Psychosocial influences on children's identification with sports teams

A case study of Australian Rules football supporters

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Abstract

The article examines the socialization of children into identification with a sports team. It presents a sociological approach which extends the insights obtained from research into psychological aspects of sports team identification. A conceptual model is presented which proffers an explanation of how and why children become supporters of a particular team. The model depicts the relationship between socializing agents, broader social influences and embodied dispositions. It is argued that these factors coalesce to influence children's identification with a sports team. The article presents results of a qualitative study of young Australian Rules football supporters which show that their embryonic identification with a sports team is strongly influenced by parental and near family influences, particularly fathers and other male role models.

Keywords: childhood socialization, fandom, habitus, socializing agents, sport

Little research has explored how people become supporters of a particular sporting code or how they come to identify with a sports team. Existing research concentrates on classifying the behaviours of those who are already

supporters (Giulianotti, 2002; Stewart et al., 2003). The process through which people are socialized into sport remains an under-researched and under-theorized area of investigation (Wann et al., 2001). Moreover, although research shows that childhood socialization is the single most important path to sport fandom (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2008: 6), very few studies have examined how and why children develop an identification with a sports team. Published work to date has focused almost exclusively on psychological aspects of identification with a sports team. Important sociological influences that inform children's socialization into sport have been largely neglected. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of adopting a sociological approach to understanding the development of identification with a sports team.

In this article we address an under-explored question: how are children socialized into identification with a sports team? We address this question by proposing a conceptual model which nominates significant others who play a prominent role in the socialization of children into sport. By exploring the sporting backgrounds and preferences of these significant others, and their support for teams which represent particular sporting codes, a sociological lens through which this socialization process can be understood is provided. The aim is to extend insights already obtained from research into the psychological aspects of identification with sports teams.

We argue that in early life many children are, as it were, stamped with an awareness of what is acceptable in terms of sporting interests. Parents play a pivotal role in this respect (Greendorfer, 1993; James, 2001). They tend to act as gatekeepers and direct their children to play sports which they deem appropriate for them (Prochaska et al., 2002). Moreover, parents may attempt to manage their children in respect of the sports team(s) they 'choose' to support (James, 2001). The motivation for this is the establishment and maintenance of familial integrity in sporting allegiances.

Our model augments notions incorporated in the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk and James, 2001, 2006) by presenting propositions which emanate from a broader sociological perspective. The work presented here elaborates on the imperative of habitus – a set of durable and transposable dispositions, an embodied history internalized as a 'second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56) – in terms of how significant others influence the early social trajectories of children. We discuss the differential influence of socializing agents on children's sporting tastes and link these to broader social factors and children's embodied dispositions, including the ways in which the body is implicated in sport socialization. Using the model as a template, the second part of the article presents results of a qualitative study which show that embryonic identification with a sports team is strongly influenced by parental and near family influences, particularly fathers and other male role models. While older children may be inclined to switch their team allegiance, this is not without cognizance of the sanctions which can be meted out by parents and other close influencers.

In the final section we draw together the main issues arising from the analysis and propose directions for further research.
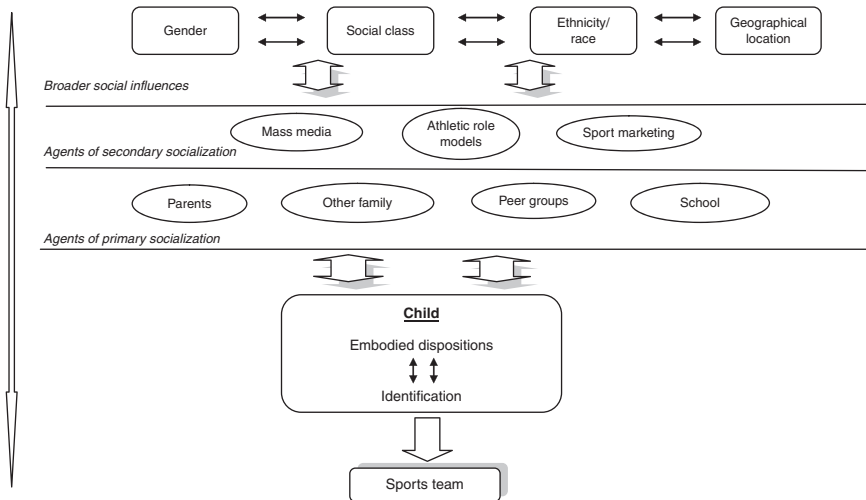
Explaining sports team identification: a model

The PCM focuses on the psychological relationship an individual may form with a sports team, and identifies the different factors thought to influence the formation of a strong identification with a team. The PCM theorizes that sport consumers move through four general stages of sport and team identification: awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. Funk and James argue that the processes of awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance to a sport or team are driven by personal, psychological and environmental influences. These, it is argued, are mediated by cognitive processes such as motivation, learning, perception, memory and attitudes, which affect decision-making in respect of the consumption of sport.

