



## What If You Don't Cheer for the Same Team as Your Family?

Rita, like the rest of her family, has always been a die-hard football fan. She hid her love for a different team for years, afraid they would be upset. A professor of sports management breaks down BIRGing and CORFing in avid sports fans and what they have to do with family relationship dynamics.

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Juleyka Lantigua-Williams:

Hi, everybody. Thanks for coming back. I'm Juleyka Lantigua-Williams. Today, I'm speaking with Rita. She comes from a family of die-hard football fans who have always bonded and sometimes split over sports traditions, games, and celebrations. Rita is also a die-hard football fan, but she cheers for a different team than the rest of her family. Let's get into it.

Rita Bautista: Hi, my name is Rita Bautista, and I'm in Houston, Texas, and in my house we call mom and dad mamá and papí. So, I think my family's really crazy about sports. On Sundays when we were kids, we used to get together, and it was kind of like the ability for us to really be loud and let our pride kind of show through. As Latinos, we're naturally really animated, and our passion, and just our energy comes through in sports, and so Sundays was our space to kind of just be able to let all that energy out, and normally it was because we were yelling at a television screen.

Whether it was like a boxing match, or a soccer game, and then American football became just this life sport for our entire family to kind of just convene and talk a lot of trash to each other. Personally, I'm a Ravens fan, because my family's spread out between New Orleans and Baltimore, but my family, in New Orleans, which my immediate family now lives in New Orleans, they're all Saints fans. And so, I became the black sheep of the family living in New Orleans. I used to have to be a Ravens closet fan until I finally broke my shell and was like, "No more. I'm enough. My team's enough. We went to two Super Bowls and won." And one year, the Ravens just so happened to come down for the Super Bowl. They play in New Orleans and I lived like less than four blocks away, and I finally just let my freak flag show, and I'm like, "No, I am a Ravens fan. I'm going to the Super Bowl."

Anytime in the past, I used to have to hide or go watch the game in another room, or just show up later, because they were gonna bash me and not watch the games. But now they have no choice but to watch the games with me, because I was so hard core about it that they finally were like, "You know what? If we don't

give her what she wants, she's gonna go crazy anyways." You know, I think anytime when you go against the grain of your family and the traditional aspect of things, or the way things are, the status quo, your family's definitely gonna feel rejected. They're gonna feel like, "Wait, what are you saying? Our thoughts are not enough?" And it's like it's never that deep, but you can definitely see why it becomes so like, "Oh my God, ¡esta va contra la familia!" Like I think that's the thing about being able to own who you are, and really being able to understand your family is always, regardless of whatever happens, they're always gonna accept you again. Whether they get mad at you or whatever, it could be years down the road, but they eventually accept you because it's love. It's all love. We just have different flags. That's all. Mine's better. It's fine.

As odd as it may sound, the reason why I became such a big Ravens fan was because it made me feel like I was at home at a foreign place that I didn't really care for too much and I wasn't really comfortable with. So, like me being able to find that space of home, they never understood that, because I never told them the whole story behind why I became such a hardcore Ravens fan. But I had a very hard transition moving. When you're a teenager, you have all those crazy emotions going on, you try to build your confidence off of things that remind you of that child sometimes, right?

So, like I get to be a Ravens fan, I get to be a child, but I also get a chance to say no all the time now. And it really gives me more power that bleeds into decisions that I make as an adult now when they're not traditional decisions, right? So, like I'm about to turn 36. I'm not married. I don't have kids. Not because I don't want them, but at the same time, I don't allow the pressure of family anymore to be that guiding light to force me to try to get into something quicker than I need to, just because I'm trying to "become a traditional Latina," or like the good girl that mom wants me to be kind of thing.

Being confident in myself and being able to utilize that passion that I have inside of me has led me to be a better adult and has led me to make some pretty powerful decisions that continue to grow my life at this point, but I owe that back to my family, too. Because the truth of the matter is like because we were always comfortable with coming around each other, and talking trash, and all this stuff, it's almost like it becomes traditional still for me anyways. So, like Sundays will always be powerful for me, because I will always remember as a child all of us getting together and watching sports, and it made me feel like I was not an outsider, an outcast. I could yell at the television. I could be as loud as I wanted to be, even if it was just for three hours out of the week and let my freak flag fly. And even if I wasn't around my family at that time, I still get a chance to experience that traditional aspect in my own personal way.

Lantigua-Williams:

I thought Rita's story was fascinating because of the way sports illuminate aspects of human behavior, our feelings, and our interpersonal relationships. Plus, I can

totally relate. I was basically born a New York Yankees fan. I am not particularly a sports fan, though, but I wanted to understand what we could learn from sports and how to navigate rivalries and those kinds of things, because in the end, you're still related to your family no matter who you're cheering for. So, to give us some insight, I did what I always do. I called in an expert.

