Rivalry, In-group Bias, and Glory Out of Reflected Failure in Sport Fans

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The purpose of the current on-going study is to investigate the impact that rivalry, in-group bias, and Glory Out of Reflected Failure can have on sport fans. In particular, fan identification, favorite team performance, and familiarity of the identified rival will be used to determine their impact on three fan behaviors relevant to their rival team: (1) perceptions of the rival team, (2) evaluations of favorite and rival fan behavior, and (3) consumptive intentions of the favorite team when the rival loses to someone other than the favorite team.

Sport rivalry has been defined as “a fluctuating adversarial relationship existing between two teams, players, or groups of fans, gaining significance through on-field competition, on-field or off-field incidents, proximity, demographic makeup, and/or historical occurrence(s)” (Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, & Schaffer, 2013, p. 51). The rivalry phenomenon can impact the way fans evaluate player performance (Wann et al., 2006), relate to other fans of a favorite team (Smith & Schwartz, 2003), the excitement they experience when the rival team loses (Mahony & Howard, 1998), their willingness to help others in emergency situations (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005), and their willingness to consider anonymous aggression (Havard, Wann & Ryan, 2013; Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003; Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999; Wann & Waddill, 2013). The level of identification a person feels toward a team can impact fan behavior (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Funk & James, 2001), however little evidence exists on the impact team identification can have on fan behavior when faced with a rival team. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: How will fan perceptions of a rival team be impacted by (a) level of identification with a favorite team, (b) success of the favorite team, and (c) familiarity with the rival team outside of sport competition?

Social identity theory states that a person will associate with others that will positively reflect on themselves (Tajfel, 1974). Fans can achieve a positive self-evaluation by joining a group of similar others, and may begin to take on the combined characteristics of the group (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). When different groups interact, people tend to display bias toward members of the in-group and against members of the out-group (Turner, 1978). In-group members will also display bias in the way they describe the actions of out-group members (Maass, Arcuri, Salvi, Semin, 1989). In sport, fans will evaluate the actions of favorite and rival fans differently (Havard, 2014; Wann & Dolan, 1994; Wann & Grieve, 2005). Therefore, the following hypothesis and research questions are provided regarding fan evaluations of favorite and rival team fan behavior:

H1: Fans will evaluate in-game behavior of rival team fans more negatively than in-game behavior of favorite team fans.
H2: Highly identified fans will evaluate in-game behavior of rival team fans more negatively than fans with lower levels of team identification.

RQ2: How will evaluation of rival team fan in-game behavior be impacted by (a) success of the favorite team, and (c) familiarity with the rival team outside of sport competition?

Schadenfreude states that a person will take pleasure in the demise of someone they dislike (Heider, 1958), and Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) asserts that fans will celebrate when their rival loses to a team other than their favorite team (Havard, 2014). Further, schadenfreude tendencies have been found in professional baseball and international football fans (Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2011; Cikara & Fiske, 2012; Dalakas & Meloncon, 2012). Finally, rivalry has been found to impact consumption intentions toward the rival team (Havard, 2014; Mahony &
Moorman, 1999), the way fans consume sponsors of both teams (Dalakas & Levin, 2005, Davies, Veloustou, & Costa, 2006), and the way a fan consumes their favorite team (Havard, Shapiro, & Ridinger, 2014). However, the current study seeks to investigate fan consumptive intentions toward the favorite team when a rival loses to a team other than the favorite team. Therefore, the following research question is presented:

RQ3: How will the consumptive intentions toward the favorite team when a rival loses to a team other than the favorite team be impacted by (a) fan of identification with a favorite team, (b) success of the favorite team, and (c) familiarity with the rival team outside of sport competition?

Participants are fans of college and professional athletics reached through online team-specific web pages. Data collection is on-going and should be completed in February 2015. The survey instrument requires participants to identify their favorite team and rival team. The Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS: Wann & Branscombe, 1993) is used to measure level of identification a fan feels toward a team. The win/loss record of the favorite team will be used to measure the level of success of a team, and participants will be asked to indicate approximately how many times they have been to the city or school where the rival team plays excluding visiting for sport competition to measure familiarity with the rival team.

To answer RQ1, the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (SRFPS: Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, & Schaffer, 2013) is being used. The SRFPS measures four aspects of a rivalry; support for the rival in indirect competition, prestige of the academics or city culture of the rival, rival fan behavior, and sense of satisfaction when the favorite team defeats the rival team in direct competition. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) will be used to answer RQ1(a)(b)(c).

To test H1 and H2, and answer RQ2, participants are asked to evaluate in-game behaviors of favorite team fans and rival team fans during a rivalry contest. For example, participants are asked to indicate whether actions such as (1) showing compassion, (2) yelling drunk profanities, (3) starting a physical altercation, and (4) taking another fans seat are more representative of favorite team fans or rival team fans. A series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) will be used to test H1 and H2 and answer RQ2 (a)(b).

To answer RQ3, participants are asked the likelihood that they would display certain consumptive and behavioral intentions following the defeat of their rival team by someone other than the favorite team. For example, participants are asked how likely they would (1) celebrate with others, (2) wear favorite team merchandise, (3) purchase favorite team merchandise, and (4) derogate the rival team following a rival loss in indirect competition. A series of ANOVAs will be used to answer RQ3 (a)(b)(c).

Results from the current study carry important implications for researchers and practitioners. First, the current study adds to the research on rivalry by measuring the impact of favorite team identification, favorite team level of success, and familiarity with the rival team on fan rival perceptions. Findings will also add to the sport management literature along with the in-group bias literature by examining evaluations of in-game behavior of favorite team and rival team fans. Finally, findings regarding the impact a rival losing in indirect competition can have on fan consumptive intentions toward a favorite team can help marketers and administrators better engage fans. Additional implications and directions for future study will be discussed.