The PCM contributes to the understanding of the factors thought to influence the formation and evolution of a psychological connection with a sport or team. Funk and James (2001: 127) make the important point that researchers 'should consider the differential influences of various socializing agents at different points of the life cycle'. Their work is useful, in that children can be classified in terms of their position within the developed hierarchy of awareness through to allegiance. However, there is more scope in this area of research such that children's identification with a sports team can be better understood.

In relation to the initial formation of sports team identification, we argue that a major limitation of the PCM is its focus on the psychological connection of an individual to a sport or team. The reference to the socialization process is somewhat oblique and limited to the influence of socializing agents. While this influence is highly relevant for understanding children's identification with a sports team, the analysis neglects broader social influences that inform children's sporting tastes. Sport fandom is not simply a matter of personal choice and individual preference; it is informed by a complex set of social influences such as class, gender, ethnicity and race (Crawford, 2004). The PCM does not provide an adequate theorization of the embodied dispositions that influence a person's sporting preferences and behaviour. We do not discount the agency of the individual in terms of their actions and formation of identities in the social world. The broad canvas for our work here is habitus, which is inscribed with the identifiable marks of agency and subjectivity (awareness of self).

The proposed model seeks to move beyond Funk and James (2001, 2006) by showing how several factors, notably parents, peers and the particular social and cultural contexts in which children live affect children's identification with sports teams. The model (see Figure 1) aims to draw together these different influences and explain their interrelationships.

Figure 1: A conceptual model for explaining children's sports team identification

Agents of socialization

Socialization is an interactive process 'through which we actively connect with others, synthesize information, and *make decisions* that shape our own lives and the social world around us' (Coakley, 2003: 98, italics in original). For Denzin (1977: 3), it is 'a process that cannot be separated from the demands of social situations, from the restrictions of language, and from the self-definitions of the persons involved'. Socialization is not a uni-directional transmission of values and behaviours from one generation to the next. Young people are active agents in the process, selective in what they accept from older members of a social group, and may attempt to socialize older members as well (Grusec and Hastings, 2007). In the post-infancy period, young people's behaviour may actually be an expression of the rejection of parental subordination in the quest for an individuated identity (Erikson, 1950). McDonald (1999) argues that young people's life worlds are decreasingly organized in terms of roles, norms and transmitted patterns of socialization. In his view, young people are increasingly confronted with the imperative of 'mobilizing the self', where the demand for self-esteem replaces being socialized into a social identity. This perspective is important in that it highlights the agency of children in their sporting choices and identifications. However, in the context of sports team identification children's agency melds with the continuing relevance of the socialization agents in their lives.

The literature identifies three key agencies which influence people's socialization into sport: family, peers and school (Greendorfer, 1993; Loy and Ingham, 1973; James, 2001; McPherson, 1976). The media also functions

as an influence on sport socialization (Crawford, 2004). Of particular note is the increased visibility of professional athletes in the media and their portrayal as role models for young people (Lines, 2001). Research shows that athletic role models are capable of influencing the identifications and behaviours of adolescents (Bush et al., 2004). Our results suggest that the prominence of high-profile Australian Rules football players in the media may be an influence on children's preferences for a particular sport or team.

In infancy the family of origin functions as the primary forum for the enculturation of children (Grusec and Davidov, 2007). A child's introduction to sport may occur very early in life via the direct influence of significant others (parents, peers, teachers) (Loy and Ingham, 1973; McPherson, 1976). Childhood play provides the foundation for sport behaviour later in life (Giuliano et al., 2000). During the pre-school years, fathers often play an important role in introducing children to sports by talking about and/or watching specific sports and teams on television (James, 2001). At later stages in a child's life other socialization agents come into play. For example, once a child makes the transition to school and becomes part of a wider social network friends are thought to have a greater influence on a child's sporting interests (James, 2001; Lewko and Greendorfer, 1982).