Michelle Harrolle:

I'm Michelle Agacio Harrolle and I am the Director of the Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program at the University of South Florida in the Tampa Bay Area, and I've been the Director for the past seven years, but an avid fan, collegiate athlete in my younger years, and I'm a professor, and I do research looking at Latinos and Latinas and their sport fandom.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, you heard Rita's story. What do you hear when you listen to that?

Harrolle: I hear culture. I hear history. I hear rivalry. I hear sports. I hear family. I hear... I just heard everything that makes up these tribes that we all live in, and sports is a perfect example of that. As with any tribes, you have your rituals. You have your customs. You have your foods. Families do all those things and then culture does the same process, and then sports fans do the exact same.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, is a sports fandom like a pseudo-family?

Harrolle: Oh, man. So, it does really bring people back to community. I think sports is just a community phenomena, and so you have your die-hard fans, those that will always be a fan regardless of what the team does, and so think about your family members. You love them regardless of what they do. I think probably the best example of family is that people talk about sports in a we. Like, "My team did really well. We did really well. We won this weekend. We lost this weekend." And when you hear people use those pronouns, that's a true sense of community and family, and that's where our die-hard fans really step up.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, but in Rita's case, that we turned a little bit against her. Because first of all, it felt like she had to be closeted for a long time when she switched teams, and then she literally kept a secret from her family. I mean, please explain this.

Harrolle: Rivalries are huge and really... I was thinking about this talk and conversation. It really comes back to tribes and how we like to be a part of that we, right? So, when you have we and then us, us or those other people, and they're just die-hard rivalries, and because of that, you get a sense of we and us. And if you were on one side and you're the minority, whatever that looks like, you're not going to be

apt to talk about your shared experience, because you don't want the other side to think poorly of you, or to give you a hard time, or to ridicule you.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, so that's all well and good. What does the data say? What have you found in your research about the sort of social and psychological impact on a person and on groups that die-hard fandom can have?

Harrolle: It's as with everything, both positive and negative. So, we have two phenomenons. We have BIRGing, basking in reflected glory. And what happens is is when my team does well, I do well. I mean, Latinos really like to do this BIRGing aspect of celebrations when the team does well, then therefore from a psychology standpoint, you have a positive emotional response, right? Then there's the opposite. It's called CORFing. Cutting off reflected failure. And what that means is when my team does poorly, I'm like, "They did bad. They did poorly." And I kind of cut off away from them, and therefore I'm able to minimize that emotional response that I have-

Lantigua-Williams:

Kind of like when your parents say to one another, "Did you see what your kid did?"

Harrolle: Exactly. Exactly! Right? They're cutting... Not me. You did that. And so, that's a good example for sports.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, the other thing that happens, and I've experienced this in my own family, in immigrant and in other ethnic minority groups, is that fandoms are generational, and they're essentially handed down, and there is a very real pressure that if you're grandfather was a Yankee fan, and your dad was a Yankee fan, then you're gonna be a Yankee fan. Can you just make sense of that for me?

Harrolle: I'll do my best. I'll do my best. Well, the reality is think about it from a cultural perspective, right? Like I have taught you. I have taught you, niña, that this is who you're supposed to love. Right?

Lantigua-Williams:

The path in life. Right.

Harrolle: This is the path. These are the people you're supposed to love. These are the teams you're supposed to love. And then when people don't have that same passion, it's almost an affront to the culture. Right? And because of that affront to the culture that you are basically saying that, "I'm in essence better than what you've taught me." And that's not good. So, how do you deal with it? You are open-minded and respectful, and trying to find common ground. Or what you can do, like my family would do, is they would recognize there was a rivalry, and then

on the one day that they played, it was the Gators and the Seminoles, you kind of felt like you're proud, you owned it, and then that was the one day that you could talk about it. The one day you could deal with it. And then after that, it was over.

Lantigua-Williams:

If there are people who are definitely die-hard, legit, lifelong fans, how can they nurture instead of force feed sports affiliations into their kids?

Harrolle: The reality is is those that are super die-hard, it's very difficult. Right?

Lantigua-Williams:

Oh, wow.

Harrolle: It's very difficult. It has a very religious aspect to it and faith-based aspect to it and coming back to like sense of identity.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, so now you've got me thinking about identity formation. Say more, please.

