Sport Attitudes across Cultures: Socialization Process through Family, Education, and Societal Agents

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to better understand the construct of sport attitudes across cultures, and how such attitudes are socialized through family, education, and societal agents. Research questions were: (1) How do people cultivate their sport attitudes? (2) What are persons’ sport attitudes? (3) How do people describe their sport attitudes? (4) How do sport attitudes vary across cultures? This study was a qualitative exploration, applying a heuristic inquiry as the theoretical framework and using interviews and survey forms to collect data. Eight undergraduate students from the US and one graduate student from Japan attending FSU participated in the interviews. Fourteen undergraduate students at FSU responded to an open-ended survey. The researcher coded the data and categorized the list of codes. The findings were validated by a triangulation process including cross interviews and survey validation, and inter-rater reliability. Results revealed three groups of themes. The first group answered the first and fourth research questions and included three emerged themes: socializing agents and agencies, culture, and personal factors. These themes could be viewed as the antecedents of sport attitudes. Examples of socializing agents and agencies were family members, peers, and schools. The category of culture was comprised of types of sports, social structure, economic situation, and people’s spare time activities. Personal factors were consisted of personal talent, health conditions, and personality. The answers to the second research questions were shown in the second group of emerged themes including: metaphors about sports, feelings about sports, and attitudes toward athletes and professional players. Examples of metaphors were exciting books, cartoons, and soap operas. Feelings and attitudes could be positive, neutral, or negative. Finally, the third group of emerged themes, answering the third research question, included: purposes, ways to be involved, and reasons not to be involved. They were consequences of sport attitudes, describing why, how, and how often people are involved in sports or why not involved.

Key words: Sport attitudes, Socialization, Qualitative method, Heuristic inquiry

1. INTRODUCTION

This study was a qualitative exploration, attempting to understand the sport attitude across cultures and its socialization process through family, education, and society. The theoretical framework of a heuristic inquiry guided the research design, analysis and interpretation. The research methods included interviewing eight undergraduate students from the researcher’s Stretch & Relax classes and one graduate student from Japan majoring in Sport Management, and a survey, which contained four open-ended questions. After data collection, the study coded the data, categorized the list of codes, and named each category as a theme. The findings were validated by a triangulation process including cross interviews and survey validation, and inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater reliability was executed in the process of analysis of data. In the process, one undergraduate junior student in the researcher’s Stretch and Relax class from education department, and a graduate student from Mainland China, studying in Department of Sport Management, Recreation Management, and Physical Education were recruited to brainstorm the coding and the categorization of codes. The first group answered the first and fourth
research questions and included three emerged themes: socializing agents and agencies, culture, and personal factors. Another three emerged themes including metaphor, magnitude, toward athletes, were used to describe what persons’ sport attitudes are. Finally, three emerged themes including purposes, ways to be involved, and reasons not to be involved, were used to understand how people describe their sport attitudes. Ethical issues, implications and applications of the results, limits of the study, and possible further research were also provided.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to describe sport attitudes across cultures and their socialization processes through family, education, and society using a heuristic inquiry. The results will be in a discussion of themes and patterns which provide useful aspects applied to describe sport attitudes and their socialization processes. The current research defined the sport attitude as a person’s enduring favorable or unfavorable evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies toward sport, sport spectatorship, and sport participation. Sport attitude socialization is the process whereby persons learn an attitude toward the sport, sport spectatorship, and sport participation.

Given the purpose statements, the overview questions include: (1) How do people cultivate their sport attitudes? (2) What are persons’ sport attitudes? (3) How do people describe their sport attitudes? (4) How do sport attitudes vary across cultures? The first question attempts to understand the reasons influencing persons’ sport attitudes. Answers to the first question were primarily acquired from the exploration of socialization processes of sport attitudes. The second question attempts to provide metaphors to describe sport attitudes. The third question attempts to understand the ways to be involved in sports and purposes of sport participation and spectatorship. Finally, combined his background knowledge about culture and his own personal experiences with collected data from eight American students and one student from Japan, the researcher attempts to describe different sport attitudes across cultures and different socialization processes.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework of the heuristic inquiry was employed to guide the research design, analysis and interpretation of the exploration of sport attitudes and their socialization processes. According to Patton (2002), the foundational idea of the heuristic inquiry is that the researcher has his personal experiences and the insights of the phenomenon under the study. The framework of the heuristic inquiry allows the researcher’s personal experiences, reflections, and insights to guide the research design, analysis and interpretation. The original stimulus driving the researcher to adopt the framework of the heuristic inquiry was his first experience in attending a football game in the stadium of Florida State University. The collective excitement and craziness toward a football game surprised the researcher. For a person like the researcher from Taiwan, he or she would have never understood what “Tailgating” was about until he or she had witnessed what happened around a stadium before a game. This stimulated the researcher’s interest in exploring sport attitudes and their socialization processes. The researcher’s experiences in Taiwan and in the US would help for the exploration. The researcher’s personal experiences and insights would grow self-awareness and self-knowledge in the study. The researcher would use his cultural background as a base to interpret the data collected from interviews and surveys. The understanding of how sport attitudes and their socialization processes vary across cultures is an
important foundation for the researcher’s experiences in studying sport consumer behavior. Therefore, the framework of the heuristic inquiry is a suitable framework to guide the research.

