Us vs. Them and Especially Them: Rival Derogation in Sport Fans

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Introduction
Early research in sport fandom focused on the vicarious relationship between fans and the team, such as the reflected glory of winning (Cialdini et al., 1976). However, sport fans are best understood as ingroups, groups whose members share a common identity. Fans of the same team are more important to this identity than the team itself (Mael & Ashforth, 2001). Social connections with other fans provide lasting and stable benefits to self-esteem and well-being (Wann, 2006).

Intergroup discrimination is well established in the social psychological literature – ingroup members hold pervasive biases favoring their ingroup over outgroups, groups with relevant differences to ingroups (Balliet, Wu & De Dreu, 2014). Sport fans are no different, they tend to perceive fans of the same team more favorably than fans of other teams (Wann & Grieve, 2005). Some research has suggested that intergroup discrimination can be explained entirely by ingroup favoritism. That is, ingroup members do not derogate outgroups, they merely lack the positive associations they have for their ingroup (Balliet et al., 2014). However, this research has not considered level of identification with the ingroup.

The degree to which fans identify with their ingroup influences attitudes and behaviors. For example, high-identified fans respond to threats to their identity (such as the loss of a game) by strengthening their connection with the team, whereas low-identified fans tend to distance themselves (Wann, 2006). Rivals are an outgroup that threatens identity due to the ongoing history of competition (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). High-identified fans pay more attention to their rivals, experience greater pleasure in their failure (Havard, Eddy, & Ryan, 2016), and are more willing to consider acts of aggression against them (Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003).

Therefore, there is good reason to believe that sport fans will demonstrate outgroup derogation against their rivals. We aim to investigate this by targeting a well-known rivalry between the University of Kentucky (UK) and University of Louisville (UL) men's basketball teams. For comparison, we include a team with which neither UK nor UL has ever played, Northern Illinois University (NIU). We hypothesize: 1) that low-identified fans will not discriminate between any of the three teams; 2) that high-identified fans will favor their team over others, and NIU above their rivals; 3) that derogation will be predicted by sense of rivalry or a tendency for confrontation; 4) that salience of rival fans will cause high-identified fans to react both more negatively toward their rivals and more positively toward their own team.

Method
Under the cover story that a sports network was test-screening basketball highlights, participants gave informed consent then completed a questionnaire packet about their sport fandom. Identification for each team was assessed using the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Sense of rivalry for each team was assessed using the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (Havard et al., 2013). Participants also reported their tendency for confrontation using the dysfunctional fandom scale (Wakefield & Wann, 2006), and identification with general sport fandom using the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (Wann, 2002).

Participants were then brought to a separate room containing four confederates to watch two-minute highlight videos for each of UK, UL, and NIU. Videos were presented in a random order, and confederates were previously trained to cheer during only the first video. Participants were video-recorded during this time and later coded for cheering or antagonistic behavior. Participants additionally completed evaluations of each team immediately following that team’s video.
Discussion
Data collection is ongoing, analysis is expected to be completed in December. This study will help elucidate the role that outgroups play in intergroup discrimination. Using sport fans will demonstrate how outgroup derogation interacts with ingroup favoritism to create attitudinal and behavioral biases. We hypothesize that fans with both a high level of identification and a strong sense of rivalry will derogate their rivals more than a neutral team. This will nuance the intergroup discrimination literature, and contribute to our understanding of rivalry in sport fandom. This has implications for sport management and marketing as the salience of rivalry can have significant consequences for fan behavior, both toward the rival and their own team.