

Journal of Issues in
Intercollegiate Athletics

**Examining the Relationship between Age of Fan Identification and Donor
Behavior at an NCAA Division I Athletics Department**

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Fundraisers in NCAA Division I athletics departments are under increasing pressure to procure donations. Prior studies have examined both donor motivations and consumer behaviors tied to fan identification. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between donor behavior and the life stage at which donors identify with a collegiate athletics program. The primary purpose of this study was to determine if donor motivations and giving amounts differ between groups of donors who became highly identified with an athletics program at different life stages. Results from 2,312 survey respondents at a “Power 5” institution showed significant differences among donor motives between those who became highly identified with an athletics program prior to turning 18 compared to those who did not. No significant differences were found in annual giving levels and lifetime giving amount among groups stratified by their initial age of highly identifying with the athletics program. In an era of heightened emphasis on declining college student attendance, it may be more prudent to increase an emphasis on family/youth marketing efforts in order to cultivate future athletics donors.

Several researchers have examined factors influencing donor motivation among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I college athletics donors (Gladden, Mahony, & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Tsiotsou, 1998; Verner, Hecht, & Fansler, 1998), but only Stinson and Howard (2010) explored the age at which someone develops an affinity for a colleges' sports teams and its impact on future donor behavior. In their qualitative study of 65 athletics donors from two NCAA Division I institutions, the researchers found most respondents were introduced to sports at the college to which they donate by age eight, suggesting the connection a donor has with an athletics department begins much earlier than when the donor was an undergraduate student at the institution, if indeed they even attended the school.

While little has been studied in terms of fan identification and its impact on donor behavior within college athletics, the effects of fan identification on consumer behavior offers a rich line of empirical research (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Greenwood, Kanters, & Casper, 2006; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996), with data exploring differences between high and low identified sport fans (Kim, Trail, & Magnusen, 2013; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003a; Wann, Ensor, & Bilyeu, 2001) as well as different levels of fan identification and consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2001; Trail & James, 2001). Few of these studies, however, specifically examined the effect of the life stage at which fans begin identifying with a team or organization. The aim of this study is to address this gap through an extension of the research on fan identification. The purpose of this study is to explore whether the development of high fan identification at different life stages has any relationship to the amounts donors give. A better understanding of when donors develop their affiliation and level of identification with an athletics department, and how that identification impacts their donor behavior, would allow college athletics administrators, particularly development and marketing personnel, to more effectively cultivate donor relationships and more successfully fundraise.

This research is particularly significant because college athletics fundraisers are facing increasing pressure to deliver results. In 2014, just 20 of 228 athletics departments at NCAA Division I public universities generated enough revenue to cover their expenses (Fulks, 2014). This phenomenon is largely attributed to the college athletics "arms race" wherein university athletics departments engage in extravagant expenditures in order to gain a competitive advantage (Frank, 2004; Knight Commission, 2010; Weight, Weight & Schneider, 2013). The critical nature of donations in fueling these growing expenditures is demonstrated by Fulks (2014), who researched revenue and expenses within NCAA athletics departments. In his study, donations were documented as the third highest source of generated revenue for Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) athletics departments and second highest among Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) athletics departments. As a result of this increased pressure, athletics administrators are incentivized to know more about their donors including how they begin to develop affinity for the program and how that might impact their giving behavior.

Conceptual Rationale

Social Identity and Fan Identification

The concept of fan identification is an extension of social identity theory. This theory postulates a person's membership in certain social groups helps define one's sense of self, pride, or self-esteem (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Hogg, 2006; Trepte, 2006). Fan identification is defined as a spectator's perceived connectedness to an organization or team. Highly identified fans experience and believe an organization's or team's successes and failures are their own. While highly identified fans are not employed by the organization or team, they see and define themselves as belonging to the organization or team (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As Fink et al. (2009) pointed out, fans become more highly identified with an organization or team when it represents the values and attributes they perceive in themselves.

