

# **The Impact of Team Identification on the Hostile and Instrumental Verbal Aggression of Sport Spectators**

Daniel L. Wann  
Jeffrey D. Carlson  
Michael P. Schrader  
*Murray State University*

The current investigation examined the hostile and instrumental verbal aggression of sport spectators. It was hypothesized that highly identified fans would report higher levels of hostile and instrumental aggression than fans low in identification and that aggression directed toward the officials would tend to be hostile in nature. Prior to attending a men's college basketball game, participants ( $N = 196$ ) were asked to complete a measure of their team identification. After the contest, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they had acted aggressively toward the officials and opposition for hostile and instrumental reasons. The results revealed strong support for both hypotheses.

The aggressive actions of sport spectators can be classified as either hostile or instrumental (Bredemeier, 1994; Silva, 1980; Wann, 1997). Hostile spectator aggression involves violent actions that are motivated by anger with the goal of harming another person. For example, fans may yell obscenities or throw objects at players and officials because they are angry at them and want to physically or psychologically harm them. Instrumental spectator aggression refers to actions intended to harm another person with the goal of achieving a result other than the victim's suffering. For example, fans may yell at officials and opposing players to increase their team's chances of success.

Wann, Schrader, and Carlson (in press) recently conducted the first empirical examination of the hostile and instrumental aggression of sport fans. These researchers examined the verbally aggressive responses of spectators attending intercollegiate men's hockey and men's basketball games. The spectators were asked to state the extent to which they had acted verbally aggressive toward the officials and opposition for hostile and instrumental reasons. The participants reported higher

---

*Author's Info:* Daniel L. Wann, Department of Psychology, Box 9, Murray State University, Murray, KY 42071; e-mail danwann@msumusik.mursuky.edu.

*Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 1999, Vol. 14, No. 2, 279–286.

©1999 Select Press, Corte Madera, CA, 415/435-4461.

levels of hostile aggression than instrumental aggression. Aggression directed toward the officials was more likely to be hostile than instrumental, while aggression directed toward the opposition was equally likely to be hostile or instrumental.

The current investigation extended Wann et al. (in press) by examining the relationship between team identification and tendencies to display hostile and instrumental aggression. Team identification is defined as the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team (Wann, 1997). Recent investigations have indicated that highly identified fans are particularly likely to act aggressively (Branscombe & Wann, 1992a, 1994), and theorists have begun to include this variable in their models of fan violence (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992b; Simons & Taylor, 1992; Wann, 1993). However, researchers have yet to examine the relationships between identification and different forms of aggression. Such an examination was the focus of the current investigation. It was hypothesized that highly identified fans would report higher levels of both hostile and instrumental aggression than low identification fans.

Highly identified fans should be particularly likely to display hostile aggression for two reasons. First, because the role of team follower is a central component of the social identity of highly identified fans (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 1999), the team's performances are highly relevant to the fans' sense of self-worth. Consequently, the fans can become hostile when their team performs poorly because such performances have negative implications for their self-image. Second, research has revealed that highly identified fans often become aroused and anxious when watching their team in competition (Branscombe & Wann, 1992a; Wann, Schrader, & Adamson, 1998). Because arousal and anxiety are related to hostile aggression (Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 1990), highly identified fans should be particularly likely to act in a hostile fashion.

For fans with a low level of identification, the role of team follower is only a peripheral component of their self-concept (Crocker & Major, 1989; Harter, 1986). As a result, the team's performances have little consequence for their self-image and, therefore, they should be less likely to react in a hostile manner. This line of reasoning is substantiated by research indicating that highly identified spectators report particularly high levels of negative affect and self-esteem after watching their team lose (Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, & Allison, 1994).

There are also two reasons why highly identified fans should display high levels of instrumental aggression. First, because the role of team follower is central to their identity, highly identified fans stand to receive

the greatest benefits from their team's successes. For example, research has revealed that highly identified fans report particularly high levels of positive affect and self-esteem after watching their team win (Cialdini et al., 1976; Hirt et al., 1992; Wann et al., 1994). Because of their desire for their team to win, these persons should be particularly likely to display behaviors they feel will assist the team, including instrumentally aggressive behaviors. Second, researchers have found that highly identified persons are more likely than low identification persons to attempt to influence the outcome of sporting events (Wann et al., 1994) and that these attempts may include instrumental aggression (Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, in press).

In addition to the aforementioned hypotheses, it was also hypothesized that there would be an interaction involving aggression type (i.e., hostile and instrumental) and aggression target (i.e., officials and opposing players). Consistent with the Wann et al. (in press) research, it was predicted that aggression directed toward the officials would be more hostile than instrumental, while aggression directed toward the opposition was not expected to differ by type.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 196 (121 male; 75 female) college students ( $M$  age = 21.3 years,  $SD$  = 4.40). Participants received extra course credit in exchange for participation.

