

ABSTRACT

DELK, JESSICA NICOLE. Socialization of Female College Football Fans. (Under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Casper.)

Despite females composing a large market share of college football spectatorship, few empirical studies have been conducted to better understand the female fan base. The purpose of this study is to identify the social factors that influence the consumer socialization of female college football fans. A qualitative approach was selected to expand the current literature on socialization and fandom. Three focus groups of female undergraduate students (N = 13) were conducted at North Carolina State University. Interview questions were developed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. The questions were formatted as probing and open-ended to aid in the development of in-depth responses by the participants and were focused on social factors. The data were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA to identify themes in responses. Seven major themes were developed throughout the focus groups including: atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others. Each of these themes are discussed in relation to their influence on female college football fans. Results of this study will be useful for sport marketing practitioners by providing a better understanding of the influences on this growing female market segment in becoming college football fans.

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Socialization of Female College Football Fans

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From 2005 to 2009, the number of college football attendees increased by over 5,000,000 spectators (National Sporting Goods Association [NSGA], 2009). In recent years, the percentage of females attending college football games has been steadily growing (see Table 1). These females constitute a large market share as they continue to attend games. With this steady growth, it is important for marketers to realize how these female fans became socialized to the sport so that they can develop stronger marketing efforts to retain and grow this market segment.

Table 1. Football – College Attendance: Percent by Gender

Item	2011	2012
Male	61.0%	53.7%
Female	39.0%	46.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
Base (No. attending – add 000)	26,160	25,006
Source: SBRnet (NSGA, 2012)		

My study was aimed at understanding the underlying social factors related to consumer behavior of female sport fans. Specifically, the purpose of my study was to identify the social factors (e.g., atmosphere, community, family, football players,

friends, school/university, and significant others) that influenced the consumer socialization of female college football fans.

Although some studies have been focused on the similarities and differences of male and female sport fans (e.g., McPherson, 1976; Melnick & Wann, 2010), few studies have focused solely on female fans (Farrell, Fink, and Fields, 2011; James & Ridinger, 2002). Fink, Trail, and Anderson (2002) discussed one frequently overlooked market with a great potential for additional revenue production in collegiate athletics: female fans. They also noted that as of 2002, there was no evidence that collegiate athletic departments have used the findings on the differences between male and female fans to capture more female fans. Fink et al. (2002) also concluded that future research should be conducted on how and why female fans become more loyal to a sport or team. They found that female fans were more likely to remain loyal fans once they had committed to their fandom than male fans were. Additionally in 2012, Meghann Malone, a marketing manager for IMRE Sports stated, “a female consumer is a consumer for life...they’re the ones more likely to become brand loyalists,” (as cited in Dosh, 2012, n.p.). In an article written by The Pigskin Report Staff (TPR Staff; 2012), the Discover Fan Loyalty Poll also showed that women were the most loyal college football fans by a small margin. Therefore, more recent findings were in line with Fink et al. (2002). Melnick and Wann (2010) also found that the female fan socialization process is more complex

for females than males. In other words, they found that females might be influenced by *complex interactions* of several social factors. With these studies in mind, my research sought to expand this literature and better understand the specifics affecting the consumer socialization (i.e., becoming a more loyal fan) of female college football fans.

Theoretical Framework

Consumer socialization was used as a framework for examining how female college football fans (i.e., consumers) were socialized. Consumer socialization has been defined as the process in which people develop and progress through their consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes over their life cycle (Moschis, 1987; Moschis & Churchill, 1978). For use in my study, consumer socialization focused on the social influences (i.e., factors) that have been found to affect the consumer behavior of individuals. These behaviors related to both the mental and behavioral outcomes, which included sport-related behaviors (Bellenger & Moschis, 1981; Casper & Meneffee, 2010a, 2010b).

Socialization is defined as, “the process of learning to live in and understand a culture or subculture by internalizing its values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms,” (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001, p. 24). Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (2000) stated that many sociologists often define socialization as the process in which individuals develop the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and other requirements to perform various social roles. Specific to sport consumer behavior,

Wann et al. (2001) stated that it is important to understand the sport fan socialization process to further the comprehension of why specific individuals become fans. In the context of this study, specific social factors affecting female socialization to college football fandom were presented. To understand how women were socialized as a fan of college football, researchers must first understand the consumer – the sport fan.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to define the difference between a fan and a spectator. Sport spectating is a leading leisure activity in today's society (James & Ridinger, 2002). Each year, numerous people attend sporting events and think of themselves as sport fans (James & Ridinger, 2002). According to Wann et al. (2001), a sport fan is one who is enthusiastic about a particular sport, team or athlete, whereas a spectator is one who observes a sport event, and is not necessarily a fan. In other words, a sport spectator is someone that may only attend a game because their friend invited him/her with no allegiance or loyalty to the sport, team, or athlete. Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw (1999) defined a fan as an enthusiastic individual who is devoted to sport in general, a league, or a team. My study focused solely on fans, rather than individuals who just watch sport. My purpose was to examine socialization into fandom and why these women had continued to be a fan of college football.

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to identify the primary social factors (e.g., atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others) that influenced the socialization of female college football fans. This study aimed to extend the current literature by examining female college football fans related to socialization factors that were the most salient in influencing their fandom.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following:

1. Gender – only females were examined.
2. Participants were students at North Carolina State University.
3. Participants were undergraduate students.
4. Participants were members of the Student Wolfpack Club.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of my study, key terms were defined:

Consumer: An individual or organization that purchases or obtains goods and services for direct use or ownership (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008)

Consumer Socialization: The process in which people develop and progress through their consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes over their life cycle (Moschis, 1987; Moschis & Churchill, 1978)

Fan: An individual who is enthusiastic about, and identifies with a particular sport, team, or athlete (Wann et al., 2001)

Socialization: The process of learning to live in and understand a culture or subculture by internalizing its values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms (Wann et al., 2001, p. 24)

Spectator: An individual who observes a sport event, but is not necessarily a fan (Wann et al., 2001)

Sport(s): Institutionalized competitive activities involving rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards (Coakley, 2004)

Sport Marketing: All activities designed to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers through exchange processes (Mullin et al., 2000, p. 9)

Summary

The purpose of my study was to identify the primary social factors (e.g., atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others) that influenced the socialization of female college football fans. The introduction provided an overview of the importance of female fans to college football as their attendance numbers have continued to increase over the past two seasons specifically. My study was aimed at filling in the research gaps that currently existed in consumer socialization (i.e., the study of consumer socialization of the female college football fan). I explained how past researchers have

suggested that more research should be conducted on female fans. I also discussed how I used consumer socialization as a guiding framework for my study. I then went on to talk about socialization and why it is important to understand how fans are socialized. I defined a fan and a spectator of sport since the two vary greatly and because I focused solely on fans. The delimitations of my study and the key terms were also defined in the introduction. I will now introduce prior literature in relation to the similarities and differences of female fans.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

College sports spectating is a leisure activity enjoyed by millions of spectators. In 2011, the NCAA Division I-FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision) attendance numbers totaled 37,411,795 (NCAA.org, 2012). College athletics, specifically the revenue sports of football and basketball, are often referred to as the “front porch” of an institution, the place where many individuals will first experience a university. “College athletics is the best high-profile promotional tool that a university can have. Every Saturday, we have the opportunity to catch the eye of millions of people and make a great impression. In that sense, your department of athletics is the ‘front porch of the university,’” (Indiana University, 2007, n.p.). This relationship between athletics and the university can be beneficial to everyone through creating a unity on campus and can help with branding of the university and the athletic department.

For many institutions, “football has become the fastest way to put their universities on the map,” (Keteyian, 2012, p. 2). For example, when Towson University played Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in September of 2012, Towson University was put on the map. Mike Waddell, Towson University’s Athletic Director was quoted, “There’ll be more people watching this game tonight than perhaps have ever watched anything to do with Towson University in our history, going back 146 years,” (cited by Keteyian, 2012, p. 3).

Even though Towson lost that game, it was still a “win for the Towson University Brand,” and Waddell noted, “You couldn’t buy this type of advertisement nationally,” (cited by Keteyian, p. 3). This branding is important for not only the athletic department, but to the university as well. Keteyian also stated, “Even at a place like Michigan, one of the top academic institutions in the country, football is the front porch to the school and a magnet for donations to the entire university,” (p. 3).

Branding is particularly important when making an institution well known. This branding can also lead to creating new fans and spectators of an institutions athletic department, which can then lead to the growth of the university financially through donations.

Everyone involved with a college or university typically understands the importance of donations for the growth of an institution. The Athletic Director at the University of Michigan, Dave Brandon, described how football season is a huge giving season at their university. “Our development folks have actually done statistical research on how much of the giving takes place during the football season and it’s a disproportionate amount,” (cited by Keteyian, 2012, p. 3). Brandon went on to say that he believes the number is around 60 - 70 percent of the donations and this college football *magnet* really does work in aiding the entire university’s growth. Therefore, as the attendance rates for women at college football games are steadily growing, loyal female fans are as important as the male fans for the continued growth of the athletic department and university as a whole.

Gender Differences

Researchers have proposed that women differ from men as spectators and fans (Anderson, Kwon, & Trail, 2005). Several previous studies have found that males typically are thought to be more involved with sports in general than females (Bahk, 2000; Dietz-Uhler, End, Jacquemotte, Bentley, & Hurlbut, 2000; James & Ridinger, 2002). Mullin et al. (2000) stated that, “women also are a major force among spectators, across a host of ‘big time’ sports,” (p. 62). Gantz and Wenner (1991) stated additional research was warranted on gender differences in fan interests and behaviors. Thus, it is important for sport industry professionals to understand their consumers and their wants and needs.

Consumer Behavior

Mullin et al. (2000) noted that, “the marketing concept begins and ends with the consumer,” (p. 44). Therefore, marketers should constantly strive to understand who their consumers are, how they have been exposed to their product, how and why they became involved with their product, and if they are committed to their product and why (Mullin et al., 2000). In the context of understanding consumers and their behaviors, socialization, involvement, and commitment are all interrelated for sport consumers (Brustad, 1992; Loy, McPherson, & Kenyon, 1978).

Mullin et al. (2000) noted that, “involvement takes one of three basic forms: behavioral, cognitive, and affective involvement,” (p. 56; Brustad, 1992; Loy et al., 1978). Behavioral involvement is prevalent in my study as it includes the activities of

sport fans at a sporting event (or while watching or listening at home), and cheering for a team. Cognitive involvement is when a sport fan is gaining more knowledge on a particular sport or team, and affective involvement is how a consumer feels and reacts towards a sport activity (Brustad, 1992; Loy et al., 1978; Mullin et al., 2000). Moschis and Churchill (1978) also discussed cognitive and behavioral patterns as related to consumer behavior. My study addressed each of these forms of involvement through the in-depth discussions on how these women were being socialized into their college football fandom.

Commitment was also examined throughout my study. Mullin et al. (2000) referenced Loy et al. (1978) to define commitment as the, “frequency, duration, and intensity of involvement in a sport, or the willingness to expend money, time, and energy in a pattern of sport involvement,” (Mullin et al., p. 57). It is important for the marketing professional to understand the socialization of their consumers so they can better understand the types of involvement and the commitment their consumers have. For example, typically the more committed an individual is to a sport or a team, the higher the value they place on the sport product (i.e., watching the game, going to the game, etc.). From the socialization, involvement, and commitment of a sport consumer stems *consumer behavior*. This consumer behavior then relates to the interaction of environmental and individual influences affecting the socialization, involvement, and commitment in sport (see Figure 1; please note that the highlighted information related directly to my study).

