest and 6.5 being the highest. The bars reflect a greater influence for

in these locales. For example, the interscholastic model found in the United States likely results in greater attention being placed on school athletic teams, while the club model in Norway renders the community (and community-based teams) as superordinate.

Before leaving our discussion of cross-cultural work on sport fan socialization, a couple of points warrant mention. First, it should be noted that these projects utilized small convenience samples often comprised of university students. Thus, the results are limited in their generalizability. However, even with this limitation, this body of work provides a partial glimpse into the process of sport fan socialization for persons in the different countries.

Second, the work detailed above focused on only four socialization agents. Of course, there are many others. In particular, individuals learn about and may be socialized into sport fandom through media outlets such as team magazines, television programs, and the Internet. Socialization in this manner may be particularly common among displaced fans who are often far removed from other socializing agents such as friends and community (Farred, 2002). Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that the impact of the media increases as people move from their early teens to early 20s (Yoh et al., 2009) and is particularly influential in the socialization of fans who did not play the sport in their childhood (Casper & Menefee, 2010b).

## Some Final Thoughts

The current chapter focused on the process of becoming involved in sport fandom and attachments fans develop for various sport objects. Our presentation of this issue was divided into two sections: connecting to sport objects via the process described by the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001, 2006, 2016), and the process of sport fan socialization and the many agents that teach us what it means to be a fan. A few final thoughts warrant discussion before leaving these critical issues. First, the process of connecting with teams, players, and other entities within the realm of sport fandom is closely tied to the construct of involvement (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1993; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997). Involvement is defined as a “state of motivation, arousal, or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product” (Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998, p. 260). Involvement is believed to be composed of five factors: attraction, sign, centrality to lifestyle, risk probability, and risk consequence (Funk & James, 2001). Table 2.2 includes a list of these factors and an explanation of each. The involvement factors are believed to differentially impact connections with a sport team, relative to the stage of connection. For example, at the stage of Awareness, a person would be expected to have low scores on the measures assessing each involvement factor. At the Attraction stage, a person would likely have a high score on the attraction factor as a function of anticipated hedonic need fulfillment. At the same time, we would expect scores on the sign and centrality factors to be lower. However, at the Attachment stage, a team may be viewed as representative of the self, and, therefore, scores on the sign factor would be higher. If following a team becomes important to an individual, then she or he would likely organize his or her time around watching

**TABLE 2.2 Five Factors Comprising Involvement**

Factor	Definition	Example
Attraction	The interest in an activity or product, and the pleasure derived from participation or use.	For example, the hedonic value associated with following a sport team.
Sign	The unspoken statement that purchase or participation conveys about the person.	For example, the Steelers are known as hard working; I am a Steelers fan, I am hard working.
Centrality to Lifestyle	Encompassing friends and families centered around activities and the primary role of the activities in an individual's life.	Following a particular team to feel accepted by family or friends. Organizing one's life around following the favorite team.
Risk Probability	The perceived probability of making a poor decision.	For example, what is the likelihood that choosing not to attend a game is a bad decision?
Risk Consequence	The perceived importance of negative consequences in the case of a poor decision.	What happens if I follow a losing team?

*Note:* Definitions are derived from the work of Havitz and Dimanche (1997), Iwasaki and Havitz (1998), Laurent and Kapferer (1985), and McIntyre (1989).

the team and attending the team's games. This greater degree of importance should be reflected in a higher centrality score. In Chapter 5, we examine further how the involvement factors can be used to determine stage of psychological connection.

As for the process of sport fan socialization, you may have noticed that the agents found to be most influential tend to be people (or persons). However, non-person factors can be important as well. For example, Kolbe and James (2000) found that the notion of a team representing a specific locale (e.g., "the hometown team") was an important influence on a person becoming a fan. Additionally, the media, promotions, and special events could also be considered non-person factors. It is likely that these non-person agents interact in some manner with one's personal experience as a fan. That is, one has to value the idea of a team being representative of one's hometown for that factor to be influential. The point we are drawing out here is that when we think about socialization, although we like to focus on "primary" influences or the person with the "most" influence, we must keep in mind that the process is not linear or even dichotomous. It might be more realistic to think of the sport fan



socialization process as a wave, with various agents and factors flowing over and around an individual throughout her or his life. These waves likely include different agents and influential factors over time.

Thus, it is important to remember that sport fan socialization is a lifelong process. For example, consider the NHL fandom experience of the first author. Although I had routinely followed almost every sport, I made it into my early 50s before ever attending (or even casually watching or following) a professional hockey game. It was at this time that I found myself romantically involved with a Nashville Predators fan. Looking back, it seems as though my identification with the "Preds" paralleled my relationship with Michelle (now my wife). The more involved we became, the more I was socialized to follow hockey and support the Nashville team. We now attend 5–6 games per year and have even discussed purchasing a season ticket package. Similarly, it is possible (perhaps even common) for parents to be socialized to follow a new sport or team via their children. Referred to as reverse socialization (Hyatt, Kerwin, Hoerber, & Sveinson, 2017), this process can occur when a child becomes involved in a sport (or supports a team) with which his or her parents had yet to become acquainted (e.g., mom and dad now follow soccer because their child is on a school soccer team). Thus, it is critical not to view sport fan socialization as simply a top-down process. Quite to the contrary, socialization agents can and often do continue to exert influence throughout one's lifetime. As a consequence, fandom tends to be an ever-evolving and dynamic enterprise for those involved with the pastime.