Socialization into identification with a sports team has cognitive and emotional dimensions and, in respect of children, the latter may be dominant. When people identify closely with sports teams they tend to feel deep emotions ranging from enjoyment, camaraderie and self-fulfilment to disappointment, frustration and rejection (Duquin, 2000). Our results demonstrate that for children and their significant others, constructs such as love/hate and vivid recollections which are frequently emotionally laden are germane to sports team identification. Sport fandom provides an emotional forum within which people can collectively affirm their commitment to and passion for their club.

Social influences and embodied dispositions

The influence of social factors on people's sporting tastes is illuminated by the work of Bourdieu (1984). He advanced the understanding of why people of different social classes (defined as social clusters with similar compositions of economic and cultural capital) tend to be involved or interested in different types of sport. Bourdieu (1984: 217) believed that economic barriers, however great they may be in the case of certain exclusive sports, are not sufficient to explain the class distribution of these activities. Class variations in sporting tastes derive also 'from the *variations in the perception and appreciation of the immediate or deferred profits* accruing from the different sporting practices' (Bourdieu, 1978: 835; italics in original).

In Bordieu's view, socialization in childhood means that both the mind and body of the individual are shaped in ways which are typical of a group's characteristic ways of thinking and acting. They acquire tastes and attitudes

and exhibit behaviours which reflect the character of the groups with which they identify and/or belong. A person's habitus, as 'the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour' (Painter, 2000: 242), tends to dictate his or her sporting tastes and preferences (Bourdieu, 1978: 835). For Bourdieu, the affinity between a habitus and particular sports is rarely a subject of conscious reflection by individuals; they just practically 'feel', rather than reflectively think, that a sport is 'right for me' or 'not for me'.

Bourdieu's analysis contributes to an understanding of how habitus shapes people's sporting tastes. Yet objections could be made about Bourdieu's emphasis on class as the determining factor, and the diminution of other social factors. Giulianotti (2005: 169) rightly argues that 'sporting tastes and practices are not so conveniently class-connected', and that we need 'to increase categorical flexibility to deploy Bourdieu's thinking within sport'. However, while the relationship between class and sporting tastes may be increasingly blurred, arguably in part as a consequence of the increasing influence of the media, it nevertheless exists (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2000). Many sports are still strongly associated with particular social groups and sociocultural settings. Thus we concur broadly with Bourdieu's illumination of class and its influence on sporting tastes. Our research results show that within Australian Rules football the identification with a particular team is driven in part by an individual's sense of place in the social hierarchy.

The development of children's sporting tastes should not be aligned only with class in the way Bourdieu suggests. Gender also plays an important role in sport socialization. Sport is dominated by males and this tends to promote traditional gender roles (Messner, 2007; Theberge, 1998). The above-mentioned agencies of socialization are key sites for the construction and the transmission of gendered meanings and cultural norms. Gender-stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity influence children's sport behaviour, for instance by portraying masculine sports as having higher prestige value (Greendorfer, 1993: 8). Despite challenges to male hegemony, sport participation continues to be based at least in part on whether the characteristics of an activity are considered socially acceptable for one's gender in terms of its physicality (Hannon et al., 2009), affirming conventional notions of male superiority and female frailty. There remains a gender-role socialization process that discourages females from becoming involved, either actively or passively, in certain sports (Sargent et al., 1998).

Preferences for, and active involvement in, specific sports also differ according to ethnicity and race. Beliefs about and within different ethnic groups can be aligned with particular sports. Moreover, these beliefs have affected access to and participation in some sports, and the decisions that people make about the role of sport in their lives (Coakley, 2003; Farred, 2008). In the United States, African Americans are popularly considered as 'better suited' for sports such as basketball and boxing, and they are under-represented in other sports,

including golf, hockey and soccer (Coakley, 2003; Harrison et al., 1999). In Australia cricket serves as a vehicle for the maintenance of an 'anglo-centric nostalgia' for a white British past (Farquharson and Marjoribanks, 2006: 27; Hutchins, 2001: 62). Australian soccer, on the other hand, has long been distinguished by its popularity among minority ethnic communities. Many soccer clubs were founded and organized along non-anglo lines and they remain a vital power base for the game (Hallinan et al., 2007), while other clubs are organized explicitly along anglo lines. Ethnic identities in soccer and other sports created an insular atmosphere that was perceived as unwelcoming by individuals outside of specific social groups. For example, Hughson (1997: 171) has noted that young Australian males of Croatian descent experienced a form of discrimination during school years that resulted in their exclusion from rugby league and cricket, leading them to band together with other Croatians and minority ethnic groups to play soccer. Several attempts have been made to develop soccer clubs that are not associated with particular ethnic groups. Most notable in this regard was the introduction of the A-League in 2005.