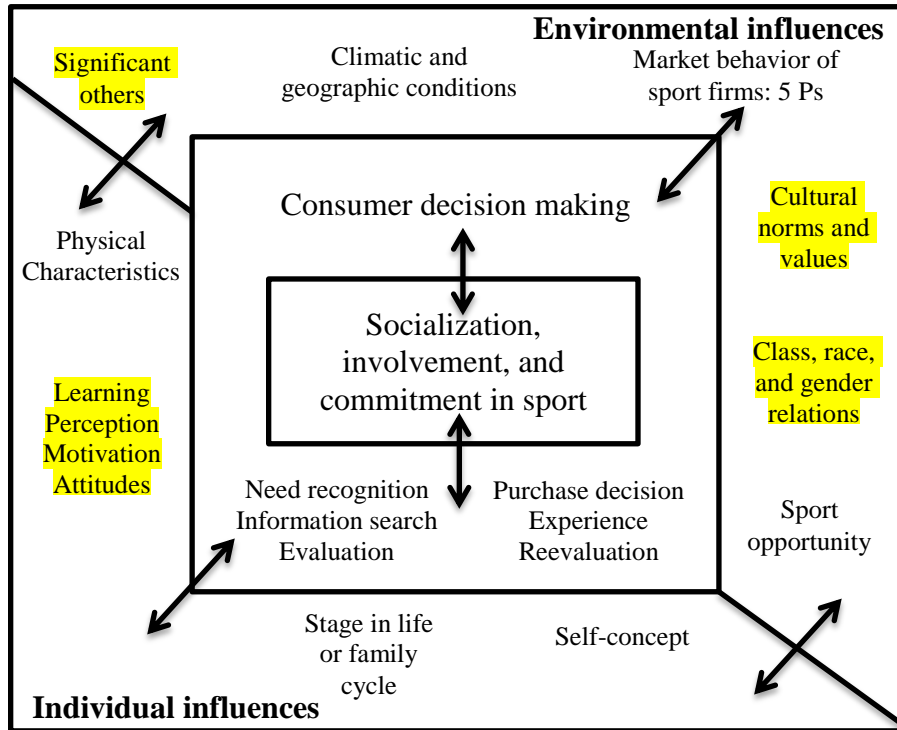


Figure 1. Consumer Behavior in Sport (Mullin et al., 2000, p. 58)

Individual and Environmental Interaction

Sport fan socialization involves a two-way interaction between individuals and their environment (Mullin et al., 2000). This interaction, in turn, creates an involvement with sport as shown in Figure 1. Environmental influences include significant others; climatic and geographic conditions; market behavior of sport firms; cultural norms and values; class, race, and gender relations; and sport opportunity.

Individual influences include physical characteristics, learning, perception, motivation and attitudes, stage in the life or family cycle, and self-concept.

Environmental Influences

The first of the environmental influences was significant others, which include family members, coaches, teachers, and friends along with anyone else who may influence an individual's patterns of involvement in spectator sports. Sport consumers may also have impersonal *reference groups* that are considered significant in their lives (e.g., distant role models such as Michael Jordan, "I want to be like Mike;" Mullin et al., 2000). These individuals may act as role models to these sport fans as well.

Cultural norms and values as well as class, race and gender relations can also influence sport consumers. The norms and values of an individual or a sports' culture, subculture, and countercultures can influence how and to what level various people become involved in different sports (Mullin et al., 2000). Gender relations related specifically to my study in that it may be important in terms of how women are socialized to sport.

Individual Influences

Perception, growth of attitudes and the individual *triggers* (i.e., motivations) were the most prominent individual influences that were directly related to my study. Perception employs the five senses through scanning, gathering, assessing, and interpreting information (Mullin et al., 2000). However, perception also depends on

each individual's personal characteristics, the situation, or the object that is being perceived (Mullin et al.). For example, one fan at an NC State football game may enjoy the loud atmosphere of the cheering fans, whereas another fan attending the same game might find it stressful or intimidating. Another example might be related to the cost and benefit relationship. For example, one fan may not mind driving over an hour to watch his/her favorite team play because the reward of going to the game outweighs the cost of time for traveling. However, another fan may view the effort and cost of time for driving to be more than they are willing to sacrifice for their favorite team when they can simply watch it in the comfort of their own home on their television.

Another individual factor of sport consumption is the development and growth of attitudes. Kotler (1997) defined attitudes as, "a person's enduring favorable or unfavorable cognitive evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies toward some object or idea," (cited by Mullin et al., 2000, p. 72). People may have many different attitudes toward a sport, which can greatly affect their sport involvement. A person's attitude towards a team can influence their perceptions and enjoyment of watching particular sports. Although attitudes can have a great effect on a person's involvement in sport, a positive attitude towards a sport does not always mean that a person will participate in positive behaviors toward the sport. However, it is important for sport professionals (i.e., sport marketers) to maintain a positive environment and experience for their fans and spectators.

Lastly, motivation can be described as individual triggers of sport involvement that may stimulate the drive to satisfy a need (Mullin et al., 2000). These stimuli can include physiological, psychological, and social needs motivations according to various theorists such as Maslow, Murray, and McClelland (Mullin et al.). My study focused on the social factors rather than the motives. However, motives were noteworthy as many of these motives were brought forth in the focus groups. Each of these influences were directly related to the socialization of sport consumers.

Socialization

Various studies have been conducted on sport fans and socialization. However, the majority of these studies are dated and have had little replication. Even within the previous studies, few authors have discussed the sport fan socialization process (i.e., Casper & Menefee, 2010a, 2010b; Kenyon & McPherson, 1973, 1974; McPherson, 1975). This may be explained best as socialization is a complex topic and can be difficult to narrow down to one subject or topic.

Specific to sport consumer behavior, Wann et al. (2001) stated that understanding the sport fan socialization process is important to further the comprehension of why specific individuals become fans. Casper and Menefee (2010a) stated that, "Based on the importance of socialization in consumer behavior, it is clear that social influence plays a major role and provides a base in the consumer decision-making process for participation and spectatorship," (p. 600). In

the context of my study, specific social factors affecting female socialization to college football fandom were presented.

Consumer Socialization Theory

Consumer socialization has been defined as the process in which people develop and progress through their consumer-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes over their life cycle (Moschis, 1987; Moschis & Churchill, 1978). For use in my study, consumer socialization focused on the social influences (i.e., factors) that have been found to affect the consumer behavior of individuals. This theory, developed from social learning theory, assumes that individuals learn their consumer roles through a continuous complementary interaction of personal and environmental factors (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Casper & Menefee, 2010a). This individual and environmental interaction relates back to Figure 1. Several previous socialization studies are discussed below in relation to consumer socialization.

Consumer Behavior – Socialization Studies

Casper and Menefee (2010a) stated that the sport environment surrounding sport consumers can affect a consumer's decision-making processes. They went on to say that, "socialization is not a static process," which means that even though consumer behavior literature suggests that parents, siblings, and peers all have an effect on a sport-consumers decision making process, "social systems are dynamic," (Casper & Menefee, 2010a, p. 596). Researchers have found that even adults can be significantly impacted by the early social influences in their lives (Childers,

Heckler, & Arunachalam, 1989). Based on previously conducted consumer behavior research studies, socialization variables have been organized into two main groups: sociocultural (e.g., economic, social class, race, age, cohorts) and contextual (e.g., family, peers, mass media; Dotson & Hyatt, 2005; Moschis, 1987; Casper & Menefee, 2010a, 2010b). Both the sociocultural and contextual factors must be accounted for in understanding the full socialization process (Casper & Menefee, 2010a). Casper and Menefee (2010a) also stated that a gap exists in sport-specific consumption, specifically related to adults. Thus, my study is important to the expansion of sport fan socialization.

Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak (2002) conducted their research study on the connection of *serious leisure* to the overall definition of what it meant to be a University of Florida Football fan. They predicted that the fans of their study personify the serious leisure category as they stated that those fans “are serious about and committed to their endeavors,” (Stebbins, 1982, p. 259). They quoted Dunning as he suggested, “identification with a sports team can provide people with an important identity-prop, a source of ‘we-feelings’ and a sense of belonging in what would otherwise be an isolated existence,” (1999, p. 6). This identification might be related to the social influence of community in becoming a fan of college football. Gibson et al. asked their participants to identify themselves as one of four types of fans: “Type I (Gator football is my number one interest); Type II (I follow all Gator sports); Type III (I am a spouse or parent of a Gator fan); Type IV (To me the

game is a social event),” (p. 403). They found that over two-thirds of their participants were Type I, less than one quarter of their participant’s were Type II, few were Type III fans, and even fewer were Type IV fans. They also used qualitative methodology and although their study was focused more on serious leisure, several of their findings could be related back to the socialization process as well.

Gibson et al. (2002) found various reasons throughout their research that several of their participants became and remained fans of Gator football. For example, they found that some of their participants discussed being fans since a young age due to a family connection. A few of their participants also noted how the feeling of “one great big family” at tailgates had played a large role in remaining a fan and attending Gator football games (Gibson et al., p. 409). Several of their participants also went on to discuss the importance of the social experiences that they had at tailgates and at games over their years as a fan. They also said in the discussion of their study:

Certainly, for these fans, the special times spent with family and friends constituted one of the most important benefits of being a Gator fan, as did the inter-generational nature of these groups and the sense of community built around being a Gator (p. 419).

Again, even though their study did not focus on socialization, many of their findings were still related to the socialization of becoming and remaining a fan of college football, which directly related back to my study.

The social factors (i.e., contextual factors) that best match the setting and subjects in my study are described below as they relate to consumer socialization.

Atmosphere

Funk, Beaton, and Alexandris (2012) cited Sloan (1989) and Deighton (1992) when they explained that individuals partake in the consumption of sport for the atmospheric conditions and emotion that is generated during a sporting event. Gibson et al. (2002) explained that, “No other sport in the U.S. seems to engender the same pregame socializing (tailgating), rituals, and atmosphere as football,” (p. 398). Uhrich and Koenigstorfer (2009) defined the stadium atmosphere as, “a specific emotional response to the entirety of stimuli in a particular environment,” (p. 325). They also discussed how experiencing the atmosphere of a sporting event is essential to the satisfaction that an individual feels that they need to enjoy the sport as a consumer (Uhrich & Koenigstorfer). Uhrich and Koenigstorfer noted that experiencing the atmosphere at a sporting event is a “pivotal value-creating element of live sport consumption,” (p. 326) as well. They also noted however, that despite the importance of the game atmosphere as mentioned above, little scientific research had been conducted on the sports stadium atmosphere at games.