Highly identified fans are more likely to attend more games, spend more on team merchandise, spend more time watching their team play, are more optimistic about the teams' future success, and view attendance at games as a more enjoyable experience (Brown, Devlin, & Billings, 2010; Madrigal, 1995; Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994; Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). For a sport organization, a loyal fan base of engaged fans leads to higher revenue in the form of ticket, concession, and merchandise sales. In the case of university athletics departments, engagement can also lead to higher donations to an institution's athletics department (Tsiotsou, 2007). Tsiotsou (2007) found the factor of "belongingness", which closely mirrors the definition of fan identification, explained the greatest amount of variance (33%) of donor motivation among college athletics donors.

People develop higher levels of identification with a university's athletics program for a variety of reasons. Research has shown the role of player talent as one predictor of sport fan identification levels (Fink et al., 2002; Jones, 1997; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996). Further, Wann et al. (1996) found parental and family influence, peer/geographic influence, and success of the team were the most prevalent reasons for initial team identification. Jones (1997) suggested geographic proximity to the team was the most dominant factor in explaining fan identification. Greenwood et al. (2006) noted several factors accounted for the variability in initial team identification including the players and coaches on the team, geographic proximity, friends and family influences, and participation in extracurricular activities (i.e., tailgating, parties, etc.).

An examination of the various catalysts which lead to sport fan identification reveals an important distinction. On one side are the factors solely related to team success such as championships won, star players on the team, and number of games televised regionally or nationally. On the other side are factors less related to team success such as family and peer influences, geographic proximity of the organization or team, and organizational marketing efforts (i.e., meeting players and coaches, game day atmosphere, etc.). This distinction is notable because the effects of success-related variables can be fleeting and difficult to control. The fan that identifies for these reasons may disassociate during times when the organization or team is less successful. Research suggests variables such as geographic proximity and family influences to be primary factors in developing and maintaining high levels of long-term fan identification (Fink et al., 2002; Jones, 1997; Tsiotsou, 1998; Wann et al., 1996).

Literature Review

Age and Lifecycle Stage Related to Identity and Fan Identification

Building on a robust body of literature related to the salience, impact, and endurance of identity development in childhood, the exploration of the fan identity lifecycle is a natural extension of the identity and social identity theory literature. For example, Demo and Hughes (1990) outlined racial identity is largely shaped through primary socialization experiences, “particularly parental messages concerning the meaning of being black” (p. 364). Similar findings about the impact of early childhood or young-adult identity/social identity development has been conducted in the context of racial/ethnic identity (e.g., Aboud, 2005; Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, Spencer, 2009), gender roles (e.g., Bussey & Bandura, 1999, Witt, 1997) sexuality (e.g., Darling & Hicks, 1982), substance abuse, and educational, occupational, and social outcomes (e.g., Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001).

This literature emphasizes the importance of social identity development in youth. Because of the theoretical linkages and roots between identity theory, social identity theory, and fan identity, this research is a useful foundation to the research questions we explore herein. Many athletics administrators believe college students who build their identification with a school’s athletics department by attending sporting events are more likely to donate to that athletics department as alumni (Cohen, 2014; Guerra, 2015; New, 2014; Rovell, 2014; Soffian, 2015), but this assumption is based on minimal empirical evidence. The call to examine the relationship between fan behaviors such as donating to a collegiate athletics department and the life stage, or length of time fans identify with a sport, has been made (Brown et al., 2010), but to date little empirical research has addressed this query.

Internal research by the National Basketball Association (NBA) suggests kids who identify with the league are 2.5 times more likely to become avid fans as an adult (Lombardo, 2011) while the National Football League (NFL) has reported that 60% of their most avid fans first became engaged with the league while still in elementary school (Karp, 2010). Similarly, Porat (2010) found highly identified adult soccer fans typically began their fandom at 10 years old. Meanwhile, Nakazawa, Mahoney, Funk, and Hirakawa (1999) discovered the length of time someone has been a fan of a sport organization influences both sport involvement and attendance motivation. Research has also demonstrated statistically significant team identification preferences for Chinese basketball fans under the age of 25, yet no difference in identification measures after fans turn 25 (Menefee & Casper, 2011). Similarly, Kolbe and James (2000) found the majority of sports fans established team preference prior to 15 years old, a decision primarily influenced by father behavior. Stinson and Howard (2010) also found the majority of athletics donors in their study began identifying with the athletics department by the time they were eight years old. They also found many of the donors said their early introduction to the university’s sports teams occurred through parents and grandparents.