In sum, social class cannot be viewed as the single determining factor shaping people's identification with sports teams. A wider range of social factors (notably gender, ethnicity and race) needs to be taken into account. These factors find expression in everyday social interactions and are embedded in institutions and cultural symbols. Habitus is a particularly useful analytical frame for understanding how these social factors affect an individual's disposition and, in turn, his or her sporting tastes.

Bourdieu's work enables the body to be incorporated as a key element in sport socialization. The habitus is located within the body and affects every aspect of human embodiment. The body is trained to occupy a habitus within which the individual acquires an appropriate deportment, the manner and style in which they 'carry themselves'. This deportment is turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking (Bourdieu, 1977: 93–4). The shape and dispositions of the body are thus the products of a habitus within the specific location of a certain social class, gender, etc. (Turner, 2008: 13). For example, the opposition between male and female is realized in bodily posture, in the gestures and movements of the body on and off the sporting field. Through the construction and the transmission of gender roles and norms, parents, teachers and the media exert influence on children's bodily negotiation of sport. In the next section we show how a methodology was developed and deployed to test the acuity of the propositions discussed above.

Methods

Five focus groups of children (between 5 and 13 years old) and five corresponding focus groups comprising their parents were convened in 2008. The parents and children were members of the Australian Football League

(AFL) club Melbourne. The club issued an email invitation to members detailing the purpose of the study and asking for expressions of interest. A list of interested members was then used to select participants at random such that ultimately there was a minimum of five participants for each of the focus groups. The researchers were aware of the possible bias in the research results as only members of the club were invited to participate. Membership is a potential source of greater connection to a club and parent members are more likely to have firm opinions and may be more motivated to influence their children to be like-minded. However, this had to be balanced against the difficulty of contacting non-members and the access to members which the club was willing to provide. Furthermore, the researchers viewed the research as a platform upon which more elaborate studies could be undertaken to identify differences in sport socialization among members and non-members of sporting clubs.

In total 37 children (25 males and 12 females) and 32 parents (19 males and 13 females) participated. Each focus group lasted 1 hour and was audio recorded. In addition, video recordings of the children's groups were made to enhance the quality of the data, as indicated by pauses, gesticulations and emotional tone. A particular interest was to interrogate the parent data to judge whether their influence was incidental or central to the socialization of their children into identification with a sports team. Would the theorized influences and relationships embedded in the model be reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of the parents whom we interviewed? Would the children express attitudes and describe behaviours that were reflective of strong parental influence? These methodological considerations motivated the decision to host the parent and child focus groups separately. Moreover, when convened as a separate group the children would be removed from any direct parental influence.

Each focus group interview was organized in two sessions. A simple but enjoyable game, which involved the moderator rolling a ball to each participant and asking them to introduce themselves, was used as an icebreaker in the first session. The remainder of the first session was used to elicit memories of events and recollections about the influence of individuals that participants had internalized as germane to their socialization into sport. The second session was aimed at eliciting unprompted responses from participants about their favourite and least favourite team. To do this a deck of 16 cards, each depicting the colours and logo of one of the 16 AFL teams, was distributed to each participant. They were asked to secretly select the card that represented their favourite football team. Subsequently, and after some discussion about their favourite team, they were asked to also select the card which represented their least favourite team. The reason that we picked these descriptors was to engender strong but contrasting responses. We expected that the resultant data would demonstrate the primacy of the parental project of socialization of children.

The dynamics of a focus group can produce data that would not arise from an interview in which particular questions have been scripted by a researcher (Morgan, 1988: 21). Mindful of this, moderator guides were carefully drafted such that this potential would not be inhibited. However, the guides were such that each of the group discussions was organized around the same set of topics, which were introduced in the same sequence. This protocol ensured that the analysis of the data was manageable and that the data could be compared within and across the focus groups. Transcript material which indicated a volley of responses between participants was analyzed as a block so that the collective and individual meanings behind them could be elucidated.