Community

Arnon, Shamai, and Ilatov (2008) discussed the importance of community as a socialization agent affecting teenagers. They cited other sources (Chekki, 1990; Clark, 1973; Hillery, 1955; Lyon, 1989; Turner & Dolch, 1996) to define community,

which was thought to include three dimensions: “a locality or territory; a social system and structure with economic, political, cultural and social institutions, functions and interactions; and social relations and symbols which provide feelings of solidarity, cohesion, trust, unity, security, identity and significance,” (p. 376). Datel and Dingemans (1984) defined a sense of place (e.g., college football games) as, “the complex bundle of meaning, symbols, and qualities that a person or group associates (consciously and unconsciously) with a particular locality or region,” (p. 135). An example of this can be explained by Dunning (1999) when he proposed that a feeling of community might be satisfied through watching a sport as not only a common activity with other fans and spectators, but also sharing a special bond with other individuals who shared the same connection with a particular team. Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, and Gladden (2002) found that community pride might influence sport spectators at first in choosing to attend a game but they did not find that community pride leads to frequent attendance at games.

Funk et al. (2012), however, discussed the psychological needs for relatedness and a need for competence being basic needs of current day humans, which was also suggested by others (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2004). Ryan and Deci (2008) defined the need for relatedness as, “feeling connected to others and having a sense of belonging with one’s community,” (p. 364). In comparison to other social factors influencing consumer socialization, significant research on the influence of the community is lacking.

Family

Moschis (1987) stated that family, in the context of interpersonal communication, is believed to be the most influential on consumer socialization. As related to my study, family can include parents, grandparents, and uncles.

Parents

The relationship between a parent and a child has consistently been identified as a primary source of socialization for children (Cotte & Wood, 2004; North & Kotze, 2001). Cotte and Wood discussed that parents influence their children's loyalty and brand preferences in consumer socialization. Studies have also found that children are most likely to be introduced to sport by their parents (Green & Chalip, 1998; Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 2002) and are likely to follow their parents' beliefs and motivations towards sport in their early childhood (Eccles, 1993).

Researchers have found the mother to be a child's most prominent social influence (Lachance, Beauadoin, & Robitaille, 2003). In the context of sport however, children reported more significant influences from their fathers in their selection of their favorite team (James, 2001). James also found that children were more likely to watch sports on TV with their fathers than their mothers. Melnick and Wann (2010) discussed that although mothers were not as influential as other family members, "females (10%) were far more likely than males (1%) to list their mother as the primary agent," (p. 7). Fathers however, were still more likely to influence

female sport fan socialization than mothers (Melnick & Wann). Children in James's (2001) study were also found to associate sports more frequently with their fathers and their brothers than their mothers, even if their mothers were known to have a favorite team as well.

Grandparents and Uncles

Little research exists specifically on the social influences of grandparents and uncles on consumer socialization. Studies have found, however, that men are typically more likely to influence men and women in their sport fan socialization process, whether it be fathers, brothers, grandfathers, or uncles (Farrell et al., 2011; Melnick & Wann, 2010).

Friends

Peers have consistently played an important role in the consumer socialization research of individuals (Casper & Menefee, 2010a, 2010b; Moschis, 1987). They have been found to affect an individuals' socialization at various stages of their life cycle (Moschis, 1987). Melnick and Wann (2010) found friends to be the most influential sport fan socialization factor among their participants who had a mean age of 21.33 years and who were all undergraduate students at an Australian university. Their results provided evidence of the importance of peer in influencing one another (Melnick & Wann). Dotson and Hyatt (2005) suggested that females may be more influenced by their peers at an earlier age since they enter puberty earlier than males. They also found that peer influences increase from early

childhood through adolescence and slowly begin to decrease through adulthood (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005). Casper and Menefee (2010a) stated that, “with adults, socialization influences from peers operate through a process of modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction” (p. 599).

School/University

Moschis (1987) noted that school as a socialization factor is more easily assessed in young children and adolescents than in adults. Moschis discussed the influence of formal education rather than the school, or university itself affecting consumer socialization. Casper and Menefee (2010b) also discussed school as a socialization agent for children. They described the experiences that children have through playing sports while in school. However, little literature seemed to exist on this social influence of an individual’s school/university on their socialization prior to my research.

Significant Others

I was unable to find any literature discussing the influence of significant others (i.e., boyfriends) on consumer socialization. Moschis (1987) also discovered that research on spouses’ consumer socialization influences was also sparse. Farrell et al. (2011) might provide the most relatable information about significant others as they discussed the general idea that males typically influence females in their sport fan socialization more than females influence women as sport fans.

Player

Mahony and Moorman (2000) found that attachment to a player can influence spectator behavior. Their study looked at spectators rather than fans. Mahony et al. (2012) found a negative relationship between player attachment and the time that a person identifies as a fan. Their study also found that fans, “may initially be attracted by players, but forming a strong attachment to the sport and to a particular team is more important for long-term support,” (p. 15). They stated that future research is needed to determine if this pattern continues throughout various sport leagues.

Socialization of Males and Females

McPherson (1976) proposed that there are four main sources responsible for teaching the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of sport fandom. He referred to these sources as “socialization agents,” including an individual’s family, peers, school, and community. McPherson limited his research to a questionnaire containing these four specific socialization agents by asking each individual to assess the impact of each agent on his/her fandom. His study revealed different patterns of sport fan socialization for male and female participants. He found that males were mostly influenced by their peers, followed by family and school. Females stated that they were mostly influenced by their family followed closely by their peers mostly influenced them. For the male participants, the community did not appear to be a significant agent while it was found to have a significant impact on

the socialization of the females (McPherson). School, however, did not appear to hold any significant value for females (McPherson). Thus, previous research, even though it is becoming dated, has shown that males and females differ in their socialization to fandom.

More recently, Farrell et al. (2011) conducted a study focused on determining if women who were sport fans and spectators were influenced by men in their sport decisions. Their study found a great influence of men on the sport consumer decisions of women. When women who were influenced by men talked about sports, they spoke mainly of being influenced by men's sports specifically. In other words, the men who were influencing these women believed that only men's sports were important and worth watching (i.e., men's basketball, football, and baseball; Farrell et al.). The men that were described as influential to these women suggested that the relationship to the female may not be as important as just being a male that is involved in her life. These researchers suggested that future studies should examine the women who are interested in a team or sport (i.e., highly identified fans or fanatical about their team) to determine if they might provide different perspectives than the women who have previously been studied and found to mostly attend or watch a game based on time spent with their significant others (Farrell et al.). My study sought to examine how female fans currently identified with college football, which was the area of female fandom under study.

In contrast to the study of female fans, Smith, Patterson, Williams, and Hogg (1981) conducted a study on the socialization of highly involved male sport fans through the use of in-depth interviews. The participants of their study were provided a list of six specific socialization agents to choose no more than the three most influential agents. This list included: father, brother, friend, coach, mass media, or no one (Smith et al., 1981). The participants responded with their fathers being the most influential, followed by their friends. These results were similar to McPherson's (1976) results that also found family and peers to be the two most important socialization agents for males (Smith et al., 1981). Other studies (e.g., Wakefield, 1995) have examined socialization agents of sport spectators. However the main focus of my study was specifically on sport fans.

The majority of the previous sport fan and spectator motivation studies have either focused on males and females and their similarities and differences, or on males in particular. Very few studies have focused solely on female fans (Farrell et al., 2011), and even fewer have focused on female fans specifically who are socialized into their college football fandom.

Other Factors Important for Sport Consumer Behavior

Other factors that are important in understanding sport consumer behavior include motivations and team identification of sports fans and spectators. Though these factors were not the focus of my study, it is important to briefly discuss them as they indirectly related to my research.

Motives

Mullin et al. (2000) discussed several motivations that have been found to influence an individual's (or groups) involvement in sport. The more prominent motivations included: achievement, craft, affiliation of community, health and fitness, fun and festival, and eros (erotic motivations). Achievement has been found to motivate both players and fans (i.e., winning does matter). Those who are motivated by the craft of the sport, however, do not believe that winning is all that counts. In relation to my study for example, several of the participants mentioned that they enjoy watching the actual game of football itself. Affiliation and community is, "to be with friends," and others who have similar interests (Mullin et al., 2000, p. 71). The motivation of health and fitness related to actual athletes more so than the fans and spectators. Fun and festival related directly to my study when discussing the atmosphere of college football games as this motivation includes more of the atmosphere and festival surrounding athletic events (i.e., tailgating, music, food, team mascot, etc.). Lastly, the eros motivation refers to the erotic motives that individuals may have that interests them in sport (i.e., sexual attraction to players). Although my study did not focus on these motivations, they were still discussed indirectly throughout the focus groups as will be evident when the findings are discussed.

Several studies have been conducted primarily on these motives of sport consumption and fandom. The most commonly studied motives of sport fans

included: eustress, self-esteem enhancement, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic values, affiliation needs, and families (Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999; Wann et al., 2001). These motives were typically evaluated using the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) developed by Wann (1995). The Sport Fan Motivation Scale consists of 23 items to evaluate the previously mentioned eight most common sport motives.

Team Identification

Team identification is defined as an individual's psychological connection to a team (Guttmann, 1986; Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Real & Mechlkoff, 1992; Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1997; Wann, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001). For my study, having a basic understanding of team identification is important as typically a fan becomes more loyal and socialized to a sport, or a team, as they become more identified. A person's level of involvement with a sport or team can be described as team identification. In my study, a prescreening team identification question was used to confirm that the individual's interested in participating in my study rated herself as a fan. This question was taken from Wann and Branscombe's (1993) team identification measurement known as the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann et al., 2001). This scale has been successfully used in several countries including the United States, Germany, and Japan (Wann et al., 2001).

A majority of the studies that have used the SSIS have determined that on a demographic and personality profile of sport fans, fans have been disproportionately likely to be male (Anderson & Stone, 1981; Bloss, 1970; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000; Doyle, Lewis, & Malmisur, 1980; Grove, Pickett, & Dodder, 1982; Lieberman, 1991; McPherson, 1975; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Prisuta, 1979; Rologg & Solomon, 1989; Sargent, Zillmann, & Weaver, 1998; Schurr, Ruble, & Ellen, 1985; Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, & Ellen, 1988; Wann, 1998; Wann et al., 2001; Yergin, 1986; Zuckerman, Singer, & Singer, 1980). Newer studies have also shown gender differences within sport fan motivation not specifically using the SSIS, but of sport fan motivations in general (James & Ridinger, 2002; Wann, 1995; Wann et al., 1999).

Wann et al. (1999) used the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) to determine the motives rated highest by both males and females. They found that females reported high levels of family motivation, which was consistent with previous research findings. They also found that, “consistent with past research on the SFMS (Wann, 1995), male participants scored higher than female participants on the total SFMS and on the eustress, self-esteem, escape, and aesthetic subscales,” (Wann et al., 1999, p. 3).

Most often, sport fans that are more involved with their favorite sport or team are more highly identified (James & Ridinger, 2002). A psychological connection has been determined to occur when an individual has a need for belonging and

affiliation, a desire to feel like a part of a distinctive group, and the salience of one's mortality (Sun, 2010). As a rule of thumb, individuals develop strength and a sense of their own identity from their connections to their social groups (Kelman, 1961; Pritchard, Stinson, & Patton, 2010).

Previous studies have examined team identification for all fans. However, little research has been conducted specifically on women who are already highly identified with a team, or sport (i.e., college football). It is important to understand that the young women in my study were already being socialized to college football as they each rated themselves as a fan based on their team identification. With the higher percentage of females now attending college football games, a better understanding of socialization is vital to teams and leagues that can economically benefit from a better understanding of this market segment. It is important to continue to socialize more women into college football fans.