More recently, Stephens-Davidowitz (2014) suggested when eight-year old fans witness successful seasons by sports teams, the connections those fans develop with the team in their formative years will translate to greater future revenues for the team. Specifically, Stephens-Davidowitz (2014) pointed out boys born in 1961 and 1978 were more likely to be New York Mets baseball fans rather than New York Yankees fans when compared to data from all other years in his examination. He attributes this finding to the fact that boys born in those years would

have been eight years old during the only two seasons (i.e., 1969 and 1986) the Mets won the World Series.

These studies seem to indicate when fans become identified with teams early in life, it impacts later consumer behavior. Shank (2009) captured this commonly assumed sport marketing philosophy when he wrote, "...sports marketers have recognized the power of the kids' market. They realize children will become the fans and the season ticket holders of the future" (p. 167). While the literature seems clear about this connection, little research has been conducted to determine what specific factors spark initial fan interest in a sport organization, something the current study begins to investigate.

Primary Motives for Intercollegiate Athletics Donors

Several researchers explored various donor motivations within college athletics (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahoney et al. 2003; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Tsiotsou, 1998; Verner et al., 1998). The findings of these studies suggest primary donor motives fall in to one of two camps: (a) transactional and (b) altruistic. Transactional-motivated donors give in order to receive a tangible benefit while altruistically-motivated donors give primarily for the benefit of the recipient. Most NCAA Division I athletics departments require an annual donation for the opportunity to buy football and men's basketball season tickets. At many universities, greater giving levels enable the donor to have access to better seat locations, parking passes, or hospitality options. In fact, access to ticket-related benefits was the highest-rated motivation among athletics donors (Mahoney et al., 2003; Wells et al., 2005). Similarly, Smith (1989) reported 92% of alumni and non-alumni athletics donors rank the opportunity to obtain tickets as one of the most important in making donations and are often the only reason for giving by non-alumni.

Conversely, Gladden et al. (2005) found improving the quality of the athletics program was the highest-rated donor motive while helping student-athletes was also highly rated. Tsiotsou (2007) found intangible factors such as a sense of belonging, trust in the leadership and vision of the university, and prestige as the dominant factors in athletics giving motivation compared to the tangible aspects of ticket acquisition and tax write-off benefits. She also found athletics donors did not differ significantly in their capacity to give in terms of household income but did differ in their motivation to give. Overall, Mahoney, Gladden, and Funk (2003) determined that motivation type could not be used to successfully predict gift amount.

While several donor motivations have been identified, the literature is not clear on whether transactional or altruistic motivations have a greater impact on giving behaviors. However, it does appear certain demographic characteristics of donors seem to play a role in the decision to donate. For instance, female college athletics donors demonstrated lower levels of sport involvement than male donors and ultimately give lower amounts but greater percentages of their household income (Tsiotsou, 2006). Additionally, alumni and non-alumni appear to give in equal amounts (Tsiotsou, 2007), but non-alumni are more likely to contribute for transactional motives compared to alumni (Stinson & Howard, 2010).

Developing highly identified fans is an important goal for college athletics administrators and fundraising officers. Highly identified fans demonstrated a greater willingness to financially support their favorite teams through ticket purchases and event attendance, media and merchandise consumption, and donations to the athletics department. The purpose of this study is to determine whether certain motivational factors are more important to individuals who become

highly identified with a university's athletic program early in life, then later become donors. The study also examines whether the age of high identification with a university athletics program impacts later giving behaviors. In order to investigate these issues, the following research questions were specifically developed to guide the study:

RQ 1: When examining the reasons why donors initially began following the program to which they donate, do significant differences between those who become highly identified with the program prior to turning 18 years old and those who do not become highly identified prior to turning 18 exist?

RQ 2: Do college athletics donors who become highly identified with an athletics program at younger ages contribute to the program more (a) annually and (b) over the course of their lifetime?

Methodology

The target population for this study was the donor base of a large public Division I athletics program in a "Power Five" athletics conference. Because the researchers had access to the entire population of 10,667 donors through the institution's donor database, no sampling methods were utilized.