Results

The sport socialization of the children and parents in our study is strongly associated with two sporting codes: Australian Rules football and cricket. Both sports feature masculine hegemony (Hutchins and Mikosza, 1998), not only in the way they are played but also in the dominance of males in the socialization of children, primarily boys, into the sports. For the fathers the playing of Australian Rules football and cricket dominated their early sporting life. John (Adult Focus Group 2), for example, recalled how his 'earliest thought of playing was … playing football and cricket in the backyard … you were always out there kicking the footy, not so much a basketball, but kicking the footy and playing cricket.' Graeme (Adult Focus Group 5) reported that he 'had a go at everything, football, basketball and all that sort of stuff, but it always ended up that football was the main thing at the end of it'.

In Melbourne, Australian Rules football is of tremendous cultural significance, traditionally as an anglo-dominated game but more recently also for immigrant groups that saw the game as a way in which they could forge an entry into Australian cultural life (Cash and Damousi, 2009: 114–41). The dominance of Australian Rules football is ensured by a kind of informal social regulation of children's activities by their peers. Tony's (Adult Focus Group 3) remark illustrates this:

> It's a bit like the social dynamics in the early days, you would want to hang around with your mates and you wouldn't want to be alienated. If you did something like played soccer for God's sake you'd be in strife … your mates would start saying 'What are you doing Johnno? Playing wogball?'

The reference to 'wogball' is instructive here. The term 'wogball' entered the Australian lexicon during the 1950s and 1960s to describe soccer when a high proportion of the players and fans were immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. As noted, the continuing affiliation of many soccer clubs to specific ethnic groups is believed to encourage a set of cultural practices which are popularly portrayed as 'un-Australian' and 'not for the likes of us'. Tony learned from an early age that playing soccer would not be socially astute.

There was evidence of an alignment of Australian Rules football and cricket with a 'hard' masculinity, in contrast to tennis and basketball which tended to be seen as soft and feminine. According to Judith (Adult Focus Group 1):

> Tennis was the alternative and probably seen by some as a bit more sissy.... [T]here was a little bit of basketball but a bit of a sissy game.... I think a lot of mothers particularly would be saying 'Now this sport [football] is too tough.'

Judith's remark reveals some of the ways in which the body is implicated in sport socialization. For many men, Australian Rules football is the 'right game' to play or watch in part because of its admired bodily qualities: speed, strength, physical contact, the use of all parts of the body (Cash and Damousi, 2009: 130). For others, however, it is a game that is associated with fear of injury, excessive physicality and sexism.

Comments offered by the children showed that there has been some shift in the composition of sports which are played and watched, reflecting the emergence of basketball and soccer as increasingly acceptable sporting pursuits. Comments which reflected this were: 'I play soccer and cricket'; 'I play footy, basketball and cricket'; 'I play footy, cricket and basketball.' However, Australian Rules football and cricket remain very much at the centre of what is a masculine sporting landscape. The inculcation of what it means to be masculine and the cultural appropriateness of Australian Rules football within Victoria is achieved through messages imparted by parents and reinforced by peers and the media. The sport socialization of boys typically involves playing and watching football and cricket. In contrast, girls tend to be socialized into an appreciation of football but typically play netball, hockey or soccer, which are generally viewed as 'more appropriate' sports for girls.

There was commonality in the responses of parents and children in terms of those figures who were most influential in their socialization into sport. When asked about who drove her to sporting events, Fiona (Adult Focus Group 4) said: 'Parents, yeah parents. Dad more than mum.' Trevor (Adult Focus Group 4) then responded: 'Parents and an uncle I had who was into everything like that … yeah he was into everything … he'd come round to our house saying he was off to a running meeting so he'd just take us with him.' The emergence of the school as an influencer was clearly indicated by Alex (Adult Focus Group 1): 'I think in time anyway, it was more what was happening at school.' Similarly, Stuart (Adult Focus Group 5) recalled: 'I went to an all boys Catholic school in the eastern suburbs, so you ended up it was basically football.'