Summary

The literature review provided an overview of the importance of college football and an outline of research focused on consumer socialization. My study was aimed at filling in the research gaps that currently exist in consumer socialization (i.e., the study of consumer socialization of the female college football fan). I explained each of the major social factors found throughout my study that have an influence on the socialization of the female fans who were participants in my study. I also discussed the differences that researchers have found between male

and female socialization and the importance of having a better understanding of female socialization specifically in relation to college football fandom. Team identification was also mentioned as a question from Wann and Branscombe's (1993) SSIS was used to determine the level of fandom of the participants of my study. The results of my study will provide insight into the primary social factors influencing the socialization of female fans that has previously been underrepresented through empirical research on consumer socialization.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to identify the social factors (e.g., atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others) that influenced the consumer socialization of female college football fans. Focus groups were used to collect data. My study aimed to extend the current literature by examining female college football fans related to socialization factors that have influenced their fandom, which to date, had been neglected in academic research.

Method Choice

While numerous studies have examined sport fan motivations (James & Ridinger, 2002; Wann, 1995; Wann et al., 1999; Wann et al., 2001), a lack of literature existed specifically on how females became fans of college football using qualitative data collection and analysis. Collecting qualitative data allowed for participants to provide in-depth descriptions and additional information on areas that quantitative researchers may not have considered (Veal, 2006). Typically qualitative approaches allow participants to provide information on their beliefs and experiences free of a pre-determined theoretical framework. However, my study was structured around factors related to consumer socialization. Participants had the opportunity to elaborate on these descriptions even though the questions were structured around the topic. Therefore, a deductive and post-positivist approach was used for my study.

I chose to use focus groups for my study. I was unable to find past research studies focusing specifically on the socialization of female fans to their college football fandom through the use of focus groups, so this approach appeared to offer new insights.

Another advantage to focus groups, as discussed by Henderson (2006), is that they are relatively low cost and are time efficient for collecting data compared to various other methods. Henderson (2006) noted that, "conducting more than one focus group on a particular topic is recommended so the data are more trustworthy," (p. 134). I chose to conduct three focus groups to collect data on the social factors influencing women's college football fandom. Three groups were chosen because data were analyzed across groups in search of common themes and patterns in responses (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus groups were also used as they provided an open, yet semi-structured, setting and allowed me to explore female fans of college football in greater detail than through a quantitative survey. According to Krueger and Casey (2000) focus groups are useful when the researcher is looking to discover the factors that influence individuals' opinions, behaviors, and motivations. Through the use of focus groups, I was able to use probing questions and ask for clarity of responses that might have otherwise seemed ambiguous as well.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, this study was approved by the NC State Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects and approved as exempt (see Appendix A). I began by contacting the Wolfpack Club at North Carolina State to obtain a list of all current (2012-2013) Student Wolfpack Club Members. I was provided with a spreadsheet of all current members (2,178 students). From that spreadsheet, I then went through and removed all of the traditionally male names so that I was left with only traditional female names. I then sent emails to those female members of the Student Wolfpack Club (approximately 400 students) explaining the purpose of my research study, the importance of the focus groups, a brief overview of what would be discussed in each group, and a pre-screening question to determine how highly each volunteer rated themselves as a fan of college football (see Appendix B). I asked that all interested females please respond if they were interested in participating in one of the three focus groups. I also asked them to answer a prescreening question:

Question: How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of NC State Football? (Please select one response from the scale below).

Not at All a Fan 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very Much a Fan

I decided to use this question as it was used in Wann and Brancombe's (1993) SSIS measurement to determine the level of team identification that an individual had.

Seventeen students responded and were also selected to participate as they each rated themselves from a '5' to an '8' on the prescreening fan scale. I decided to use each of these participants as a rating of a '5' to an '8' was on the higher range of the scale than a fan who rated herself as a '1' through '4' on the scale. These participants were given three dates to choose: Monday, November 5; Wednesday, November 7; and Thursday, November 8, all from 6:00pm – 7:00pm in D.H. Hill Library, which is centrally located on the main campus of NC State University. Private rooms were reserved at the library for each of these focus group sessions. Students who volunteered were sent a reminder email prior to their scheduled focus group meeting.

Each female member of the Student Wolfpack Club was given an equal opportunity to sign up for the focus groups if she qualified based on the pre-screening question. The focus groups involved the single-category design of studying one audience – female college students at North Carolina State University who are all members of the Student Wolfpack Club. This sample was also a convenience sample due to my connection to North Carolina State University.

Focus groups of six to eight participants were planned. However, not all participants were able to work their schedules around their scheduled group. Krueger and Casey (2000) determined that groups of six to eight are more successful than larger groups because they are easier to control and allow more opportunities for each participant to share their experiences. The first focus group

consisted of four participants, the second group consisted of five participants, and the third group consisted of four participants for a total 13 participants.

Upon arrival at each focus group, all participants were asked to complete a demographic survey (age, hometown and state, marital status, year at NC State, major, years in the Student Wolfpack Club, and race). This information was collected to provide additional information that may not be discussed specifically in each group, but may provide additional context specific to this population (see Table 2). For example, it was important to determine how many years each of the participants had been involved in the Student Wolfpack Club as that might help to explain why they already rate themselves as a fan. It is important to note that although all participants were Caucasian, race was not a requirement to participate.

Table 2. Demographics of Focus Group Participants.

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Year at NC State	Major	Years in Wolfpack Club	Race
1	19	In a Relationship	Sophomore	Psychology	2	Caucasian
2	17	Single	Sophomore	Fashion & Textile Mgmt.	1	Caucasian
3	18	Single	Freshman	Sport Mgmt.	1	Caucasian
4	18	Single	Freshman	Communications (Media)	1	Caucasian
5	18	Single	Freshman	Business Marketing	1	Caucasian
6	20	Single	Junior	Sport Mgmt.	3	Caucasian
7	19	Single	Sophomore	PRTM	2	Caucasian
8	18	In a Relationship	Freshman	Nutrition Sciences	1	Caucasian
9	18	Single	Freshman	Undecided	1	Caucasian
10	19	Single	Sophomore	Business Entrepreneurship	2	Caucasian
11	18	Single	Freshman	Business Administration	1	Caucasian
12	21	In a Relationship	Senior	Chemical Engineering	2	Caucasian
13	18	Single	Freshman	History	1	Caucasian

Each focus group was provided food and refreshments for participation. Each participant was given a NC State magnet as an additional incentive for participation and had an equal chance to win other prizes such as \$5.00 Starbucks gift cards (three total gift cards – one per focus group). I wrote down each participant's name for each focus group and randomly drew a name out of a bag to determine the winner of one of the prizes. For the other prize, I asked each participant of each group to write down their best guess for the attendance number at the Florida State versus NC State football game that season. Whoever guessed closest to that number (which I received from the athletic department) won the prize in each group.

I served as the only moderator for each of the three groups. As the moderator, I was able to consistently involve each of the participants in the discussion to help with controlling the dominant participants of each group. Each session was audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy with transcription. After the completion of the three groups, written transcripts were made verbatim from recordings of each group to increase accuracy in the analysis. I also listened to each recording after transcription and verified it.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The interview guide (see Appendix C) for the focus groups was developed by myself and reviewed and approved by the thesis committee and the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University. All questions were designed as probing and open-ended so that the responses would be conversational. At the

conclusion of each focus group, the recording was transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

After transcription, data were uploaded into MAXQDA, a computer software program designed to organize and manage qualitative research. This software allowed me to manage codes and analyze the data for each group. The data were analyzed using open and axial coding, while memos were prepared throughout each transcription as well. Memos were used to provide descriptions of what was happening throughout each focus group at specific times to enhance the transcriptions (e.g., were the participants excited when discussing specific information). Memos were also used throughout transcription for me to elaborate upon common words and phrases so that more specific themes could be developed. Each memo was stored in MAXQDA for easy reference.

All data from each of the three transcripts were reviewed and coded by myself. Themes emerged through data analysis by identifying statements related to social factors that female college football fans deemed the most salient in their socialization to college football fandom. I began with open coding in which I identified common words and phrases. Each of the common words and statements were assigned a code (i.e., family) to best explain the social factor(s) affecting their fandom. Labels and themes were identified through axial coding which helped to better understand how the open codes fit within the social factors categories.

With one investigator, personal bias can develop. However, I searched for direct quotes and descriptions from the participants to develop each theme to avoid prematurely guessing what participants might have been trying to say. The use of direct quotes and descriptions partially helped to show that my data were trustworthy.

Trustworthiness was important for my study, specifically as I was the only researcher. Throughout the entire study, I was focused on the results reflecting the participants and their descriptions. I listened to the participants and engaged each participant in the focus groups by inviting them to describe and explain their personal opinions and experiences. I also asked for participants to elaborate at times when I felt more information was warranted to avoid ambiguity. I used my interview guide to ask the major guiding research questions which were structured around consumer socialization to improve the credibility of my data. I also used descriptions and quotes to support the conclusions that were drawn from my study to increase the internal validity of my data. My committee chair reviewed and verified the themes after I completed the coding as well. The findings of my study cannot be generalized beyond North Carolina State University. But they do provide evidence of the patterns that existed in the socialization of female collegiate football fans.

Summary

The methods portion of my paper provided in-depth descriptions of how and why I chose to use a qualitative approach (focus groups) for my study. All participants of

my study were undergraduate students at North Carolina State University who were all members of the Student Wolfpack Club. The Wolfpack Club was contacted prior to data collection to obtain a list of all current Wolfpack Club members. All interested participants (n=17) were asked to answer a pre-screening question from Wann and Brancombe's (1993) SSIS measurement to determine their level of team identification, which has been found to be directly related to an individual's level of fandom. Data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to determine common themes and subthemes. I also discussed the steps I took to avoid personal bias and trustworthiness of my data. The common themes will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

Socialization can be defined as, “the process of learning to live in and understand a culture or subculture by internalizing its values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms,” (Wann et al., 2001, p. 24). This process directly related to my study’s findings in that the focus group participants became more socialized into their college football fandom as they are continuing to become more involved and immersed in the college football culture throughout the course of their lives.

Socialization was an ongoing process. Several social factors were found to affect the socialization to fandom for each of the participants of this study including: atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others. With the focus on college football, and the sample of participants solely from North Carolina State University, the majority of the participants discussed specific reasons regarding why they were fans and how they were continuously being socialized as NC State football fans.

Atmosphere

One common theme throughout the focus groups was the social aspects of the college football atmosphere. Under the theme of atmosphere were three subthemes including: tailgating, pregame festivities, and the student section.

Tailgating was a subtheme that the participants discussed in relation to the atmosphere. Tailgating was not a huge subtheme compared to other subthemes but it was important in influencing women who were already college football fans. All of the participants in the first focus group mentioned they enjoyed the tailgating scene at college football games. A couple of the participants talked about playing corn hole and listening to music with other tailgaters being their favorite tailgating activities. All three groups had participants discuss the feeling of camaraderie as their favorite aspect of tailgating for a game. One participant said that she liked that she could walk around the student tailgating lot and see people from classes and other people that she knew enjoying tailgating together, and that she enjoyed that aspect of tailgating most. A couple of participants who had tailgated at different colleges and universities did mention that it depended on the school for how exciting the tailgating scene can be. For example, one participant stated:

It's completely different tailgating at App (Appalachian State University), because I've tailgated at App and here (NC State)...I just feel like Carter-Finley and the people that go to State games are a lot more cohesive and everybody just molds together when you get into a crowd... At App, there's certain sections...I mean it's still fun, but I just think it's cool that everyone that comes to tailgate at NC State, you can just meet new people every time. This statement related to the specialness that these females felt that NC State had over other colleges and universities in relation to college football.