### Procedure

Participants were asked to meet in a university auditorium one hour prior to an intercollegiate men's basketball game. Upon entering the auditorium, participants were asked to sign a consent statement and were given instructions for the study. They were told that they would be completing a questionnaire and that they would then be escorted to the basketball arena to watch the game. They were told that they could sit any place in the arena they desired. They were also told that there would be a post-game meeting where they would complete a questionnaire assessing their reactions to the contest. A map of the basketball arena was drawn on the chalkboard and used to describe the location of the post-game meeting. Participants were then handed a pencil and the pre-game questionnaire.

The first section of this questionnaire contained demographic items assessing age and gender. The second section contained the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS, Wann & Branscombe, 1993). This reliable and valid 7-item scale has been used in a number of studies to

assess sport fan identification (see Wann, 1997). Participants were asked to target their university's men's basketball team when completing the scale. Once the questionnaires were completed (approximately 10 minutes), the participants were given an index card containing a random three-digit number. They were told that this number would be used to match their pre- and post-game questionnaires. They were asked to write their number at the top of their pre-game questionnaire and to keep the identification card so they could write their number at the top of the post-game questionnaire as well. When all participants had complied with this request, the pre-game questionnaires and pencils were collected and the participants were escorted to the arena.

The game involved the university's men's basketball team and a conference rival (the campuses are less than 75 miles apart). The contest was the last regular season game for each team. The final score of the contest was 80 to 65 in favor of the visiting team. The host arena had a seating capacity of 5,550 spectators. The attendance for the game was 4,468 (81% of capacity).

When the participants arrived at the post-game meeting they were given a pencil and a post-game questionnaire. This questionnaire contained the eight-item Hostile and Instrumental Aggression of Spectators Questionnaire (HIASQ) used in Wann et al. (in press). Wann et al. found the scale to be reliable, valid, and to contain two items assessing each of the four combinations of aggression target (i.e., officials and opposition) and aggression type (i.e., instrumental and hostile). Participants were asked to rate the extent they had yelled at an official/opposing player or coach because they thought it would help their team win/because they thought it would improve their team's performance (i.e., the instrumental items). In addition, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they had yelled at an official/opposing player or coach because they were mad at him or her and wanted to express their anger/because they were mad at him/her and wanted to hurt him or her in some way (i.e., the hostile items). The HIASQ items were scored on a 1 (not at all) to 8 (a great deal) scale.

After the participants had completed their questionnaires (approximately 10 minutes), the questionnaires and pencils were collected and the participants were given a debriefing statement explaining the nature of the study. The participants were then excused from the study.

## RESULTS

The internal consistency of the four HIASQ subscales was examined using Cronbach's reliability alphas. This set of analyses revealed that the subscales (two items each) were reliable: instrumental aggres-

TABLE 1 Mean Levels of Hostile and Instrumental Aggression by Aggression Target and Level of Identification

<i>Aggression target</i>	<i>Aggression Type</i>	
	<i>Hostile</i>	<i>Instrumental</i>
<b>High Identification</b>		
Officials	3.72 (2.22)	3.41 (2.09)
Opposition	2.95 (2.15)	3.15 (2.13)
<b>Low Identification</b>		
Officials	1.94 (1.68)	1.67 (1.24)
Opposition	1.45 (1.14)	1.66 (1.46)

*Note:* Standard deviations appear in parentheses below each mean.

sion/officials  $\alpha = .91$ , instrumental aggression/opposition = .93, hostile aggression/officials = .73, and hostile aggression/opposition = .80. Consistent with past research on intercollegiate basketball fans (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann & Dolan, 1994a, 1994b), males ( $M = 29.96$ ,  $SD = 11.74$ ) and females ( $M = 28.28$ ,  $SD = 12.74$ ) did not significantly differ in their level of team identification. In addition, there were no significant effects involving gender for either hostile or instrumental aggression. Thus, all analyses were conducted across gender.

The hypotheses were examined through a MANOVA with level of identification (high or low) as the grouping variable and HIASQ scores (aggression target: opposition and officials and aggression type: hostile and instrumental) as the dependent variables. The identification groups were constructed using a median split on the SSIS scores (low identification  $n = 95$ ,  $M$  SSIS = 2.71,  $SD = 0.96$ ; high identification  $n = 101$ ,  $M$  SSIS = 5.60,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Cell means for this analysis appear in Table 1.

The MANOVA revealed a significant identification level main effect,  $F(1, 194) = 56.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . As expected, highly identified participants reported higher levels of hostile ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ) and instrumental aggression ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ) than low identification participants (hostile  $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ; instrumental  $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ). The Identification Level by Aggression Type interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 188) = 0.13$ ,  $p = .72$ .

The aggression target main effect was also significant,  $F(1, 194) = 27.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , as participants directed a higher level of aggression toward the officials ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ) than the opposition ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ). The aggression type main effect was not significant,  $F(1, 194) = 0.018$ ,  $p = .67$ . More importantly, the Aggression Target by Aggression Type interaction was significant,  $F(1, 194) = 17.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, aggression directed toward the officials was more likely to be hostile ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ) than instrumental ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ), while aggression directed toward the opposition was equally likely to be hostile ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ) and instrumental ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ). Post hoc analyses (Newman-Keuls) indicated that the amount of hostile and instrumental aggression directed toward the officials was significantly different from all other conditions. The MANOVA failed to reveal any other significant interactions.

