



More on Teenage Interest in Pro Sports by Reginald W. Bibby

Pro Sports Still Failing to Attract Young Females

For most women, spectator sports is about relationships, not results – sociologist

Having delivered the bad news that a decreasing number of Canadians are following the National Hockey League, University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby has released some new findings that may further disappoint the NHL and a few other leagues. The findings also may upset a good number of sports-minded women.

Bibby reports that his examination of Canadian trends over the past two decades reveals that a shrinking minority of females, younger and older, are National Hockey League fans. What's more, only tiny minorities of women of all ages are currently following such leagues as the NBA, NFL, CFL, and Major League Baseball.

The Baby Boomer emphasis on erasing many cultural differences between women and men has not been felt in the realms of these pro sports. Bibby's most recent research, highlighted in his new book, *The Emerging Millennials*, shows that only 25% of teenage females are following the NHL, compared to almost 50% of males. In the early 1990s, the figure for teenage females was a slightly higher, 28%. Among adult Canadian women, about 20% claim to be NHL fans.

The levels of interest that teen females have in other major sports are even lower.

- Only 11% say that they are closely following the **NBA**, 8% the **NFL**, 5% the **CFL**, and 4% **Major League Baseball**. In every instance, the levels are well below those of their male counterparts.
- Significantly, in each case the levels are actually lower than they were in the early 90s.
- Interest in other sports such as soccer (15%) and figure skating (7%) is also low.
- **In Toronto**, where all five leagues are present, interest levels among teen females are lower than the national average in the case of the NHL (12%), a bit higher for the NBA (19%), and at about the same level in the case of the NFL (7%), Major League Baseball (6%), and the CFL (4%).

“Don't get me wrong,” Bibby says. “Despite their lack of interest in these specific pro sports leagues, large numbers of young females enjoy sports more generally.”

- Some 60% say they do something to stay in shape, at least several times a week.
- Around 40% indicate they are a member of a team or a sports club.
- About the same proportion say they attend some kind of sports event at least once a month.

“The difference,” Bibby emphasizes, “is that while young women **play sports** and **enjoy sports**, just 9% bother to **follow sports** on a daily basis, well below the 37% figure for young males.” Those levels for females and males have changed little over the past two decades.

Why, then, the limited female interest in the dominant pro sports? Some observers emphasize the fact that few women play football, hockey, and baseball, while others see football and hockey as violent sports that are of limited interest to most women.

- But perhaps the heart of the answer lies with what young women value. Bibby's research shows that females place supreme importance on relationships, including friendship and being loved – even more so than males. They also place more importance on cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, and sites like Facebook that help to make relationships possible.
- As a result, the spectator sports they enjoy most are the sports they can share with friends and family, where the focus is a social event rather than the sport and game. Put another way, for most females, spectator sports are about relationships, not results. That's why they can be expected to be at a Grey Cup party or a Super Bowl bash, at a kids hockey or soccer game, or watching a Canadian athlete or team go for Olympic gold.
- That's also why most women don't **follow sports** – one doesn't follow events. And lest anyone needs to be reminded, it's also why very few women could care less about detailed sport stats.

To the extent that spectator sports are about relationships and not results, we would expect that large numbers of women who attend NHL and CFL games, along with Blue Jay and Raptor games, will **not be fans** but rather **be accompanying a fan** who usually is a male. The survey findings point to a tangible indicator: female fans spending a fair amount of the game socializing – often with the help of their cell phones. Most of the others will be watching the game with their kids. “This is not sexism,” Bibby says; “this is social science! Those are the empirical facts.” He adds, “Of course there are ‘Give ‘em hell’ female fans present. But they are in the minority.”

The research message? Canadian professional sports teams have not had much success in tapping the female segments of their potential markets. If teams want to attract more women, they are going to have to be more closely in touch with the importance women place on the social and relational dimension of a game experience – on the event rather than the outcome – providing things for friends, partners, and children.

Otherwise, Canadian pro sports will continue to be something largely for men only, or for men and their frequently passive female companions.

As a personal footnote to his research, Bibby points out that he shares Eskimo season tickets with a colleague, even though Lethbridge is about a six-hour drive from Edmonton. His wife combines games with shopping. “And to the credit of the Eskimos,” Bibby notes, “my seven-year old daughter’s favourite Eskimo isn’t Ricky Ray – it’s Nanook, the Eskimo mascot. They add two more women to the stadium count.”

That pretty much sums up his argument.