The perception of the children was that male influencers were also more actively involved in sport. Ben (aged 7, Child Focus Group 1) noted that 'my mum just watches but my dad is a coach of football team.... He does play football with me.' Similarly, the recollection of meaningful sporting

memories by the children typically featured those people who they felt were influential. Some events appear to have been recounted to them by their parents or other family members in cases where they were too young to have clear memories of them. Thomas (aged 11, Child Focus Group 4) recalled how: 'Probably when I was six months old my pop took me to my first football match.' Joseph (aged 10, Child Focus Group 5) reported: 'When I was three and my dad turned on the TV.… I sat on the couch – on his shoulders and watched the footy when [it was] Melbourne versus the Eagles and they won by two points I think.' These comments clearly indicate the centrality of male influencers in terms of direct participation and spectating. Mothers appear to play a substantial yet qualitatively different role in the community sports environment through activities such as taking their children to games, running the canteens and laundering uniforms.

The participants in the study were indicative of a middle-class cohort in terms of their place of residence and their occupations. A review of the database of club members shows that, in terms of geographical location, they tend to live in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne such as Kew, Hawthorn and Camberwell. These are well-known middle-class enclaves. Their affiliation with Australian Rules football and cricket, and their motivation to socialize their own children into understanding and playing these games, reflects the habitus within which this demographic group is domiciled. The parents displayed an almost unconscious approach to the socialization of children which has intergenerational integrity – to use a familiar saying 'like father like son'.

Identification with an Australian Rules football team: compulsions and sanctions

The participants were very clear about how they were influenced to become favourably disposed to a team. Two forms of influence dominated the discussions. We have characterized these as compulsions and sanctions. In the case of the parents there was clear evidence of how some of them had been compelled to follow a team and were sanctioned if they attempted to do otherwise. There was also evidence of how they as parents compelled their own children to follow a particular team. Thus it may be argued that, in many cases, the formation of an allegiance to a sports team arises because of the strong influence of parents and other near family, primarily males.

Compulsions

Colin (Adult Focus Group 2) remarked: 'I feel obliged to say Melbourne … because if I don't my family would kill me.' Graeme (Adult Focus Group 5) also recalled that: 'from the word go really, [I] had no choice'. Gillian (Adult Focus Group 5) added how: 'I've had it rammed down my throat all

my life by my elder brother.' The motivation of parents to enforce identification with their team on their children is very well illustrated by Kevin (Adult Focus Group 3): 'So our kids didn't really have much choice in what they were doing … they're pretty much told they can pick their own team when they're 18 and they move out, while they're living in our house they're Melbourne.' The children's comments resonated with those of the parents: Paul (aged 8, Child Focus Group 2) reported that 'my dad forces me to go for the Bulldogs'. Jane (aged 12, Child Focus Group 3) recalled that her 'aunty barracks for Essendon and her two kids barrack for Essendon because she forced them. They never really get much choice.'

Sanctions

The children were quite verbal about the consequences of communicating a desire to support another team. Emma (aged 9, Child Focus Group 1) said that her father was adamant that his children would not support Collingwood: 'He would be mad at [my brother] for saying Collingwood.' Luke (aged 11, Child Focus Group 3) described how his mother responded negatively to the point of invoking punishment: 'She'd say, what the hell is wrong … what are you talking about? Go to your room.' Similarly, Thomas (aged 10, Child Focus Group 4) imitated his father in saying that :'If you go to Geelong you can pack your stuff and go in a hotel or something.' Maria (aged 11, Child Focus Group 1) described how 'one of my friend's cousins got thrown out of a car for saying he was going to change to Collingwood'.

It was also apparent that the children were capable of compelling others to conform and also mete out sanctions in the case of non-compliance. Tom (aged 13, Child Focus Group 2): 'Not a lot of people like him now because we don't like our people to swap teams, like how they swap because it's betraying their team.' Parental sanction is illustrated by Julie (Adult Focus Group 4): 'Correct parenting, make sure they make the correct choices. Go for blue. Go for a blue team … there's a big lolly [stick] out the back and I'll whack you on the head with it.' Claire (Adult Focus Group 4) added: 'He's 13, and he will not go to a Collingwood game.' When asked about his son's predilection to change his loyalty to another team, John (Adult Focus Group 2) remarked: 'If he's strong-willed enough to want to change teams … well go to the footy alone, yeah, goes on his own and good luck to him. And his wardrobe will be pretty empty.'

Love/hate orientations in sports team identification

When participants were asked to freely describe their least favourite team, the language which they used was indicative of a love/hate orientation. This is illustrative of the way in which sports team identification is suffused with emotions. The articulation of a strong negative affect towards other teams is a behaviour displayed to reinforce identification with one's favourite team.