Instrumentation

Due to the unique and exploratory nature of this study, it was necessary to develop an instrument specific to the research questions addressed. The instrument was compiled based on both an extensive review of literature and discussions with college athletics fundraising personnel to include three sections: (a) donors' initial motivations for following the program; (b) measurement of fan identification at various life stages; and (c) demographic information. The first part of the instrument asked respondents to rate reasons for their initial interest in the athletics program (e.g., the schools' athletic success, geographic proximity, influence of peer/friends, etc.) on three-point Likert-type importance scales. Respondents were asked to consider only the importance of these motivations in their initial interest in the athletics program, rather than how they currently felt regarding these motives.

The second section gauged donor levels of fan identification at different life stages. To measure fan identification, the researchers utilized the Team Identification Index (TII) developed by James and Trail (2008) and Trail et al. (2003a). The TII is a three-item measure which has been shown to be both valid and reliable (James & Trail, 2008; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003b). Respondents rated themselves on a five-point Likert agreement scale for each item at five different life stages: (a) 13 years and younger; (b) 14-18 years old (i.e., high school age); (c) 19-22 (i.e., traditional college age); (d) 23-29 years old (i.e., traditional young alumni age); and (e) 30 years and older.

The final section of the survey consisted of demographic information including questions about current and lifetime giving levels as well as more standard questions regarding gender, age, and income level. In an effort to enhance content validity, the survey was reviewed by a panel of experts including a sport administration professor, an athletics administrator, a development officer from an outside athletics department, and a survey expert from the Odom Institute of Social Science Research. Prior to distributing the survey, a pilot study was conducted

with 12 athletics donors at a peer institution. Pilot study respondents confirmed the instrument items were clear and easily understood.

After the survey was approved by the researchers' institutional review board, a link to the instrument was sent electronically to the participating institution's donor base consisting of 10,667 individuals. Accompanying the link was an informed consent letter, informing respondents their participation was voluntary and results would be completely anonymous.

Data Analysis

To answer RQ1, the sample was split in two groups: (a) those who indicated they were highly identified with the athletic program before turning 18 years old and (b) those that were not highly identified prior to turning 18. To be classified as highly identified, respondents needed to score a 4.0 or higher on the 5-point TII. The independent variables (e.g., initial motivations for following the program) were measured on 3-point "importance" scales. Because a 3-point scale was used, scores were treated as categorical (i.e., not important, somewhat important, very important) rather than continuous variables. Chi square analysis was utilized to detect whether significant differences existed within the dichotomous grouping variable of becoming a highly identified fan of the program prior to turning 18.

To answer RQ2, the researchers stratified the sample into five groups based on when participants first indicated high identification with the athletics program. The age brackets included: (a) 13 years and younger; (b) 14-18 years old (i.e., high school age); (c) 19-22 (i.e., traditional college age); (d) 23-29 years old (i.e., traditional young alumni age); and (e) 30 years and older. Again, in order to determine identification level, the mean of the three TII scores were calculated for each respondent within each age bracket. Respondents with a mean score of 4.0 or above on the TII were categorized as highly identified fans at that age bracket. Once a donor indicated a high identification mean score in a particular age bracket, they were removed from all other older age bracket groupings. After donors were arranged in the appropriate "age of high identification" grouping (i.e., the dependent variable), an ANOVA was conducted to determine whether college athletics donors who become highly identified with an athletics program at younger ages contribute to the program more annually, and over the course of their lifetime, utilizing the independent variables of annual giving amount (seven levels) and lifetime giving amount.

Results

A total of 2,312 respondents completed a significant portion of the survey for a response rate of 21.7%. An additional 200 surveys were initially opened via electronic link but were significantly incomplete and were thus not included among the 2,312 respondents. The mean age at which respondents indicated they originally began following the institution's athletics program was 14.6 years old ($SD = 8.94$). Among all respondents, 77.7% were male. The mean age of all participants was 54.7 years old ($SD = 14.8$). The majority of participants in the sample were 30 years old and older (93.3%). Only 6.9% of participants did not graduate from a four-year university, 48.8% earned their undergraduate degree from the institution to which they were donating, and 15.6% earned their graduate degree from that institution. Among respondents, 42% earned more than \$150,000 annually. A complete listing of participant demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