## DISCUSSION

The prediction that highly identified spectators would report greater levels of both hostile and instrumental aggression was confirmed, thus replicating and extending past research on fan violence (Branscombe & Wann, 1992a, 1994). The lack of a significant Identification Level by Aggression Type interaction indicated that the highly identified fans did not prefer one form of aggression over another. Rather, they were more likely to exhibit both forms of aggression.

Also as hypothesized, aggression directed toward the officials was more likely to be hostile than instrumental, while aggression directed toward the opposition was equally likely to be hostile or instrumental. Because this finding replicates Wann et al. (in press), it appears that this pattern of effects is rather robust. Wann and his colleagues argued that the pattern may be due to the fact that spectators realize that officials are trained to be impartial in their judgments. Consequently, the spectators are less likely to act aggressively against these persons in an attempt to assist their team. Rather, they tend to act aggressively toward these persons as a reaction to something, such as a bad call. Their aggressive reaction is not designed to lead to a change in the official's judgment, but instead is designed to retaliate against this person. It should be noted that this explanation is purely speculative at this point. However, researchers could easily test its validity. That is, the argument that spectators tend not to exhibit instrumental aggression against officials because the officials are trained to disregard such attempts could be tested by examining spectators' verbally violent reactions to officials at lower levels of competition, such as individuals officiating college intramural games.

Presumably, these officials have less training than intercollegiate officials and the spectators may realize this. Consequently, spectators could be more likely to exhibit instrumental aggression in these situations.

## REFERENCES

- Berkowitz, L.(1993). *Aggression: Its causes, consequences, and control*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L.(1991). The positive social and self-concept consequences of sports team identification. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 15*, 115–127.
- Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L.(1992a). Physiological arousal and reactions to outgroup members that implicate an important social identity. *Aggressive Behavior, 18*, 85–93.
- Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L.(1992b). Role of identification with a group, arousal, categorization processes, and self-esteem in sports spectator aggression. *Human Relations, 45*, 1013–1033.
- Branscombe, N.R., & Wann, D.L.(1994). Collective self-esteem consequences of outgroup derogation when a valued social identity is on trial. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 24*, 641–657.
- Bredemeier, B.J. (1994). Children's moral reasoning and their assertive, aggressive, and submissive tendencies in sport and daily life. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 16*, 1–14.
- Cialdini, R.B., Borden, R.J., Thorne, A., Walker, M.R., Freeman, S., & Sloan, L.R.(1976). Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34*, 366–375.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B.(1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*, 608–630.
- Geen, R.G.(1990). *Human aggression*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Harter, S. (1986). Processes underlying the construction, maintenance, and enhancement of the self-concept in children. In J. Suls & A. G.Greenwald (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol. 3, pp. 136–182). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hirt, E.R., Zillmann, D., Erickson, G.A., & Kennedy, C. (1992). Costs and benefits of allegiance: Changes in fans' self-ascribed competencies after team victory versus defeat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 724–738.
- Silva, J. M.III (1980). Assertive and aggressive behavior in sport: A definitional clarification. In C. H. Nadeau, W. R.Halliwell, K. M.Newell, & G.C. Roberts (Eds.), *Psychology of motor behavior and sport-1979* (pp. 199–208). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Simons, Y., & Taylor, J. (1992). A psychosocial model of fan violence in sports. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 23*, 207–226.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

- Wann, D.L.(1993). Aggression among highly identified spectators as a function of their need to maintain positive social identity. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 17*, 134–143.
- Wann, D.L.(1997). *Sport psychology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Wann, D.L., & Branscombe, N.R.(1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of identification with their team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 24*, 1–17.
- Wann, D.L., & Dolan, T. J. (1994a). Attributions of highly identified sports spectators. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 134*, 783–792.
- Wann, D.L., & Dolan, T. J. (1994b). Spectators' evaluations of rival and fellow fans. *The Psychological Record, 44*, 351–358.
- Wann, D.L., Dolan, T. J., McGeorge, K. K., & Allison, J. A. (1994). Relationships between spectator identification and spectators' perceptions of influence, spectators' emotions, and competition outcome. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 16*, 347–364.
- Wann, D.L., Peterson, R.R., Cothran, C., & Dykes, M.(in press). Sport fan aggression and anonymity: The importance of team identification. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*.
- Wann, D.L., Royalty, J., & Roberts, A. (1999). *The self-presentation of sport fans: Investigating the importance of team identification and self-esteem*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Wann, D.L., Schrader, M.P., & Adamson, D.R.(1998). The cognitive and somatic anxiety of sport spectators. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 21*, 322–337.
- Wann, D.L., Schrader, M.P., & Carlson, J. D.(in press). The verbal aggression of sport spectators: A comparison of hostile and instrumental motives. *International Sports Journal*.



Copyright of Journal of Social Behavior & Personality is the property of Select Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.