A notable feature of the responses of parents and children was the frequent identification of Collingwood as the least favourite team. An example of this is a sequence of responses about Collingwood from Child Focus Group 3:

Most of the players at Collingwood get in trouble a lot.

... they [Collingwood players] are like stupid people.

We have a particular nickname for them [Collingwood] in our family … poo bums … that's why they smell.

They [Collingwood players] get drunk and can't control their cars and then they crash … and then they try to lie.

They're dirty players … the supporters are worse than the players.

Remarks made by the parents about their least favourite team were marked by the same sentiments but with more refined articulation and reasoning. Reflecting a dissonance between friends who were Collingwood supporters and his hate for that team, Kevin (Adult Focus Group 3) said:

I keep thinking, why do I hate Collingwood because these people you go to the footy with them and they're so easy. When you get to the ground and you're playing Collingwood, you find the ones [other Collingwood fans] that just drive you insane.

These comments reflect an identification of self and other which has strong class connotations and is primarily driven by parents and near others who are the primary agents of socialization. Media reports of bad behaviour by players from opposing clubs appear to have been used by parents to bolster the feelings of alienation of their children with regard to clubs which do not have at least a middle-class pedigree. The participants in the study support a team which epitomizes establishment values and this is evidenced in the supporter base that it attracts. Their habitus is typified by expensive housing, boutique shopping strips and the largest concentration of private schools. In contrast, Collingwood emerged from an inner-city working-class suburb. The club is recognized as and conscious of its power as a representation of this community (Stoddart, 1986: 48–9).

The children exhibited a strong capacity to map one club against another. The parent data was particularly compelling in this regard and resonated strongly with the content and sentiments expressed by the children. This was further evidence of the powerful role played by parents in mapping the early social trajectory of their children: they had inculcated them to regard as alien teams and players deemed to be 'not our sort of people'.

Conclusion

We have sought to explain how children are socialized into identification with a sports team through an examination of the socializing agents and

broader social influences that affect their sporting tastes. The conceptual model and the analysis demonstrate the value of adopting a sociological approach to sports team identification. Our approach augments other work which has been presented from a psychological standpoint. We have shown that following exposure to play in infancy, many children are socialized into an awareness of sport and some codes are central to that process; in Victoria these codes are Australian Rules football and cricket. As agents of socialization, parents may have a vested interest in managing the development of sporting tastes in their children such that they conform to their own worldview. Sport provides a vehicle for parents to model behaviours and express nuances to their children which they believe are appropriate to their familial style.

In connection with Australian Rules football we have shown the parental imperative of ensuring that their children follow the 'right team'. The right team is integral to the sense of self which parents want to develop in their children. Theory would suggest that children have agency in their choice of sports teams. However, our results show that, in connection with their identification with Melbourne, their preferences typically accorded with those of their parents. As shown in the model in Figure 1, children's identifications with a sports team are indicative of embodied dispositions, which are, in turn, influenced by social factors such as class, gender, race and ethnicity. These influences are mediated through the values and attitudes expressed by parents and other socializing agents. They affect which sports and teams are deemed socially appropriate in terms of both support and participation. Two dominant forms of parental influence are compulsions and sanctions: several research participants had been compelled to follow a particular team and were sanctioned if they attempted to do otherwise. In addition, the research results show that children's identification with Melbourne is driven in part by their sense of place in the social hierarchy, which also tends to be strongly influenced by their parents. Our findings are strongly suggestive of a socialization of boys into sport which is different in character to that of girls. Typically, boys watch and play football and cricket. In contrast, girls tend to be socialized into an appreciation of football but typically play netball, hockey or soccer, which are viewed as more appropriate sports for girls.

A possible bias in the research results emanates from the fact that only members of Melbourne were invited to participate. Members may be more motivated to influence their children to be like-minded. Future research could investigate whether there is a differential in the identification of children with a sports team according to whether or not their parents are members of a club.

We have discussed how Bourdieu's work enables us to explicitly incorporate the body in approaches to sport socialization. We have criticized his schema for presenting class as determining practices of the body, with relatively

little influence from gender, race and ethnicity. We have also shown that intense emotions appear to be germane to identification with a sports team. This was done by elaborating on a love/hate construct which characterizes children's and parents' construing of their favourite and least favourite team. The role of bodies and emotions in children's socialization into sport is an important area for further investigation.

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