The framework of the heuristic inquiry guided the research design, analysis and interpretation of the exploration of sport attitudes and their socialization processes. Based on the researcher’s experiences, the research design included developing purpose statements and overview questions, interviewing students, and conducting a survey. In the stage of the data analysis, the researcher applied his experiences, background knowledge, and insights in sports, education, and culture to create codes and categorize the codes. Finally, by applying personal understandings, the researcher interpreted the results to describe sport attitudes and their socialization processes and provide aspects used for the descriptions. Figure 1 illustrates the focus of the study. In short, the researcher’s background and cultural experiences were used in the study to understand the sport attitudes and their socialization processes. In the process of understanding, the study used data coding and categorization of codes to catch themes, patterns or aspects which can be used to describe the sport attitudes and their socialization processes.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kenyon and McPherson (1973) and McPherson (1976) mentioned that the process of socialization makes people become involved in sports. The focus of these two papers was when and how people began to consume sports. Through socializing agents, people began to be aware of the sports and might have their first experiences with sport consuming. Kenyon and McPherson (1973) mentioned that there were three elements of the socialization process, Personal attributes, Significant others, and Socialization situations. These three elements suggested that in the socialization process, significant others (socializing agents) exerted influence within social situations (socializing agencies) upon role learners who are characterized by a variety of personal attributes (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973). Kenyon and McPherson (1973) also mentioned that factors related to family, school, peer, community, and mass media might influence the sport socialization. McPherson (1976) used three components to operationalize the socialization. The first component was the degree of behavioral socialization referring to the number of sport events attended or consumed on TV. The second component was the degree of affective socialization referring to the amount of loyalty or identification with specific teams. The third component was the degree of cognitive socialization referring to the amount of knowledge about the structure, rules, and strategy of sport. The weakness of McPherson’s (1976) operational definitions was that the results of socialization were over-simplified into only one dimension in
terms of the quantitative degree. Neither Kenyon and McPherson’s (1973) nor McPherson’s (1976) articles discussed qualitative variations of attitude and behavior shaped by socialization.

Kolbe and James’ article (2000) examined the creation of a team fan by socialization, and James’ article (2001) focused on the role of socialization in the initial development of team loyalty. These two articles emphasized on when individuals became team fans and when children began to demonstrate team loyalty, and emphasized on investigating who were the most influential socializing agents. These two articles did not show qualitative variations of sport attitude and behavior resulting from socialization. Bush, Smith, and Martin (1999) examined the influence of consumer socialization variables on attitude toward advertising. They suggested that parental communication, peer communication, mass media, gender, and race were related to attitudes toward advertising. They used a 10-item scale to measure attitudes and produced a single figure to show the one dimensional degree of a quantitative attitude. Again, this did not show qualitative variations of attitude. In short, prior research showed factors that influenced the socialization process, but failed to demonstrate the qualitative variations of sport attitudes and behavior. The current research attempted to fill the void of research.

In addition, cultural differences may play a crucial role influencing the socialization process and the results. Kenyon and McPherson’s (1973) mentioned “that national differences exist in the nature of both sport roles (kind, milieu, and complexity) and relevant social system elements (values, norms, sanctions, and situational facilities)” (p. 312). Different value focuses across nations may lead to different sport attitudes through the process of sport socialization. A society which is more oriented toward masculinity might tend to emphasize a value of achievement. Kenyon and McPherson (1973) proposed that “The greater the achievement motivation, the greater the propensity for sport involvement (p. 310).” Therefore, people in a more masculine society may be more likely to be involved with sport. Moreover, one mode of the core nature of sports is competition. In a community where Buddhist thoughts permeate, residents probably would have negative attitude toward sport because sport might arouse competitiveness which violates part of the basic principles of Buddhism. Buddhism pursues the philosophy of “put down” and “no fight.” In addition, for proponents of Confucianism, “The Superior Man has nothing to compete for. But if he must compete, he does it in an archery match, wherein he ascends to his position, bowing in deference. Descending, he drinks the ritual cup. This is the competition of the Superior Man (Confucius, n.d.).” Further, for Taoism, Lao-Tzu in his book Tao Te Ching (approx. 500 B.C.) said that “Because he is not a competitor, no one in the world can compete with him.” These three major philosophies are pervasive in Eastern Asia. They do not encourage competition, or at most encourage competition in a gentle and fair way. Maybe that is part of the reason why aggressive sports like football are not popular in this area. In addition, Brownell (2000) mentioned that there was a notion called “face culture” that permeated Chinese sports discourse. Chinese “love face.” They do not like to lose face. However, in any competition, there must be a loser, who would lose face. Thus, the best way to avoid losing face would be not to compete. In conclusion, the current research hypothesized that because of the differences among cultures, the socialization process and the results of socialization in terms of sport attitude and behavior would vary across cultures.