	%	<i>n</i>
Gender		
Male	77.7%	1,739
Female	22.2%	498
Age		
18-22	0.0%	5
23-29	6.5%	151
30+	93.3%	2,156
Annual Income		
\$0-\$25,000	0.0%	11
\$25,001-\$50,000	3.5%	78
\$50,001-\$75,000	6.2%	138
\$75,001-\$100,000	9.1%	203
\$100,001-\$125,000	10.3%	230
\$125,001-\$150,000	9.5%	214
\$150,000+	42.5%	952
Preferred not to disclose	18.6%	416
Graduate from a 4-year University?		
Yes	91.7%	2,039
No	8.2%	184
Level of Education		
Completed undergrad/grad degree at the institution	48.8%	1,129
Did not complete undergrad/grad degree at the institution	51.2%	1,183

Regarding contribution levels of respondents, 39.5% reported giving \$1 to \$500 annually while 39.6% reported giving \$501 to \$2,500 annually. An additional 16.7% of respondents gave at the annual level of \$2,501 to \$10,000, and 2.7% donated \$10,001 to \$25,000 annually. Fewer than 3% of respondents gave over \$25,001 annually. A total of 1,648 respondents offered their estimated lifetime giving amount to the athletics program. The mean lifetime gift was \$47,380 ($SD = \$154,039$).

Initial Identification and Donor Motivations

The first research question examined whether statistically significant differences existed between donors who indicated a high identification with the athletics program prior to turning 18 years old ($n = 1,337$) and those who were not highly identified prior to turning 18 years old ($n =$

931) on measures of how donors initially began following the program. In terms of demographic variables, these two groups were fairly similar, as depicted in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Demographic characteristics of highly identified donors compared by age of established high identification

	High ID Prior to 18		No High ID Prior to 18	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Lifetime Giving	\$48,939	\$164,870	\$45,322	\$137,921
Annual Gift (7-point scale)	1.89	0.90	1.86	0.91
Income (7-point scale)	6.09	1.72	6.28	1.62
Mean Age	53	14.66	57	14.65
Gender (Male)	79.4%		73.6%	
<i>n</i>	1,337		931	

Note: Annual gift means fell between categories (1) \$0 - \$500 and (2) \$501 - \$2,500; Income means fell between categories (6) \$125,001 - \$150,000 and (7) \$150,000+.

Participants responded to ten “initial motivation” factors. Chi Square analysis for these independent variables showed significant differences between donors who indicated developing high identification with the program in their youth (i.e., <18 years old) and those who did not indicate high identification prior to turning 18 in all but two of the factors examined (e.g., national media visibility of the program, and attended a game in person). Donors who were highly identified with the program prior to turning 18 rated motivations for initially following the athletic program as more important, at a statistically significant level, in all eight cases. Results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Rationale for initially following the athletic program

	ID Prior to Age 18		ID After Age 18		X_2	p
	n	%	n	%		
Parents were fans of the program					330.72	.000
Not Important	264	23.6	335	68.5		
Somewhat Important	209	18.7	85	17.4		
Very Important	647	57.8	69	14.1		
Friends/peers were fans of the program					38.76	.000
Not Important	296	24.6	265	36.2		
Somewhat Important	557	46.3	326	44.5		
Very Important	350	29.1	141	19.3		
Grew up living close to the institution					116.95	.000
Not Important	309	28.6	306	53.3		
Somewhat Important	408	37.7	186	32.4		
Very Important	364	33.7	82	14.3		
Academic success of the program					3.38	.185
Not Important	213	19.1	132	16.2		
Somewhat Important	307	27.5	246	30.2		
Very Important	596	53.4	436	53.6		
National media visibility of the program					2.41	.299
Not Important	199	16.6	146	17.3		
Somewhat Important	457	38.1	344	40.8		
Very Important	545	45.4	354	41.9		
Overall athletic success of program					21.87	.000
Not Important	85	6.8	92	10.6		
Somewhat Important	435	34.9	352	40.6		
Very Important	726	58.3	422	48.7		
Team success in men's basketball					40.89	.000
Not Important	50	3.9	81	9.2		
Somewhat Important	294	22.9	255	28.8		
Very Important	941	73.2	549	62.0		
Team success in football					39.39	.000
Not Important	171	13.6	190	22.0		
Somewhat Important	588	46.9	428	49.5		
Very Important	495	39.5	246	28.5		
Attended a game in person					11.41	.003
Not Important	146	12.5	120	14.5		
Somewhat Important	245	21.0	218	26.3		
Very Important	777	66.5	491	59.2		
Met a player or coach					31.75	.000
Not Important	315	31.0	289	43.4		
Somewhat Important	280	27.5	177	26.6		
Very Important	422	41.5	200	30.0		