A couple of the participants described that their favorite part of the atmosphere was getting inside the stadium in time to see the pregame festivities on the field. One participant indicated that the aspect of a college football game that she remembered most was the pregame stuff, “like the band coming out on the field, and the team running through...I think that’s what always sticks out to me!” Another participant mentioned that, “seeing the band come out and everything else before that... you just get that full experience and it just completes it.”

When participants were asked what they would say to one of their friends to convince them to go to a college football game, most said they would explain the atmosphere of the games. One participant said:

I would say that just going to a football game in college is an essential experience that you have to have. Even though our team is not great, our fans still have so much pride and they support our team so strongly. I can’t imagine going to State and saying that you’ve never been to a football game. Even people that don’t like football, they go to be a part of the school and be a part of the student body.

Another participant responded that she would say:

You’ve just never seen so many die-hard fans at the tailgates...just driving down the street that’s next to the stadium. There’s just red - like a sea of red tents everywhere. There are such dedicated fans here, it’s crazy!

One participant noted that some of her friends from high school think that they have no interest in going to a college game because they “didn’t like to go to football games in high school.” Her response was, “It’s totally different...you don’t really have to like it. It’s more the atmosphere. The atmosphere of a student section is amazing...you can’t really help but to get into it!”

Community

Another theme found through the data analysis process was the social influence of the college football community. Community was described as the feeling of “community” and “oneness” with other fans of the same college football team. A participant from the second focus group indicated that coming to a game was, “a really big family type thing...everyone feels as one.” One participant in the first focus group mentioned that, “It’s more of camaraderie because a lot of people that go to college football games are alumni, people who are around, or they’ve grown up loving the team.” This statement displayed the common influence for many fans about cheering for a specific college team. Another participant mentioned, “I just think it’s cool that everyone that comes to tailgate at NC State, you just meet new people every time - whoever you park next to you become friends with.” Several participants explained that this camaraderie was not the case at all colleges and universities with football programs.

All of the participants spoke of this specialness that they had experienced at North Carolina State University. One participant from the third focus group

discussed how she loved the feeling of community at tailgates as well and enjoyed when the entire parking lots start chanting for their team as they are walking into the stadium. She stated that, "it just makes it a really amazing experience."

A participant from the third focus group grew up as a Tennessee Volunteers fan and discussed NC State football games as having a larger sense of community:

I think you can become best friends with just the person standing next to you in the stands. I've met a lot of people doing that and you can even walk up to random people's tailgates and just start a conversation with them. You're definitely going to meet a ton of people at State games and you don't really feel that at a lot of other schools...it's not as open as it is here.

Another participant followed up to this statement by her own experiences at the NC State versus Tennessee game in Atlanta, Georgia during the 2012 football season:

That's something that I noticed in Atlanta--when we were there the Tennessee tailgating was on the other side from where State was tailgating, but the State fans were walking around and intermingling...everyone was just so nice and we tailgated with X parents. We had never met the people before in our life and they just ended up being beside one of our friends and came over. Tennessee fans, however, would walk through but instead of all of them talking to each other, they just walked individually...they didn't mingle or mix.

The feeling of community was also discussed several times by participants when they began discussing what it was like to be in the student section during a college football game.

The community of the student section at college football games was found to be a large factor that influenced the fans to become more invested (i.e., to continuously become more socialized and identified). A few of the participants discussed how everyone interacts with other fans inside the stadium when their team is winning, especially in the student sections. One participant said that during the Florida State University game (at NC State) this past season, “people were running around giving anybody and everybody high fives,” and another participant jumped in with, “people were just falling over each other trying to give each other hugs!”

A few participants grew up attending NC State football games and discussed their desire to one day be a student at NC State just so they could sit in the student section. They said they had always envied those students. For instance, one participant said:

Because we have the season tickets (to the NC State games), we’ve always sat on the other side and every year when I was in high school I would think, ‘I just want to be in that student section’...I’ve just always wanted to be there. So now that I’m in the student section, it’s been so much fun and you can just

stand up the whole time and cheer. We've also gotten on TV two weeks in a row at the Carolina game and then at this game!

Another participant mentioned in a very excited voice that she enjoyed sitting in one of NC State's opposing team's student section as well because, "people were yelling at us, and I had all this adrenaline and that was just a fun football experience!" This example demonstrated a relationship between the theme of community at college football games, and the atmosphere theme at games.

Family

Another social factor influencing these young women in their college football fandom was various members of their families. Father was the most commonly mentioned family member followed by mother, uncles, grandfathers, and grandmothers.

Fathers

Fathers seemed to be the most influential family member with these female participants in influencing their college football fandom. When asked who had influenced them the most and how, one participant said:

Probably my Dad because he got my family the tickets and got me involved and always talked about it. We always had football on Saturday's and just being there (at the games) and getting that experience really interests me....My family always goes [to games], but it's always like my Dad and I are

the ones watching....We went to the Carolina game, I think it was 2 years ago, and it was just so much fun, because that's what we talk about!

Another participant said:

I definitely think my Dad...it just started at a really young age and at my house we've always had parties at different games...and we'll just sit there and watch the football game and we'll grill out. So it's really mostly my Dad and really my whole family.

She also mentioned that her first football game memory was at a professional football game with her Dad as well.

One participant explained that even though another one of her family member's had always been the one to purchase the season tickets for their family, her Dad was the one that she talked to the most about college football. Another participant described being with her Dad:

Saturday college football is all that's on our TV, and I just don't know any other way. That's just how it's always been on Saturday's - just college football all day. And then Saturday night you sit down and you watch college football highlights and find out about other games.

This tradition began with her grandfather that her Dad continued in their house as she was growing up.

Another participant agreed that her Dad had the most influence in her college football fandom: "My Dad played college football so he'd always tell me that when I

was little I'd always fall asleep watching football on his chest as a baby...I mean I've always been around football." She said that when she was watching a game with her Dad, he always said, "you should watch this, they're going to run a bubble screen...they're going to do this...they're running this defense," which has helped her to better understand and appreciate the sport even more now that she knows what is going on in the games. Another participant said that her family having season tickets throughout her entire life to a specific university's football games influenced her because her Dad was an alumnus of that university and they were always big into football.

Mothers

The participants' mothers were another common family member that influenced these females in their college football fandom. One participant mentioned that her mother went to another ACC school and, "she used to take me to games since I was a little kid." She also said, "my whole family is sports fans. You can't escape it. For college sports specifically I'd have to say my Mom [influenced me the most in being a fan]."

Another participant stated, "I remember my very first NC State game, I can't remember how old I was, but I grew up watching them on TV...my Mom was going crazy! We were just all into it!" She also discussed that when her Mom was growing up she went to UNC, but was a true NC State fan, "she was the only red fan [at the games]!" and that her entire Mom's side of her family has always been State fans.

She noted how her family's NC State fandom had greatly influenced her enthusiasm toward the sport and the passion that she had for it. The same participant was really excited about NC State when talking about her Mom and growing up in a State household. She also noted how her mom always, "loses her voice just screaming so loud...like she's always into it." She said:

When you have a family that's so passionate about it, you just can't help but be passionate about it. You grow up in it and you can't get away from it and I'm very thankful that I grew up in an NC State family.

Another participant, whose family had always had season tickets to the University of Tennessee's home football games, mentioned that her mother attended another Southeastern Conference (SEC) school and had always been a big football fan as well as her father. She said, "both my parents just always, didn't force it on us, but they encouraged us to go to the games."

Uncles

Uncles were also influential to a couple of the participants. One participant in the first focus group noted that her uncle was a member of the Wolfpack Club and had always provided the tickets. When she had attended college football games, it had mostly been with her Dad and her uncles. Another participant from the same group also mentioned that her Uncle went to NC State and always came to the games. She said, "they have their own tailgates, so I can always go and see them and it's fun." She also pointed out that one of her Uncles was a UNC fan:

My uncle is a Carolina fan, and when I was younger I think this sparked my interest in football too...because he's a big Carolina fan I think he started the rivalry with me and UNC because he always jokes around...his sons go to UNC as well so we always had this ongoing pick about the other school, and it's always made it more interesting.

Grandparents

Grandparents also had an influence on these participants. When asked who had influenced them the most in being a college football fan, one participant stated, "My grandparents are the ones with the season tickets, so it's kind of my grandparents and my parents." She continued with:

My grandma influenced me because she'd always put together a classy tailgate and invite all her friends and dress up...and so now that we go here, we'll wear dresses and stuff...I think about her and I try to plan stuff out for our tailgates like she did...she was always just so cute about it!

Another participant in the same group mentioned that her grandfather and one of Ohio State's previous coaches grew up together. She believed this association began the socialization process for her family to become such big Ohio State football fans:

My whole family's just big Ohio State fans and that's all we talk about from the start of the family reunion, which is in August. We talk non-stop about college football. We will Facebook, text, and call up each other, and so I definitely

thank my grandpa for making our whole family tight because we all like college football.

Lastly, one other participant told how her grandfather, mother, and two uncles went to NC State. She added that, “just growing up in that family and being together all the time, and especially on Thanksgiving just watching the State game...I’ve just always been around the State type atmosphere.”

Football Players

Another influence that described how female students were socialized to college football fandom was getting to know the players, and/or their families. A few of the participants found these experiences to be influential and something that they really enjoyed about college football. One participant said that she was able to meet and hang out with one of the football players’ families and how she enjoyed being able to meet them. Another participant recalled seeing a football player at a basketball game last season:

I saw one of the players in the parking lot after the game and said “Good luck at the bowl,” and he responded with, “thanks.” It was just exciting. When they won the bowl I felt like it was because I told him good luck!

Another participant mentioned during her focus group that one of her good friends knew a former NC State football player. She stated, “It was really cool that I got to meet him. We went to a picnic with his family. So I mean, you kind of feel like part of the family when you get to meet the players too.”

Knowing the players (i.e., their fellow student peers) also seemed to be influential on female fans. Many students had class with the players on a daily basis both in high school and in college. In the first focus group, one participant shared that she had attended the same high school as one of the current NC State basketball players and that she “knows him” as in they would speak if they passed each other in the hallway or on campus, which she thought was cool. A couple of the other participants offered that they think it’s “cool” to go to high school with someone who goes on to play in college. For example, a participant in the first group said that:

It’s cool when you go to high school with somebody and then they go on to play in college. I have a friend that went to Western Carolina this year to play football, and he’s doing so well. I love looking at him, like we’ll go online and watch because there’s a bunch of us from back home that came to State. We’ll all get together and we’ll see how he’s doing because it’s cool to know somebody that plays.