5. METHOD

Methodology of this study is a qualitative exploration in general with a theoretical framework of the heuristic inquiry as a guide. Specifically, the methods included interviews and a survey. The steps of the methods included obtaining the access, deciding a sampling strategy,
interviewing the students, conducting the survey, and analyzing the data. The interviewee sampling was an intensity sampling from the researcher’s Stretch & Relax class. Eight students were recruited for the interviews. A graduate student from Japan studying in master program of sport Management was also recruited. Since all these participants volunteered to participate in the research, they were believed to be more willing to provide rich information. Because the study is a type of heuristic research, “the researcher seeks a sample of sufficient intensity to elucidate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001, p. 234). For the nine interviews, the researcher prepared some general topics to direct the interviews and adapted questions to respondents’ knowledge and the interview context. In the interviews, the instructor wrote down the key notes. After interviews, the instructor typed down the details based on the key notes and his memory. After completing all of the interviews, the researcher developed four open-ended questions and then conducted a survey. Students in the researcher’s classes were encouraged to answer the survey to earn extra credits. Fourteen students answered the survey. Figure 2 illustrates the data collection procedure. Table 1 shows the survey questions. The units of analysis were the students in the stage of data analysis, but in the discussion, the units of analysis were three nations, the US, Japan, and Taiwan.

![Figure 2 Data Collection Procedure](image)

<table>
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<th>Table 1 Survey Questions</th>
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<td><strong>Directions</strong></td>
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| **Questions** | 1. In general, what is your attitude toward sports and athletes? Could you apply some “metaphors” to describe the value of sports for you? Explain.  
2. Could you recall what the process of the socialization is in which you cultivate your interest in playing sports and watching sports? Could you give me some of your experiences and stories?  
3. Who was the first person who stimulated your interest in playing sports and watching sports? How? I would like you to write down some stories.  
4. After you entered school, what role did the schools play in further cultivating your interest in sports? How? Again, answers by stories would be better. |

In the data analysis, the researcher first coded part of survey answers and created 50 codes. The list of codes was provided to an undergraduate student from education department, who was a student in one of researcher’s classes. She used the provided list of codes to code four interviews and created 82 codes and categorized these 82 codes into nine groups. The researcher completed the coding of survey answers and created 161 codes and 11 categories. A list of all codes and categories were provided to a teaching assistant studying in the master program of recreation management. The teaching assistant coded five interviews with 47 codes and
categorized these 47 codes into seven groups. The researcher finally examined all of the coding again, revised some of the coding, and decided the final list of 238 codes and 9 categories. Table 2 shows different versions of categories by the researcher and other two coders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Student's Version</th>
<th>Researcher's First Version</th>
<th>The Assistant’s Version</th>
<th>Researcher's Final Version</th>
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<tr>
<td>Socializing Agents</td>
<td>Attitude toward Athletes</td>
<td>Socializing Agents</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td>Types Of Sports</td>
<td>Attitude toward sport</td>
<td>Types of Sports</td>
<td>Types of Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ways to be involved with Sports</td>
<td>Motive, emotion</td>
<td>Ways to be involved with Sports</td>
<td>Socializing Agents</td>
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<td>Places</td>
<td>occasions</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
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<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasons to be involved with Sports</td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>Reasons to be involved with sports</td>
<td>Toward Athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons not to be involved with sports</td>
<td>Purpose of sport</td>
<td>Reason not be involved with sports</td>
<td>Ways to be involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words having to do with School</td>
<td>Socializing agents</td>
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<td>Extra Words</td>
<td>Spectator</td>
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<td>Types of sports</td>
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The process of coding included, first, listing all descriptions of interviews and answers to the survey. There were about 900 units of descriptions. Next, give each description a code. After coding every description, use the function of Sort Ascending in the EXCEL to put all descriptions in a new order based on the alphabetic sequence of the codes. These codes then were categorized into groups. In the final version of categories, the category of Types of sports was combined into the category of Culture, and the category of Toward athletes was combined into the category of Attitude. Figure 3 illustrated the relationships among categories. The categories of Socializing Agents, Culture, and Personal Factors are the factors influencing the formation of Sport Attitudes. The Sport Attitudes are manifested by Purpose for sport, Ways to be involved, and Reasons not to be involved in sport. The following describes each category.

