

Integrated Fan Identity: Theoretical Framework and Conceptualization

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ABSTRACT

While extensive work on team identification have broadened our understanding of sport fans' psychological ties to teams, it has been pointed out that limited and inaccurate use of theoretical perspectives on identity has prevented further investigation of a complex construct. In this review, we explain the concept of identity work and adopted as to understand the dynamic nature of sport fans' identities. Next, we outline the underlying theoretical perspectives for three different identity types (collective, role, personal) and how they are represented in team identification studies. Based on the above, we propose a rationale for implementing the conceptual framework of an integrated fan identity, highlighting the reciprocal identity work processes of the social, role, and personal identities of sport fans. Implications for future work are also discussed.

PURPOSE

Thus, the primary aim of this review is to advance an integrated framework that provides a multi-faceted perspective on sport fans, that are also multidimensional and dynamic. In doing so, we utilize the concept of identity work that is applied to different types of identity (collective, role, personal).

INTEGRATED FAN IDENTITY

The central concept of our integrated perspective on fan identity can be categorized as twofold: (a) fan identity appertains to multiple identity types collectively, and (b) fan identity's dynamic and fluid nature is facilitated through constant identity work.

DEFINITIONS

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The process of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising one's self-meanings.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The part of an individual's self-concept that derives from being a member of a social group along with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership.

ROLE IDENTITY

Based on individuals' possessed roles, which provide members with self-efficacy and stronger ties between members, resulting in a strengthened identity

PERSONAL IDENTITY

The set of meanings that characterize the individual as a unique entity rather than as a role enactor or member of a group.

IMPLICATIONS

1

By understanding the different factors that contribute to fan identity, value can be added through cluster analysis to categorize fans in a more dynamic way allowing teams to create targeted fan engagement strategies.

2

Practitioners can develop and strengthen interpersonal ties with fans by creating specific roles for fans to take on or provide opportunities to connect personal values and beliefs with a team or athlete.

3

The pandemic pushed interactions predominantly into an online space, this remains a valuable outlet to connect with fans and strengthen group-based identity by creating meaningful experiences in a virtual format.