This statement not only showed that she enjoyed watching with her friends, but that she was also influenced in her college football decisions by knowing a player at a different university. Another participant described that, “one of my good guy friends freshman year played on the football team, so it was really cool to say, ‘Oh, I hung out with so and so last week and he just scored a touchdown.’ I thought I was hot stuff...I was like, ‘yea, I know some student-athletes!’”

In another sense of knowing players, participants also explained how a football player from her county went on to play at the collegiate level in the SEC and stated, "I know I'm going to keep up with him because I know he's going pro."

Another participant described a similar situation, "There's a kid from my high school who was recruited to come here next year, so that'd be kind of interesting because it'd be easy to follow him - it's a name that I know." Another participant even discussed that she followed the players that a family friend knew. The family friend was previously a football trainer at a large Division I institution and the participant stated that:

It's cool going to her house on Sunday's and watching random games and hearing her say, 'oh so and so, I've massaged his leg before'...or, 'I would wrap up his wrist,' and just random stuff...and so it's cool to follow those people.

A few of the participants communicated that they wish they had better relationships with the players and had more opportunities for getting to know the players in college. One participant said, "We actually knew them [the players] and could cheer them on and everything, so that smaller atmosphere of knowing definitely makes a difference." She was followed by another participant who agreed; "With my major there's a lot of football players, so it just gives it a different kind of attitude when you know who the players are." Knowing the players also related to

the peers (i.e., friends) of the young women of this study as they were all college students.

Friends

Friends were another influential social aspect for these young women in their college football fandom. Many of the participants talked about hanging out with their friends and watching sports. One participant indicated, "I'm off work at 4:30 and most of the games are at 7:00 and I'm around campus, so I get to sit, watch sports, and hang out with my friends." She went on to say, "my best friend is in Student Wolfpack Club so we go together. We go and get margaritas and then go and watch the games... we have a blast and we're really loud and cheering."

Another participant said that being at a football game, "with one of my best friends is what made me fall in love with football." One of the participants from the third focus group stated that:

Me and one of my friends that I met this year, it was also her first time ever going to a football game and it was really exciting for the both of us. Just being in the atmosphere, sitting in the Student Wolfpack Club section, and being at the college football game - it was just really fun for both of us because it was a big, new, exciting experience.

Another participant discussed the first time she attended a NC State football game. She was with her best friend whose father worked for athletics at NC State University and he provided their tickets. She said it was a little overwhelming sitting

next to the student section, because they had never really been in the “college student” atmosphere (i.e., intense, drunkenness), but that it was still a lot of fun.

Another participant from the third group stated that:

For me, the biggest thing is going to the games with my friends and spending time with them. I think the games that are most memorable are the games in Atlanta this year and the Carolina game. Even though we lost both games, I went to them with a friend and so it was cool to just go on that trip.

A few of the participants also mentioned the influence of their friends on their fandom when their friends helped them learn more about the sport of football. One participant noted that she began enjoying football in general when, “I had one of my guy friends sit down and actually explain the game to me, and that definitely made a big impact on my love for football.” Another participant mentioned that when she was in middle school her teacher, as well as one of her friends, influenced her love for football. She discussed that it began when she continued to get “silent lunch” and her teacher, who was the football coach, sat her down and told her she could either read “this book” (“Football for Dummies”), or she could talk to the wall. She decided to read the book. She then ended up having one of her friends sit down with her at a football game and visually on the field explain the terms that she was learning in the book. This experience influenced her in becoming more socialized as a football fan as she continued to learn more about it.

Almost all of the participants in the second focus group stated that if they were to invite one of their friends to join them at a college football game, they would not have to do much convincing. The majority of the people that they had as friends and surrounded them were all sport lovers as well. One participant added, “There’s not much to say, I mean all my friends have grown up loving sports...so there’s not too much convincing to be done; so it’s like, ‘what are you doing? Nothing? Alright, we’re coming’...”. Another participant explained, “I’ve always surrounded myself with sport lovers and big sport fans, so I’d think they’re sick if they said something like, ‘no, I’m not going to go,’ or, ‘no, I don’t want to go.’ It’s just a no-brainer.” One participant said that she was friends with a lot of people from a university that did not currently have a football program and if she had a ticket for them, they were “more than willing to come and go.”

School/University

Many of these young women described how the school or university had a significant influence, or special meaning, to them and how it had influenced them in being a college football fan. When asked why each of the participants decided to attend North Carolina State University, one participant said, “My Dad went to NC State and I’ve always grown up going to the football games, and I’ve always just loved NC State.” Another participant said that with the major she wanted, only three universities in the state of North Carolina had anything related to that degree. She decided on NC State because, “I didn’t want to move too far away from my

family...and they're in the ACC, so...football is pretty big on the list!" In another focus group, a participant added that she decided to attend NC State because, "I just like the ACC school spirit and I really liked the atmosphere when I came and visited."

Another participant said, "I chose State because I've been going to Kay Yow's basketball camp since I was in middle school and I've been in love with State since then." A participant in the third group said:

Senior year I really wanted to move to the beach...so I was debating between here [NC State] and UNCW (University of North Carolina at Wilmington) and I completed the application for UNCW. But then I got to thinking about the fact that they don't have a football team and I just didn't even submit my application!

Another participant in this same group said in response to the same question, "I grew up in Raleigh, so NC State was kind of always there...every other school that I applied to was an SEC school just because I like football that much, but State was just close for me." It is important to note here that these participants applied to universities based on their football reputations and programs.

Another participant said:

My first football game I was two years old, so I don't remember it...I've seen a lot of pictures of me in my little NC State cheerleader outfit...so I mean, I feel like I was always conditioned to love NC State.

Significant Others

The last social theme for these young women that they claimed was influential in their college football fandom was significant others. Throughout my study, a significant other was defined as a boyfriend, or an ex-boyfriend, who had been influential in their socialization to college football. One participant had stepped outside her comfort zone of attending home games by attending rival games at another university as well, “My high school sweetheart goes to Carolina, so he always gets me tickets to Carolina...It’s really funny, you’ll see me and I’m the one red person in there, but it’s fun... I get to see both sides!”

Another participant explained:

I guess I started getting into football my tenth grade year because I was the athletic trainer, and then I started dating my boyfriend who was on the football team so I started getting really into watching and figuring out everything.

One participant was dating someone who was already a student at NC State while she was still in high school. She said:

I think my first college game ever was at Wake Forest, it was my Junior year of high school and my boyfriend’s freshman year here (at NC State)...he got us tickets and we went and I was a little star-struck kid because it was my first time being at Wake...I really enjoyed that game probably because we had visitor tickets...it was just a fun game.

She then went on to describe how her first college game at NC State University was the same year, also with her boyfriend, “He got me a guest pass in the student section.” She also noted his influence:

I would go to games with him because he was here at school while I was a junior and senior in high school, and weekends were mainly the only time we spent together...so during football season he would want to go to games so he would bring me to them and so that definitely encouraged my love for football.

Another participant in this same group agreed and said:

It’s the same with me because my boyfriend is a year ahead of me and he played his junior year at high school before he came to the school I went to where we didn’t have football...He would sit down and explain what was actually going on and that just got me even more interested...and then I was even more excited to come to a school that had a football team!

Summary

Through transcription, coding, and data analysis, common themes emerged that were influential on these young women to being a college football fan. The common themes included: atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others. Included in the family theme to be most influential were fathers, mothers, uncles, grandfathers, and grandmothers. The

relationship between these themes and previous literature will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of my study was to identify the social factors that influence the consumer socialization of female college football fans. Focus groups were used to collect these data. Emerging themes related to social factors included atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others. Each will be discussed in relation to prior literature.

Atmosphere

Many of the participants of my study mentioned that they really enjoyed and were influenced by the pre-game festivities, tailgating, seeing the band out on the field pre-game, and the overall ambiance that surrounded college football games. This social factor was not as prevalent in previous studies. However my study allowed for the young women to discuss in detail, exactly what they enjoyed the most, and why they considered the college football atmosphere to be influential. Sloan (1989) stated that individuals partake in the consumption of sport for the atmosphere and the emotion produced during a sporting event. This sentiment was obvious in my study as the participants discussed emotions such as seeing the band come out on to the field. This emotion can best be explained by Gibson et al. (2002) when they stated that it seems that no other U.S. sport has the same, “pregame socializing (tailgating), rituals, and atmosphere as football,” (p. 398). The influence of the atmosphere was also evident in the statement made in one of the focus groups that a person did not need to like football to enjoy the game day atmosphere.

Community

In line with McPherson's (1976) study, my study also found that community was significant in the socialization of female fans. McPherson's study, however, was dated and was also limited to a questionnaire asking each participant, males and females, to assess the impact of specific socialization agents on their fandom. My study found that women tended to enjoy the feeling of *oneness* with other fans in the same sport/team community. With my study, women were also given more opportunities to elaborate and explain their answers. On the other hand, McPherson did not find out what aspects of the community were the most influential to these females and why. The participants in my study, for example, defined an important aspect of the community as feeling like one big family.

Mahony et al. (2002) also found community to influence sport spectators at first when they chose to attend an athletic event. However, they did not find significant evidence that community pride would lead to frequent attendance. The participants in my study frequently discussed that the feeling of community that they experienced at college football games was one of the aspects of college football that kept them coming back. Participants described how they enjoyed meeting fellow fans that all shared the same pride in the team.

In the study by Gibson et al. (2002), participants discussed this feeling of *oneness* and sense of community that kept them coming back for several years. The best example of this was when one of their participants explained that her group

had been tailgating and attending games together for over 20 years and how that had created the feeling of *one big family* which was also mentioned by participants in my study.

I was unable to find any literature that discussed the influence of community within the student section at college football games related to female students. The sense of community within the student section at college football games was important to the female fans in my study. They discussed the joy of giving high fives and hugs to other fans that they did not even know. These female fans also discussed that this camaraderie not only influenced them at home games, but at away games as well and how it had increased their level of fandom more since becoming a college student.

Community and Atmosphere Relationship

Mullin et al. (2000) posited that sport fan socialization involves a two-way interaction between individuals and their environment. Two of the stimuli they summarized from past research studies were affiliation and community as well as fun and festival, and aspects of these stimuli were prominent social factors in my study (i.e., community and atmosphere). The motivations related to affiliation and community were directly related as the majority of the female participants discussed being with friends and family when attending games or watching games on TV. Mullin et al. (2000) also discussed that past research had found that few fans, approximately only 1 – 3 percent, attended sporting events alone. These findings

were consistent with my study as none of the participants attended a game alone. Sporting events, thus, were often a time of gathering and becoming one with the community and other fans who shared the same interest.

One aspect of my research that I found to be interesting in relation to the influence of the community and atmosphere at college football games was that the female participants of my study were more interested in the social, or entertainment, side of the games than the core product itself (the actual football game). Although the participants of my study discussed an interest in watching the game, the majority of their influences were found in the events and activities surrounding the game. The results from the Gibson et al. (2002) study also found that for many of their participants, “the social experiences accompanying football have provided a wider sense of meaning to their lives,” (p. 413). It is evident when attending a sporting event, particularly football, that the entire environment and atmosphere surrounding the game is very prominent in today’s society with all of the events that go on prior to, simultaneously and following the actual game itself. This atmosphere and environment surrounding these college football games might also help to explain the increase in female attendance rates at college football games throughout the past couple of years specifically (see Table 1).

