The Relationships among Vicarious Achievement, Team Identification, and BIRGing/CORFing on Viewers of the World Series

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Identity theory (Stryker, 1968) has long been used to explain role-related behavior, and has recently been used to explain aspects of sport consumer behavior (Trail et al., 2005; Trail et al., 2003). Identity theory, in general, states that individuals form multiple roles (identities) that define who they are (e.g. mother, wife, coach, attorney, or more relevant to us, fan). The individual defines these roles that guide behavior. Recently, Ervin and Stryker (2001) and Cast and Burke (2002) suggested that self-esteem theory and identity theory are easily intertwined to explain how the salience and importance of identities influence how self-esteem is developed and maintained. According to Ervin and Stryker (2001), an identity is the cognitive representation an individual holds about him/herself, whereas self-esteem is the affective response to that self (p. 32). Cast and Burke suggested "that the verification of an identity produces feelings of competency and worth, increasing self-esteem" (p. 1043). Typically people use a connection to successful others to maintain or improve their self-esteem (Cialdini et al.) and Madrigal (1995) indicated that team identification is one variable that accomplishes this through BIRGing behavior. Trail et al. (2003) partially supported Madrigal's results by finding that team identification had an indirect influence on BIRGing and CORFing, and Trail et al. (2005) found a direct relationship between the former and the latter.

Vicarious achievement has been considered a motive for being a fan (e.g., Fink et al., 2002; Funk, Mahony, Ridinger, 2002; Trail et al., 2005; 2003; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995; among many others), and has been considered a reason for people to BIRG and CORF (Sloan, 1989). Sloan noted that an individual often could not directly fulfill the need for achievement, one of the needs in Maslow's (1970) hierarchy, and thus the individual would have to achieve vicariously to meet this need. Those high in this need and unable to accomplish it through their own endeavors would attempt to associate with a successful other and bask in the reflected glory of the successful other. Swann (1983, 1990) suggested that individuals attempt to maintain or improve their self-esteem by creating contexts for self-verification, and thus individuals try "to verify their identities and avoid situations where self-verification is problematic" (p. 1043). In other words, people try to BIRG in situations that reflect positively on themselves and try to CORF in situations that reflect on them poorly. Thus, people can be motivated to be fans (create or maintain a role identity as a fan), because of the need for vicarious achievement which allows them to build self-esteem through the connection with a successful other. However, when the other (the team) is no longer successful, then the need for vicarious achievement may not be met. Thus, for some individuals, when the identity as a fan of that particular team does not allow the in

To test the relationships among vicarious achievement, team identification, and BIRGing/CORFing we evaluated responses to the Florida Marlins winning the 2003 World Series and the New York Yankees losing the Series. Specifically, our hypotheses were:

1. Need for Vicarious Achievement will be positively correlated with Team Identification regardless of the situation (winning vs. losing) because both teams were successful before the World Series started.
2. Need for Vicarious Achievement will be positively related to CORFing in the failure situation (losing team - Yankees). That is, those who have a high need for vicarious achievement will CORF from the Yankees after they lost.
3. Need for Vicarious Achievement will not be related to CORFing in the success situation (winning team - Marlins) because they won.
4. Need for Vicarious Achievement will be positively related to BIRGing in the success situation (winning team - Marlins) because they won.
5. Need for Vicarious Achievement will not be related to BIRGing in the failure situation (losing team - Yankees) because they lost.

6. Team Identification will be negatively related to CORFing in the failure situation (losing team - Yankees). The less identified the individual is with the Yankees, the more likely that they will CORF (band-waggoners jumping off). However, highly identified Yankee fans will not CORF, they will maintain their association.

7. Team Identification will not be related to CORFing in the success situation (Marlins). Regardless of whether the individuals are highly identified or not, there is no need to CORF.

8. Team Identification will be positively related to BIRGing in the success situation (Marlins). Those more highly identified with the Marlins are more likely to BIRG.

9. Team Identification should not be related to BIRGing in the failure situation (Yankees). Regardless of the level of identification with the Yankees, after a loss, people will not BIRG.

Data were collected from 246 (male: 141, female: 105) students at a large Mid-western university after the 2003 World Series. The models and the relationships among the variables were tested using a structural equation modeling program. In general, all of the models fit well. Support was found for all hypotheses except for #4 and #9. Around 15% of the variance in team identification was explained by vicarious achievement. This indicated that although some people do create a fan identity to try to fulfill a need for achievement vicariously, fan identification is influenced by something else. In addition, for those people who do have that need, in a situation where the association is with an unsuccessful team, those individuals tried to cut off reflected failure. However, for those who are highly identified with the team, even when they lose, they did not CORF. Those people who were highly identified with the winning team tended to BIRG more than those who were not as identified, but the need for vicarious achievement did not predict level of BIRGing. We hypothesized that as the need for vicarious achievement increased, those people were more likely to BIRG (the band-waggoner effect) to increase their level of self-esteem. However, this was not evidenced.

From a marketing standpoint, this information is encouraging. It indicates that highly identified fans are more likely to remain with the team regardless of the success of the team; therefore, the focus should be on creating highly identified fans. Furthermore, identification is not solely contingent on vicarious achievement. However, further research needs to determine what causes people to become loyal fans, if it is not vicarious achievement.