6. RESULTS

The process of coding included, first, listing all descriptions of interviews and answers to the survey. There were about 900 units of descriptions. Next, give each description a code. After coding every description, use the function of Sort Ascending in the EXCEL to put all descriptions in a new order based on the alphabetic sequence of the codes. These codes then were categorized into groups. In the final version of categories, the category of Types of sports was combined into the category of Culture, and the category of Toward athletes was combined into the category of Attitude. Figure 3 illustrated the relationships among categories. The categories of Socializing Agents, Culture, and Personal Factors are the factors influencing the formation of Sport Attitudes. The Sport Attitudes are manifested by Purpose for sport, Ways to be involved, and Reasons not to be involved in sport. The following describes each category.
Figure 3 Relationships among Categories

- **Socializing Agents**: This category includes people and agencies which influence a person to be aware of and interested in sport. This category also contains school activities and the time when a person began to be involved in the sport world.
- **Culture**: This category is comprised of types of sports, social structure, economic situation, and people’s spare time activities.
- **Personal Factors**: This category is consisted of personal talent, health conditions, and personality.
- **Attitudes**: This category includes metaphors about sport, feelings about sport, and attitudes toward athletes and professional players.
- **Purposes**: This category describes the reasons why people are involved in sports.
- **Ways to be involved**: This category describes how people participate in sports and consume sports and how often people are involved in sports.
- **Reasons not to be involved**: This category reveals the reasons why people choose not to participate in sports or not to be involved in sports. For example, people may need to work and do not have time for sports.

This research used four methods to examine the validity and reliability. First, in the literature review, three elements of the socialization process mentioned by Kenyon and McPherson (1973) are similar to the themes which emerged in the current research. **Personal attributes**, **Significant others**, and **Socialization situations** from literature review are respectively similar to **Personal factors**, **Socializing agents**, and **Culture** of the research. Second, the researcher’s cultural experiences provide directions about how to describe sport attitudes. For example, the current research includes the attitude toward athletes as part of general sport attitude. Third, member checking across different interviews and information from survey were used to cross-examine the validity of data. Finally, three coders dealing with the coding and categorizing provide the inter-rater reliability.

### 7. DISCUSSION

This session of discussion identifies vignettes and quotes that capture the essence of the research purpose and answer research questions. The first question, **How do people cultivate their sport attitudes**, and the fourth question, **How do sport attitudes vary across cultures**, could be answered by the categories of Socializing agents, culture, and personal factors, i.e. the
antecedents of Sport attitudes (see Figure 3). For socializing agents and agencies, the college organizations in the US are fraternities and sororities for students to participate in Intramural games, whereas in Taiwan, students participate in sport activities through school department teams. In Taiwan, when students are in the middle schools, they are busy in preparing the entrance exams and the focus by parents and social expectations are usually academics rather than sport activities. Some students may give up their talent and concentrate their energy on studying. Unlike middle schools in the US, middle schools in Taiwan do not contribute to cultivate sport interests and skills. After class or on weekend, students may participate in community sport clubs in the US, but students in Taiwan may go to cram schools. Most parents or even grandparents in the US cultivate children’s interests in sport in an early age, but Taiwan’s parents may be busy in earning money. Children in Taiwan may cultivate interests in sports later by playing sports with peers or watching sport programs on TV. In Taiwan, mass media may play a more important role as a socializing agent than in the US. Similar to Taiwan, Japan emphasized academics, but “30% joined the schools clubs... and played sports from 4 to 5 p.m. for fun,” the Japanese interviewee said. Japan might be better in sport participation.

From the cultural standpoint, the cultural value for sport is positive for most people in the US. They do not over-emphasize academics. In the US, the social structure such as schools and communities also provides numerous opportunities for children, students, and residents to participate or watch sports. Since the US and Japan have the highest GNP in the world, people in these two countries usually can afford to invest in sport facilities and equipments. People participate in more various modes of sports in the US than in Taiwan. The cultural value for sport in Taiwan is not always positive. Some students in Taiwan may be taught not to “waste time” on sports and sports might be thought primarily for wild students. Different from schools in the US, schools in Taiwan and Japan usually hold sport festivals once a year for one or two days. However, the participation frequency and the items of sports are fewer in Taiwan and Japan.