Reginald Bibby has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through eleven best-selling books. His most recent book is *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation is Responding to Change and Choice* (for details see "reginaldbibby.com"). The current Project Teen Canada survey was concluded in late 2008, and consists of a highly representative sample of more than 5,500 teenagers. Results are accurate within about plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times in 20.

Media Contacts

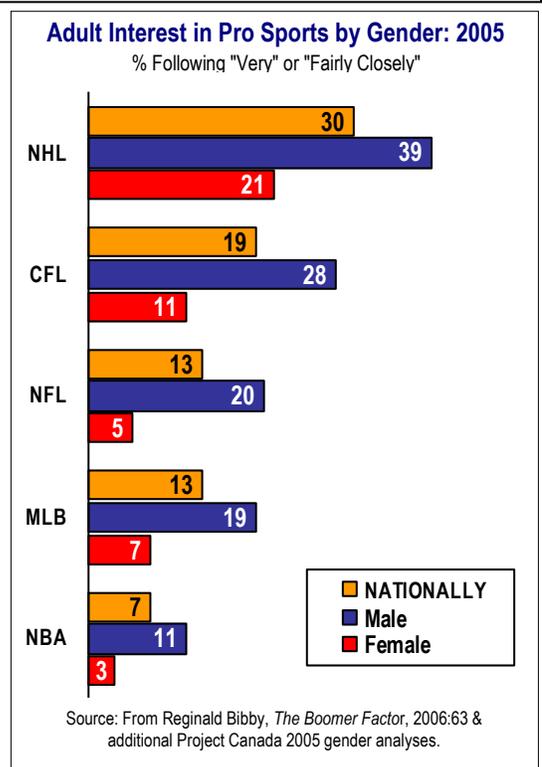
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Teenage Interest in Major Sports Leagues by Gender: 1992-2008
 % Indicating Following "Very" or "Fairly Closely"

	NAT	Males	Females
NHL			
2008	35	46	25
1992	45	63	28
NBA			
2008	21	33	11
1992	27	37	18
NFL			
2008	19	32	8
1992	26	44	10
CFL			
2008	14	23	5
1992	22	37	9
MLB			
2008	10	17	4
1992	33	48	19

Source: From Reginald Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, p. 29 & additional PTC08 gender analyses.



Teenage Interest & Participation in Sports by Gender: 1992, 2000 & 2008

	NAT	Males	Females
Enjoyment from Sports <i>A Great Deal or Quite a Bit</i>			
2008	70%	81	60
2000	63	71	56
Do something to stay in shape <i>Several times a week-plus</i>			
2008	67	74	60
1992	69	81	57
Member of sports team or club			
2008	47	56	40
1992	47	56	38
Attend a sports event: Monthly+			
2008	48	57	40
2000	41	49	34
Follow Sports: Daily			
2008	22	37	9
2000	21	37	7
Follow soccer: 2008 <i>Very/Fairly Closely</i>			
	18	21	15
Follow figure skating: 2008 <i>Very/Fairly Closely</i>			
	5	2	7

Source: From Reginald Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, p. 28 & additional PTC analyses.

Some Top Sources of Enjoyment

% Receiving "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"

	ALL	Males	Females
Friends	95%	95	96
Music	92	90	94
The Internet	83	83	82
Your iPod/MP3	80	77	83
Sports	70	81	60
Your cell phone	65	57	72
Television	64	67	61
Shopping	61	41	78
Video/computer games	46	67	27

Source: From Reginald Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, p. 27.

Use of Select Means of Communication

% Using or Accessing Daily

	ALL	Males	Females
Cell phone	54%	48	60
Text messaging	44	37	51
Facebook	43	37	49
E-mail	42	38	46

Source: From Reginald Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, p. 32 & additional PTC08 gender analyses.

Sometimes a book comes along that is unmatched because of the historic and unique information it unveils. This is such a book.

From sociologist and bestselling author, Reginald Bibby, one of the country's foremost trend trackers and social trends analysts, a landmark look at today's youth - and today's Canada.

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- Written in Bibby's signature style - the solid, stimulating researcher and lively, engaging author.

Reginald W. Bibby, Ph.D., O.C., holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. He is the author of eleven bestselling books, including *The Emerging Generation*, *Teen Trends*, and *Canada's Teens*, along with *Fragmented Gods*, *Unknown Gods*, *Rootless Gods*, *Rootless Churches* - and the book that sketches the social context for today's teenagers *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*. Over the years he also has become familiar to Canadians through his many media appearances and presentations from coast to coast.

Ron Rolheiser, bestselling author and columnist, educator, and priest.

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