Giving Level and Fan Identification Age

The results of the second research question, do donors who become highly identified with a collegiate athletics program at a younger age contribute more annually or over the course of their lifetime, were as follows. First, respondents were grouped based on the first age at which they became highly identified with the athletics program. Among all respondents, 47.3% were highly identified with the program prior to turning 14. By 18 years old, that percentage increased to 57.6%. During the traditional college ages, the percentage of highly identified donors grew to 85.2%. By age 29, 89.1% of all donors reported being highly identified with the program. For those 30 and over, 92.3% were highly identified. A total of 4.8% of the sample never met the definition of highly identified at any particular age grouping although many had a TII score of 3.67 by the last age grouping, which represented the highest TII score below 4.0. The remaining 2.9% of responses did not complete the middle section of the survey and were not included in this portion of the analysis. The results of a one-way ANOVA showed no statistically significant differences between mean annual giving among any of the age groupings, $F(5, 1,633) = 0.720, p = .608$. Likewise, the results of a one-way ANOVA also showed no significant differences between mean lifetime gift across age groups of when donors became highly identified with the athletics program, $F(5, 1,642) = 0.424, p = .832$.

Discussion and Implications

The first research question examined the connection points where future donors first began following a university's athletics program. The results suggest significant differences in importance levels for initial motivation to start following the program between those who became highly identified with a college athletics program prior to traditional college enrollment age (i.e., 18 years old) versus those who did not. Team success in men's basketball was the most important factor for initially following the program among respondents in both categories, echoing the research of Wann et al. (1996) which found team success was the most prevalent reason for initial fan identification. It also represents an immutable factor for college athletics administrators, who may be seeking to develop more highly identified fans. Similarly, the fourth most important factor for both groups was "overall athletic success." College sport marketers have little control over these items.

Other factors can be influenced by college athletics marketers, though, and were shown to be quite important to initial identification in this study, significantly more so for donors who became fans early in life. Factors such as attending a game in person, having parents who were fans, and meeting a player or coach were all rated highly, particularly among those who had become highly identified before turning 18. In fact, the factor demonstrating the biggest difference between the two groups was parental influence. Those who became fans of the athletics program prior to turning 18 rated parental influence far higher, echoing the findings of Greenwood et al. (2006) and Kolbe and James (2000). For practitioners, this finding suggests athletics departments would be wise to cultivate more family-oriented marketing and promotion with their athletics programs in order to develop the next generation of donors. In a recent *SportsBusiness Journal* article, fewer than 15% of the 65 "Power 5" schools advertised family ticket promotions for the upcoming football season (Smith, 2015), demonstrating a lack of

family-oriented marketing. While nearly every NCAA Division I university has made efforts to attract students to games, relatively few have adopted the outbound ticket selling practices which have been effective at generating attendance for professional sport teams, who cannot rely the same way on college students to fill seats (Bouchet, Ballouli, & Bennett, 2011; Popp, 2014; Wanless & Judge, 2014).

Perhaps the most important finding in this study was the results of the second research question; a lack of significant differences between giving patterns of those who become highly identified with an athletics program at various ages. Donors who became attached at an early age gave roughly the same amounts annually and over their lifetime as those who did not highly identify with the athletics program until later in life. Similarly, no significant differences between the ages at which donors identified with the athletics program based upon current giving levels were found. These key findings suggest it is equally important for collegiate athletics marketers and fundraisers to cultivate relationships and promote their programs among children and teenagers. These findings support the rich literature documenting the impact of childhood and adolescent identity and social identity development on future behavior and perceptions (e.g., Aboud, 2005; Barber et al., 2001; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Darling & Hicks, 1982; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Swanson et al., 2009; Witt, 1997).