Fewer people in Taiwan and Japan would cultivate sport skills seriously. Only those who are born with great talent may decide to use sports as a living, but they are very few. Residents in Taiwan and in Japan may have more various spare activities rather than only focusing on sports. Compared to Japan, people in Taiwan may have fewer live games to attend because there is only professional baseball league in Taiwan. However, although in Japan there are more live games, “people in Japan work from 9 a.m. to 11 or 12 p.m. and do not have time to play sports,” the Japanese interviewee said.

Personal factors also influence sport attitudes. One interviewee mentioned that “I have never really been good at playing sports.” Then, she said, “I felt like they forced me to play sports that I did not want to play.” On the other hand, another interviewee said, “I can run fast. I can play sports very well... I have good skills... I can play every sports better than other classmates.” Then, she said, “Winning brings me with more fun to play.” Obviously, it seems that there is a vicious cycle or reinforcement theory to explain the relationship between personal talent and sport attitudes. Personal body defects, problems, injuries and personality might also influence sport attitudes. For example, body problems might lead to a negative attitude, and nervous personality may feel a lot of pressure in competition. In contrast, a competitive personality might like to compete in sports.

The second question, What are persons’ sport attitudes, could be answered by metaphors, affective feelings, and attitudes toward athletes and professional players. Students in the US mentioned several interesting metaphors related to sports such as Exciting book, Air, MacDonald, Cartoon, Soap opera. One student said, “I choose to watch sports in my spare time, like children choose to watch cartoons.” In the US, sport participation and spectatorship might be more likely
as part of daily leisure life. However, in Taiwan, health might be a primary reason driving people to participate in sports, and spectatorship might be more likely to be thought unhealthy and not encouraged. More American people emphasize sportsmanship and are fanatic in sports than people in Taiwan. Attitudes toward athletes might be “contradictory” in Taiwan. On the one hand, athletes might be thought inferior in academics. For example, they are not good at academic performance and only good at physical activities. Some stereotypes about athletes may be referred to wildness without moral discipline. On the other hand, athletes might be seen as heroes because of their talents on sports. In the US, in general, there is less negative stereotypes attributed to athletes, but they might be thought commercial because they earn too much money. The situation in Japan might be in the middle. There are less negative attitudes toward Athletes in terms of academic performance, moral behavior, and commercialization in Japan. In Japan, professional players are a special group of people. The Japanese interviewee said that “it is a rare chance for a person to be in a professional team.”

The third question, How do people describe their sport attitudes, could be answered by the categories of purposes for sports, ways to be involved, and reasons not to be involved in sports. In general, sociability and entertainment are common motives driving people to attend games. However, appreciating sportsmanship along with competitiveness might be emphasized in the US, whereas a motive of health for sport participation might be emphasized in Taiwan. In addition, people in Taiwan or in Japan might be attracted by the entertainment of sport, but might not be consciously aware of the motive of self-esteem for vicariously experiencing self-achievement through watching sports. In a collectivism culture, individual self-achievement may not be emphasized. As for the ways to be involved, the research suggested that there were differences between eastern and western cultures. Students in the US usually cultivate sport interests and learn some sport skills in the middle schools. These interests and skills would influence people’s rest of life. By contrast, for most people in Taiwan or Japan, they may give less value for sports, have other choices of spare time activities, or simply work for a long time, and consequentially may participate in fewer sports. Since most students in Taiwan may not cultivate strong interests in sports and learn some sport skills, sports for most people in Taiwan are not part of daily lives. The reasons not to be involved in sports may be also related to the cultural value, the social structure, and economic situations. If a culture does not emphasize the value of sport, the society would not allocate resources in investment of sport facilities and equipments. Residents would have fewer chances to be involved in sports and fewer choices of sport items. If the economic situation is not good enough, residents may not be able to afford for sport participation and spectatorship.

In conclusion, this study adopted a heuristic framework, coded data, categorized the codes, and found out seven themes useful to describe sport attitudes and their socialization processes. If the study could have interviewed more students from Japan, the research would have more understanding of sport situations in Japan and the comparisons would be more complete. Future research is required to interview people from other countries and develop more comprehensive framework of sport attitudes. The results of the current study provide useful information for sport marketers to design their promotion programs in different cultures where people may have different sport attitudes. For example, if the competition of sports may not have a positive connotation for some cultures, it would not be wise to emphasize the competition of sports as the main theme in a promotion campaign. Sport marketers may choose other themes. The research is an initial step to explore the sport attitudes. More empirical research is required to support the qualitative results of the study.
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