Harrolle: Yes. So, an identity occurs based on your lived experiences, right? Where you came from, what your parents believed, what you experience in life, what your peers... Peers are a huge influence in identity, as well. In particular, especially as we all know with adolescents, college age, so it really... It's that lived experience. So, the more that a family can hone in on that identity at a young age, like you will see young children wearing jerseys, infants wearing onesies that say Go Bulls, Go Bolts. You will see the identity grow stronger and stronger, and that's why actually they have found that if you take your child, under the age of two, to sporting events, they are more likely, even though they don't really even understand what's going on, they are more likely to identify with that sport team later on in life.

Lantigua-Williams:

Wow.

Harrolle: Yes. So, you will see babies, and infants, and little kids, but it's that shared experience quite young in life, and then it becomes a historical moment that you can come back and think about later on in life. And that's... You'll find a lot of parents will share it with their children because they experienced it with their parents.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, one of the things that Rita was really great at explaining was that for her, these sort of really deep affiliations to her sports teams also came as a result of serious moments of transition in her life.

Harrolle: Yes.

Lantigua-Williams:

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So, can you talk a little bit about that, and why that is, why she was able to basically find solace in these sports affiliations?

Harrolle: Yeah. Absolutely. So, that really comes back to identity, right? So, when you're going into a new community, whether that be you're moving, you got a new job, you're in a new relationship, if you can attach to that identity, you will feel better about yourself and you... It'll give you a sense of community that you can connect with, and that in essence takes you from an outsider to an insider. That sense of belonging is huge. And then if you find other people around you with that same passion and identity, whether for a team, or sports, you get a stronger sense of community.

And they have found from a psychological perspective that you will feel better about yourself.

Lantigua-Williams:

In my experience, a lot of my immigrant friends and family members have also used sports and sports fandom to solidify their sense of belonging to their new country. Do you have research on that? Is there research on that? What are some of the things that we've learned about that connection?

Harrolle: So, there's not a lot of research specifically on moving to a country and using sport specifically for identity's sake. We have a lot of anecdotal information on that. So, we have seen that when people cheer, like for the Olympics, right? You will see this large sense of national identity for the country that you've moved to from an immigrant's perspective during the Olympics. If you're from Mexico, you may actually... Yeah, you'll cheer for obviously your Mexican Olympians, but if you've moved to the United States, you will also cheer for the American athletes, as well. And that's where you see an increase in nationality and identity with the nation that you've immigrated to, regardless of where that is.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay. Last question. So, it sounds like Rita and her family sort of came to terms with her sports choices. But for folks who might need some help negotiating these murky fandom waters, what are some of the sort of like more practical approaches that they can have, so that opposing, and even rival sports affiliations don't get in the way of their filial relationships?

Harrolle: I think it relates to almost anything in our lives where we have them and us. Whether that be politics, religion, racial tension, whatever it is, I think it's coming back to that common ground. Right? Actually, sports provides a great example of where you can have a disagreement and I love my team and you love your team, but know that we're still family, and because we have that common ground we're able to understand and appreciate the other person's perspective a little bit better. Sports can be great mechanisms for understanding rivalries, the them versus us, and appreciate at the end of the day, what I love about sports is you

have to have both sides, right? You have to have a them and an us, or you don't have sports.

And I think if we are able to appreciate that and we understand that we need the collective whole, sports is a good example of we have to have cooperation and we have to have a them and an us in order to be successful.

Lantigua-Williams:

Michelle, thank you so, so much. This was really fun.

Harrolle: Oh, it was absolutely my pleasure.

Lantigua-Williams:

All right. Let's recap what we learned from Michelle. Be open minded. The same way that you found a sense of belonging with your team and it's fans, your loved ones found the same sense of belonging with your rival team. It happens. Be respectful. Everyone is entitled to an opinion, but you don't have to take that opinion personally. Keep it classy. In sports, sometimes it has nothing to do with you. And remember, love your people. If being die-hard fans for a particular team is taking a toll on your relationships, remember that these were your people before they were a fan of the sports. Even if you were born into a legacy fandom like I was and it appears that you don't have a choice, you still love them, they still love you, and when the season is over, that is what's going to keep you guys going.

Lantigua-Williams:

Thank you so much for listening and for sharing us. How to Talk to [Mamá and Papá] About Anything is an original production of Lantigua Williams & Co. Virginia Lora produced this episode. Kat Hernandez mixed it. Micaela Rodríguez is our founding producer and social media editor. Cedric Wilson is our lead producer. I'm the host and creator, Juleyka Lantigua-Williams. On Twitter and Instagram, we're @TalktoMamiPapi. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, Spotify, or anywhere you listen to your favorite podcasts. Bye, everybody. Same place next week.

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