Among professional sport franchises, youth marketing is a strong priority backed by considerable research and extensive financing (Hruby, 2015; Perlberg, 2014). Professional teams and leagues are now co-branding with children's museums, toy manufacturers, and youth-centric organizations such as Disney (Irwin, Sutton, & McCarthy, 2008; Lefton, 2010; Thomas, 2015), as well as producing team-related cartoons and other media, including educational materials (Kaplan, 2010; Karp, 2010; King, 2009; Lombardo, 2011). While most NCAA Division I athletics departments offer kid's clubs, few college athletics marketers target kids as successfully, aggressively, and scientifically as professional team marketers. Most collegiate athletics marketers view youth marketing as a short-term revenue driver (e.g., when kids attend games, they typically go with ticket-buying parents), rather than a tool for developing lifelong consumers (Pink, 2013). Most collegiate-licensed products designed for children such as toys, video games, and even baby mobiles are developed and promoted exclusively by the firms manufacturing them and their retailers with little input from the college athletics departments which sign off on the licensing agreements (Sosnowski, 2005).

College athletics administrators are also greatly concerned with the well-publicized decline in student attendance at campus sporting events (Cohen, 2014; Guerra, 2015; New, 2014; Soffian, 2015). One of the primary reasons for this concern is a fear that if current college students do not attend university sporting events, those students will not build a strong identification with the athletics department's teams. Looking into the future, many athletics administrators believe a present decline in identification will ultimately result in fewer donations to the athletics department by those same individuals as alumni. Because of this concern, athletics marketers and fundraisers are investing heavily in measures to increase student attendance, such as developing loyalty reward programs, reducing the price of student tickets, installing Wi-Fi access in arenas, and adding many other amenities to improve the game day atmosphere for students. Many university athletics programs often allocate prime seating at basketball and football games for college students. There are a variety of reasons for doing so such as enhancing the game day atmosphere and justifying the appropriation of student fees towards the athletics budget. However, it is worth noting some of those prime seats might provide an equal, if not greater, long-term return on investment if sold to young families because

the children from those families are more likely to become the next generation of athletics donors than those sitting in the student section. In many cases, selling some of those seats at full price to the public rather than at a discount to students may also generate more short-term revenue for the athletics department.

The results of the current study suggest these college athletics administrators may be somewhat misguided in their efforts to focus so much of their marketing resources on current college students. In the current study, only about 65% of college athletics donors from a major NCAA Division I university were actually alumni of that institution. In addition, the mean age at which respondents began following an athletics program at the university was 14.6 years old. These two statistics alone suggest fundraisers and marketers would be wise to re-examine their various marketing and engagement efforts targeting current students, alumni, and youth. While cultivating fan identification among current undergraduate students may lead to future giving by those alumni (an assumption that has still not been empirically tested), the thousands of donors, or potential donors, who did not attend the institution are paid much less attention. Administrators need to ask themselves what efforts are being exerted to target those potential donors who will likely form their identification with a school's athletics program before they ever enroll at a university, if indeed they even do.

Limitations and Future Studies

The population for this study was the athletics donor base of a single university in a "Power 5" conference. The school also has an illustrious history in the sport of men's basketball. These two facts may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers should replicate this study with multiple universities to analyze the differences in fan identification and athletics donor behavior. Another limitation was the reliance on respondents to recall their experiences much earlier in life. The mean age of survey respondents was 55 years old yet respondents were asked to remember when they first began following an athletics program and what they remember as their primary motivations for doing so. A related limitation is the ability to generalize between generations. There are strong generational differences documented in the literature, and the motivation and behavior of the generations of donors in this sample may differ from the motivations and behaviors of upcoming generations. Future studies could approach this issue from a longitudinal perspective, gathering survey responses from potential future donors when they are young and tracking donor behavior throughout their lifetime. In addition, more work is needed in the sport marketing literature to examine the influence of life stage on consumer behaviors such as game attendance, ticket purchases, and donor motives.

The results of this study also highlight the importance of understanding the lifecycle of fans and the influence of age team identification is established. These findings suggest sport consumption behavior may be impacted by the way in which consumers develop identification with a team and at the age at which that connection occurs. Prior research suggests similar notions (Lombardo, 2011; Nakazawa et al., 1999; Stephens-Davidowitz, 2014) but much more work is needed in this area.

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