Family

The influence of family was also influential on the decisions of these female participants to become college football fans. Moschis (1987) stated that family was

believed to be the most influential factor on consumer socialization. I, however, found the factors of community and atmosphere to be discussed more often in my study than family.

The family members described in my study who were the most influential were consistent with previous studies. For example, Cotte and Wood (2004) discussed the influence that parents had on their children's loyalty and brand preference in consumer socialization. Similarly, the majority of the participants in my study discussed how their parents had been influential since they were young children. This aspect of my study related to the participants in the study conducted by Gibson et al. (2002) who also discussed the influence of their family, as one participant said that he had been a fan of Gator football since the day he was born.

Fathers were the most frequently mentioned influential family member with my female participants, followed by mother, uncles, grandfathers, and grandmothers (determined by the number of times each were mentioned throughout the study). The influence of fathers in my study was consistent with the findings from Farrell et al. (2011) who found that fathers were highly influential in the sport decisions of females, especially with men's sports. Similar to my study, Farrell et al. (2011) also found that grandfathers were influential in females' sport consumer decisions and socialization. Their study, however did not find any significance in uncles' influences on women. The findings from my study along with Farrell et al. (2011) were consistent in that more men than women seemed to have a greater influence on the

decisions of these participants to become fans of college football. One reason that fathers and grandfathers, along with other family members, might have been so prominent might be because my study was on college football and not all sports. With college teams, it is not unusual for an older family member to have a relationship or interest in a university (e.g., being an alumnus) that led to future generations' fandom with the same teams.

Several of the female participants also discussed the influence of their mothers and grandmothers on their socialization to college football. I was unable to find any previous studies that determined that mothers and grandmothers had a significant influence on another individual's motivation toward sport fandom. Farrell et al. (2011) specifically mentioned, "Although different generations of women were interviewed, not one pointed to a female influence relative to sport," (p. 193). My findings might be explained due to these participants' mothers and grandmothers having had a previous connection or relationship with the same university. It would be interesting for future researchers to determine if there is a female influence on the socialization of male fans as well as determining if other female groups who are studied have any similar female influences as my study showed.

Football Players

Previous literature found that player attachment can influence spectator behavior (Mahony & Moorman, 2000). My study also found this attachment to be an important social factor in influencing female fans. Women are typically social in

nature and it was no surprise to me that they enjoyed getting to know the football players. Many of the participants discussed how they thought it was cool to know the football players and how it made watching the games and being a fan more interesting and enjoyable. A couple of the participants also talked about how knowing players from high school who went on to play college football at other university's outside of their favorite school influenced them in following that team as a fan as well.

This finding might have been expected as the football players were peers of the participants, and in some cases, their friends. Knowing these players helped these young women feel like they were a part of something much bigger (i.e., the entire football community).

Friends

Consistent with McPherson's (1976) findings, friends (i.e., peers) were found to be an influential socialization agent for females. Melnick and Wann (2010) found friends to be the most influential social factor among their participants who were also all undergraduate students. The participants in my study discussed how they surrounded themselves on a daily basis with friends who were also sport fans and had the same interests as them. They also talked about how many of their friends helped to increase their college football fandom as they were the ones to get them more involved in understanding the sport. As more people are deciding to attend college, and with so many activities and opportunities offered on college campuses

today, it is not surprising that these participants' friends were found to be influential in their decisions.

School/University

School and university was another influential social factor on the young women in my study. Many of the participants noted that going to NC State University had influenced their fandom as well as had growing up as an NC State fan. This finding was consistent with the idea of a collegiate athletics department, specifically the revenue sports of football and basketball, being referred to as the "front porch" of an institution, the place where many individuals will first experience a university.

Being a fan of a college football team for a majority of these participants' lives was a common theme expressed. Many of the participants had parents, other family, and friends who had attended the university or had another special connection to a university for the majority of their lives. Farrell et al. (2011) also found that, "being a college student and supporting her school's athletic teams were inextricably linked," (p. 194). This link was common for the female fans in my study who explained that even though some of their previous schools (e.g., high school) did not have a football team, they had grown to love college football and support NC State athletics since coming to the university. A couple of the participants also discussed the influence of college football on their decisions of where to apply for college. McPherson's (1976) study found that although males were influenced by

school, this motivation did not have a significant value on the influence of females. My study showed the opposite findings since this social factor was mentioned in all three focus groups as was family. This result may be because the participants in my study were all current college students who were active in the Student Wolfpack Club and with university athletics in general, specifically college football.

Significant Others

Farrell et al. (2011) suggested that future studies be conducted to examine women who consider themselves a fan of a specific team or sport to determine if they might provide different perspectives than the women who had previously been found to attend or watch a game based on the time spent with their significant others. Farrell et al. found that their participants often spoke of the impact of their husbands and their boyfriends on their fandom, but that they also mentioned the greater influences of their relationships with their brothers, nephews, and other family members as well. Overall, this significant others factor has not been found to be as influential in the past as other factors (Moschis, 1987). However, it now seems that change may be occurring, at least with women who are current college students. A couple of the participants of my study spoke more in depth than the other participants on their relationships with their boyfriends (current and past) and how they influenced their socialization to becoming a college football fan. The boyfriends that did seem to influence the few participants in their fandom seemed to be one of the initial reasons they started to become socialized, followed by other

social factors that have since been just as influential, if not more (i.e., friends, community, atmosphere, etc.).

Implications

My study has possible implications for professionals in the sport industry as well as future researchers. These implications could lead to future marketing efforts directed specifically at creating a more loyal female fan base at college football games as well as for other sport professionals and researchers that are interested in better understanding this growing market segment.

Through the understanding of specific social factors that were most influential to female fans of college football, marketing professionals could use this information to create a marketing plan that better markets towards getting women more involved and interested in the games. These professionals could also determine marketing efforts through these social factors (i.e., family members, football players, friends, significant others) that might also help to grow a more loyal female fan base for their sport or organization. For example, future marketing efforts might be directed towards fathers and friends to create Family or Friend Days at college football games. This effort could encourage current fans to bring their family members (i.e., father/daughter games) or friends to games. These games could include special events or contests that interests the majority of fathers and daughters or friends of all ages. Marketing efforts could also be focused on creating an even better game-day atmosphere for getting fans more involved at tailgates and in the pregame

festivities. As for the influence of community, more community structured tailgates could be implemented throughout the season by the university, the athletic department, or clubs. Some universities, such as North Carolina State University, have implemented special events throughout the year for fans to meet their favorite football players and coaches. For example, NC State hosts *Meet the Pack Day* each year prior to the start of the football season and also allows fans to meet the players and coaches on the field following the spring football game. More of these events might be created in the future to allow more of these females the opportunity to meet the football players so that they can feel that special connection to the team.

The results of this study may be valuable to colleges and universities as well in determining ways to better market their institution to future students and donors by promoting the *front porch* effect of collegiate athletics on a university. Testimonials specific to females might help attract more potential students that had not considered the opportunities that they had at an institution with a collegiate football program. It is important for college students and community members to be involved with various aspects of the college, or community, and this promotion could be one way to encourage interaction. Each of these interactions in turn could aid in the branding of the university and the athletic department as a whole. Future donors might also be interested in these testimonials from female fans to help sponsor academic and athletic scholarships, for example. Donors might also be interested in attending and donating to the tailgating activities for special events such as the

possible father-daughter games and “bring a friend to the game” activities to increase awareness of the university, the athletic department, and the college football program. I believe that the findings from my study are a great way to begin new marketing efforts for not only the athletic department and college football programs, but for the university as a whole.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations were presented throughout my study’s findings. These limitations included: the study of only undergraduate students, the use of one large southern Division I university, the study of one demographic (i.e., the Student Wolfpack Club, Caucasian), the participants’ pre-socialization (i.e., all participants viewed themselves as fans), and the lack of a secondary moderator and transcriptionist.

The participants of this study were all undergraduate students from the same university and club and all were Caucasian. Also, by examining students at a large Division I university, the findings were likely limited to the socialization of fandom at a university with a large college football program. Smaller universities, as well as larger universities (i.e., SEC schools) might be likely to have other social influences on their college football socialization. These limitations limit the comparisons of this study’s findings to other studies that examine other groups of women (i.e., different age groups and not all from the same school/university). Future studies should

examine women who are from various universities and of various ages and races to determine if the findings are still consistent with my study.

The examination of women who already viewed themselves as college football fans might have also limited this study's findings. Future studies may examine women who are currently being socialized, but have not already reached a high level of fandom. These studies could also examine a combination of various levels of fans which might lead to a difference in findings as well.

With myself being the only moderator and transcriptionist, another limitation was presented. I also attended NC State University for my undergraduate degree and was also a member of the Student Wolfpack Club at that time. I also grew up an NC State fan – similar to many of the participants of my study, which could have led to bias in the results. I also have a current relationship with the NC State Athletic Department and was able to easily access the Student Wolfpack Club list. Having access to the list was advantageous but my potential bias could have been a limitation. However, as noted in Chapter 3, I did as much as I could to assure trustworthiness I took precautionary measurements to avoid as much personal bias as possible throughout my study. Future studies should also examine female students who are not all from the same athletic support club on campus to determine if the findings are similar or different for those women.

If I were to do this study over, there are a few items that I might change. To begin with, I would have tried to get a more wide variety of participants from several

universities. I cannot say if results would have varied, but it would have been interesting to see if the university that the women attended had any affect on the social influences for female fans. This could have also helped to decrease some of the potential bias through the study of only one university in which I was associated with. After reviewing the study by Gibson et al. (2002) on the University of Florida football fans, it would have been smart to determine the *type* of fan that each of my participants were prior to collecting their data. If these types of fans had either been identified I could have analyzed how each type of fan was socialized and why. I also could have explored more of how the types of fans interacted with each other if placed in the same group. I could have changed a couple of my questions in my interview guide to better fit *socialization*, such as “What does your typical game day routine consist of,” or “What does being a fan of college football/your favorite college football team mean to you,” as well. These questions might have presented additional social influences that affect these female fans, or may have provided more insight into the social influences that were presented. I would have also asked fewer questions on what other sports my participants were interested in outside of football as these ended up providing no additional information that hadn’t already been mentioned in relation to being socialized to college football. Lastly, I would have found a committee, or another individual, to help with each of the focus groups to help eliminate any bias. This individual or committee would have helped with focus

groups, transcriptions and coding. I would suggest that all future studies take each of these items into consideration.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the social factors that influenced the consumer socialization of female college football fans. The major themes found through the use of focus groups were the social influences of the atmosphere, community, family, football players, friends, school/university, and significant others. The results of this study may aid in future marketing efforts of college football to women and help increase the loyal female fan base at college football games. The results may help with university branding and obtaining more donors and donations for the university as a whole as well. Limitations and future research implications were also discussed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

North Carolina State University is a land-grant
university and a constituent institution of the
University of North Carolina

Office of Research and Innovation
Division of Research Administration

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Campus Box 7514
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514

919.515.2444 (phone)
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Deb Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: October 1, 2012

Title: Social Factors Influencing Fandom: The Case of Female College Football Fans

IRB#: 2823

Dear Jessica Delk

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101.b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.
Thank you.

Sincerely,



Deb Paxton
NC State IRB

IRB# 2823

North Carolina State University
 Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
 REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION (Administrative Review)

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Date Submitted: <u>September 17, 2012</u>
2. Title of Project: <u>Social Factors Influencing Fandom: the Case of Female College Football Fans</u>
3. Principal Investigator: <u>Jessica Nicole Delk</u>
4. Department: <u>Parks, Recreation, Tourism, and Sport Management</u>
5. Campus Box Number: <u>8004</u>
6. Email: <u>jndelk@ncsu.edu</u>
7. Phone Number: <u>336-963-0074</u>
8. Fax Number: _____
9. Faculty Sponsor Name and Email Address if Student Submission: <u>Jonathan Casper, jonathan_casper@ncsu.edu</u>
10. Source of Funding? (required information): <u>N/A</u>
11. Is this research receiving federal funding? <u>No</u>
12. If Externally funded, include sponsor name and university account number: <u>N/A</u>
13. RANK: Faculty: <input type="checkbox"/> Student: <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate; <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Masters; or <input type="checkbox"/> PhD Other (specify): <input type="checkbox"/> _____

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:
Jessica N. Delk _____ *
 (typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

Faculty Sponsor:
Jonathan Casper _____ *
 (typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

*Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature

PLEASE COMPLETE AND DELIVER TO:
 (dapaxton@ncsu.edu) or Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (Administrative Services III,
 Room 245)

 For SPARCS office use only

Regulatory Compliance Office Disposition

Exemption Granted Not Exempt, Submit a full protocol
 Exempt Under: b.1 b.2 b.3 b.4 b.6

Jessica N. Delk
 IRB Office Representative

9-28-12
 Date

Project Description: Describe your project by providing a summary and answering the requests for information below.

1. Project Summary. Please make sure to include the purpose and rationale for your study as well as a brief overview of your study.

The purpose of this study is to examine female college football fans. This research study is important to extend the current literature on what leads sport fans to actually become a fan. In the recent years, female college football attendance rates have decreased, however females still make up a large market share of the sport and a more thorough understanding is important for market research.

2. Description of participant population, including age range, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and any vulnerable populations that will be targeted for enrollment.

The subjects for this research will be obtained solely from current Student Wolfpack Club members. The anticipated age range will be from 18-22 as these members are typically undergraduate students at NC State. The principal investigator works within the NC State athletic department and will have access to the current club roster. By obtaining a list through the Student Wolfpack Club, other female NC State students who are college football fans will be excluded because they are not a member of this group. However, this is a non-exclusive group and is open for anyone who is a current NC State student to join if they choose to do so.

3. Description of how potential participants will be approached about the research and how informed consent will be obtained. Alternatively, provide an explanation of why informed consent will not be obtained. Include a copy of recruitment materials, such as, scripts, letters of introduction, emails, etc. with your submission.

Each subject will be a current member of the North Carolina State Student Wolfpack Club and will be emailed to determine their interest in participating in this research study. The email will contain one question asking the subjects to rate their "fandom" based off of a 1-10 scale, with one being that they definitely do NOT consider themselves a fan of college football, and 10 being that they definitely consider themselves a college football fan.

Informed consent will be obtained at the beginning of each of the three focus groups. Each participant will be asked to sign the consent form at this time.

4. Description of how identifying information will be recorded and associated with data (e.g. code numbers used that are linked via a master list to subjects' names). Alternatively, provide details on how study data will be collected and stored anonymously ("anonymously" means that there is no link whatsoever between participant identities and data). Describe management of data: security, storage, access, and final disposition.

One video recorder and one audio recorder will be used during each focus group to ensure that the group will be recorded for transcription. Each focus group will be transcribed and coded by the lead researcher and one other individual as well to ensure validity and reliability of the information. Once each of the groups have been transcribed, the tapes will be stored in a secure area to be determined by the research committee. The data will then be analyzed through MAXQDA. The subjects' names will not be used in the research paper or shared with anyone outside of the focus groups and research committee.

5. Provide a detailed (step-by-step) description of all study procedures, including descriptions of what the participants will experience. Include topics, materials, procedures, for use of assessments (interviews, surveys, questionnaires, testing methods, observations, etc.).

I will begin my research by emailing all identified female Student Wolfpack Club members at North Carolina State University. In the email, I will ask for volunteers to participate in my research study on female college football fans, which will consist of three focus groups to be held on campus at Billmore

Hall. I will attach the informed consent form (attached) for the subjects to review prior to agreeing to participate in my study. I will then include that participants will be offered incentives (i.e. pizza and other gifts such as giftcards, etc.) for their participation and that each focus group should not last any longer than one hour maximum. The subjects will have the option to select which of the three focus groups will work best for their schedule. I will then have one question listed at the end of the email asking for each subject who responds to the email to rate their level of fandom to college football. This question will ask the subjects to rate their "fandom" based off of a 1-10 scale, with one being that they definitely do NOT consider themselves to be a fan of college football, and 10 being that they definitely DO consider themselves to be a college football fan.

Once the subjects agree to participate, I will begin sending out reminders for each of their respective focus groups (i.e. two weeks out, one week out, one day out, and then the day of) via email and cell phone.

Each focus group will be scheduled for the Hines Room in Biltmore Hall for after 5:00 PM, this way participants can park on campus if they choose to do so.

During each of the focus group, a series of open-ended and probing questions will be used to determine which social factors influenced each of these females in becoming a fan of college football. There will not be any questions asked that should harm any of the subjects in this study.

At the conclusion of each focus group, participants will be thanked for their time once again and will be reminded that their names and any personal information that they provided will not be shared or included in the final draft of the thesis or in the defense.

6. Will minors (participants under the age of 18) be recruited for this study:

No

7. Is this study funded? No If yes, please provide the grant proposal or any other supporting documents.

8. Is this study receiving federal funding? No

9. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project?

No

10. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? NA

11. **HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING**

*Please consider taking the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.

12. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

- a) If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
- b) Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal. See the IRB website for a Sample Consent Form and Informed Consent Checklist <http://www.ncsu.edu/sparcs/irb/forms.html>
- c) Please provide any additional materials (i.e., recruitment materials, such as "flyers", recruitment scripts, etc.) that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

**If a survey instrument or other documents such as a consent form that will be used in the study are available, attach them to this request. If informed consent is not necessary, an information or fact sheet should be considered in order to provide subjects with information about the study.*

The informed consent form template on the IRB website could be modified into an information or fact sheet.

The Following are categories the IRB office uses to determine if your project qualifies for exemption (a review of the categories below may provide guidance about what sort of information is necessary for the IRB office to verify that your research is exempt):

Exemption Category: (Choose only one of the following that specifically matches the characteristics of your study that make this project exempt)

- 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
***Please Note- this exemption for research involving survey or interview procedures or observations of public behavior does not apply to research conducted with minors, except for research that involves observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.**
- 3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- 4. Research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- 5. Not applicable
- 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration, or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study

Social Factors Influencing Fandom: the Case of Female College Football Fans

Principal Investigator

Jessica N. Delk

Faculty Sponsor (if applicable)

Dr. Jonathan Casper

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine female college football fans.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet on campus in the Hines Room located in Biltmore Hall after 5:00 PM on the focus group day of your choice. You will take part in a 45 minutes – one hour discussion on what led you to become a fan of college football. Throughout the focus group that you select to participate in, your responses will be recorded via video camera and voice recorder. All of your responses however, will remain confidential in that they will not be traced back to you in the actual research study.

Risks

There are no risks to the participants of this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to the participants of this study.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a password protected computer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation

For participating in this study you will receive food during the focus group in which you select to participate in. You will also have the opportunity to obtain other small gifts such as coffee gift cards, etc. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will still have the opportunity to receive the same incentives, as long as you participated in part of the selected focus group.

What if you are a NCSU student?

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you are a NCSU employee?

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jessica Delk, at 336-963-0074.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled."

Subject's signature _____ Date _____
Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

Hi Wolfpack Supporters!

My name is Jessica Delk, a graduate student from the Department of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Sport Management at NC State University. I am also a full-time employee within the NC State Athletic Department. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project that is focusing on female college football fans. You qualify for this study if you are a current Student Wolfpack Club member and a female who is a college football fan.

As a participant, you will be asked to select one of the focus groups listed below that best fits your schedule. Each focus group will last no longer than 1 hour.

I will be providing food at each focus group along with various other small giveaways such as gift cards, etc. as a token of my appreciation for your participation.

I will video and voice record each focus group for my personal use as I analyze each group. These recordings will be stored safely on a password protected computer and your identity will be kept confidential. Each of the focus groups will be held in D.H. Hill Library, room to be announced. There are three focus group dates and times to choose from:

- 1) Monday, November 5, 6:00pm – 7:00pm, Room TBA
- 2) Wednesday, November 7, 6:00pm – 7:00pm, Room TBA
- 3) Thursday, November 8, 6:00pm – 7:00pm, Room TBA

If you would like to participate in this research study, please respond to me via email at jndelk@ncsu.edu by **Wednesday, October 31st**, with the times that best fit your schedule along with your response to the pre-screening question listed below.

Question: How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of NC State Football? (Please select one response from the scale below).

Not at All a Fan 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very Much a Fan

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Jessica

APPENDIX C

Jessica Delk

Interview Guide

- 1) **What are a few of the reasons that each of you decided to attend NC State University?**
 - a. This question should provide insight into exactly what made each of these Student Wolfpack Club members decide to attend NC State. Were they influenced by one or more of the social factors (peers, significant others, family, school, community, mass media)?

- 2) **Please explain how you have been involved in the Student Wolfpack Club throughout your year(s) at NC State.**
 - a. This question is important to determine how involved each participant has been/currently is within the Student Wolfpack Club. Depending on their involvement, it may be determined how highly identified each of the participants are with college football. This question allows for the researcher to explore whether or not these females are fans of other college sports teams as well, or if they are mainly attracted to, and socialized into, college football. (Peers, family, community, significant others, mass media).

- 3) **Tell me about the first football game that you attended, whether it be an NC State football game or another team.**
 - a. This question will allow the researcher to gain information on when each participant attended their first football game (i.e. as a child, as a teen, in college, etc.), which can also provide insight into how/when each participant started in their socialization to college football. The details that each participant gives about their first football game may shed light onto the "real" reasons of why, and how, each social factor influenced their fandom.

- 4) **Now, think back throughout your years as a football fan and tell me about your fondest football game memory. (Was it an NC State memory, or another team? Was it when you attended a game, or maybe a game you watched on TV?).**
 - a. This question may provide insight into what aspect of the game each participant enjoys most (i.e. a favorite tailgating memory, a favorite play, beating one of their favorite teams biggest rivals, being with friends to experience a win, etc.), and may help to explain how they began their socialization to college football as well.

- 5) **If you were inviting your friends to attend a college football game with you, what would you say to them to convince them that they should join?**
 - a. This question should shed light on exactly what each participant enjoys the most, even if they may not have thought of it previously (social factors).

- 6) **What aspect of a college football game attracts, or interests, you most?**
 - a. Social factors.

- 7) **Tell me about the people in your life who have influenced you in becoming a football fan.**
 - a. Social factors.

- 8) **Tell me a little about how any professionals or other famous people have influenced your fandom.**
 - a. Social factors.

- 9) **Explain to me what other sports, other than college football, you enjoy watching and/or attending and why.**
 - a. Social factors.