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DANIEL WANN, ET AL., EDITORS,
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Chapter Eight

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
CONSEQUENCES OF
SPORT FANDOM**

CHAR. 8

Social scientists have debated the virtue of sport fandom and sport spectating for many decades. For instance, consider the thoughts of G. E. Howard, who as early as 1912 stated that sport fandom and spectating were: "A singular example of mental perversion, an absurd and immoral custom tenaciously held fast in mob-mind, has its genesis in the partisan zeal of athletic spectator-crowds. I refer to the practice of organized cheering, known in college argot as 'rooting.' From every aspect it is bad" (G. E. Howard, 1912, p. 46). Granted, this negative perception of sport fandom is almost a century old. However, several contemporary social scientists hold similarly negative views of the pastime (e.g., Beisser, 1967; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; K. V. Meier, 1989), including Reese (1994), who argued that "no human being on this Earth either has to or needs to attend any professional sports events" (p. 12A). In fact, Zillmann et al. (1989) write that there is "nearly a universal condemnation of sport spectatorship" on the part of social scientists (p. 246). Hughes (1987) agreed with this viewpoint and argued that everyone seems to like sport except the social scientists who comment about it.

In contrast to the detractors, some early authors had a more positive impression of sport fandom. For example, in his article titled "The Why of the Fan," Brill (1929, pp. 430, 434) stated:

The average man, for perfectly simple psychological reasons, just will not muster much enthusiasm for the idea of getting out and playing instead of watching the game. On the other hand,

through the operation of the psychological laws of identification and catharsis, the thorough-going fan is distinctly benefited mentally, physically, and morally by spectator-participation in his favorite sport. . . . I conclude that the national habit of watching rather than playing games, despite all of the head-shaking of physical culturists and economists, sociologists, and intellectuals, is a salutary habit.

Similarly, in the late 1890s, Roosa (1898) described football crowds as "an orderly, well-dressed, even cultivated and intellectual mass of humanity" (p. 642). Indeed, many other social scientists have viewed sport fandom as a worthwhile pastime (e.g., Guttman, 1980, 1986; Hemphill, 1995; Lasch, 1989; Melnick, 1993; G. J. Smith, 1988, 1989; G. J. Smith et al., 1981; Zillmann et al., 1989).

So, which of these contrasting views is most accurate? Are sport fans violent beings engaged in a worthless activity that has a negative impact on society and its members? Or, are sport fans similar to non-fans in most respects, with the exception that they have an abiding interest in a worthwhile, socially acceptable pastime? In the next two chapters, we attempt to answer these questions by ascertaining the potential costs and benefits of sport fandom and sport spectating. Our analysis examines the debate from both psychological and sociological perspectives; that is, we review the positive and negative consequences of sport fandom for both the individual fan and for society as a whole. The current chapter focuses on the psychological consequences of fandom, while chapter 9 analyzes its societal consequences.

We begin this chapter with an examination of the criticisms of sport fans and their pastime. Each criticism of sport fandom will be critiqued within a framework of existing data, when possible. We then examine the psychological health of sport fans and the methods they employ to maintain their psychological well-being. The reader is reminded that the current discussion is restricted to the potential psychological costs and benefits of sport fandom and spectating. Possible societal costs and benefits are discussed in the concluding chapter.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY BASED CRITICISMS OF SPORT FANS AND THE PASTIME

Although a number of different psychologically based (i.e., individual-level) criticisms of sport fandom and spectating have been raised, four arguments appear to be most common: (1) fans are lazy, (2) fans are aggressive, (3) sport encourages fans to adopt negative values and

maladaptive behaviors, and (4) fans have poor interpersonal relationships. Each of these alleged psychological costs of sport fandom are addressed in this section.

Are Sport Fans Lazy?

One of the most common criticisms of sport fans involves the perception that they are lazy (K. V. Meier, 1989; see Lasch, 1989; G. J. Smith, 1988; Zillmann et al., 1989). Individuals who hold this belief view fans as little more than overweight couch potatoes (these critics are more than happy to point out that approximately three billion potato chips were consumed during the 1998 Super Bowl). However, Guttman (1980) offered an insightful challenge to this criticism. He suggested, "Although it is unusual to denounce museum-goers for not painting still-lives and bad form to fault concert audiences for not playing the violin, it is quite common, even for those who are enthusiastic about sports to criticize spectators for athletic inactivity" (p. 275). Likewise, Hemphill (1995) noted that "it would be absurd to insist that all spectators become players, just as it would be absurd to insist that everyone should stop reading books and start writing them, that ballet audiences should take up dancing, that movie goers should make their own films" (p. 52).

The criticism that sport fans are lazy has not held up well to empirical investigation. This conclusion is drawn from two lines of research: (1) the relationship between spectating and athletic participation and (2) the relationship between sport fandom and success/involvement in higher education. With respect to the relationship between spectating and athletic participation, a number of empirical investigations have found that sport fans are as particularly likely to participate in sport as athletes (see chapter 1). If, as claimed, sport fans are lazy, one should find a negative correlation between sport fandom and athletic participation. Clearly, this is not the case.

With respect to higher education, if sport fans are lazy, one would expect them to exhibit poorer academic performances and lower levels of involvement than nonfans. However, once again the data contradict this notion. Instead, research indicates that sport fans perform better in college than nonfans and are more involved with and have better impressions of their university. For example, consider the work of Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, and Henriksen (1993). They compared the six-year college graduation rates and grade point averages (GPAs) of college student fans (i.e., students who had attended one or both of a pair of target games) and nonfans (i.e., students who had not

attended either of the two target games). Using the students' high school performance and college entrance scores, the researchers found that the fan (mean predicted college GPA = 2.37) and nonfan groups (mean predicted college GPA = 2.40) were similar in their predicted college performance. However, analysis of actual student performance revealed that the fan group had a higher six-year graduation rate (64 percent versus 48 percent) and higher GPAs (2.55 versus 2.46).

A second study refuting the belief that sport fans are lazy was recently completed by Wann and Robinson (1999; see also Schafer, 1969). These investigators conducted a pair of studies that examined the relationship between university sport team identification and integration into one's university. In the first study, college students completed a questionnaire that assessed their level of identification with the university's men's basketball and football teams. The questionnaire also assessed the students' intentions to graduate from the institution and their involvement in university activities. The data revealed significant correlations between level of identification (for both teams) and graduation intentions and involvement with the university. Participants higher in sport team identification reported greater levels of involvement with the school and were more likely to believe that they would graduate. A second study replicated these effects using students' identification with the university's sport program as a whole.

Are Sport Fans Aggressive?

Another common argument against sport fandom is that sport fans are overly aggressive. When examining the relationship between sport fandom and aggressiveness, it is important to make a distinction between violent actions and violent personalities, that is, the difference between state levels of aggression and trait levels of aggression. State levels of aggression involve temporary shifts in one's aggressive state. Trait levels of aggression, on the other hand, involve an individual's dispositional level of aggression over a long period of time. Thus, trait aggression is similar to a personality variable. The finding that sport fans occasionally report high levels of state aggression and sporadically exhibit violent behaviors does not lead to the conclusion that these individuals also possess high levels of trait aggression (i.e., that fans have an inherently violent disposition). Certainly, the fact that college students have, on occasion, acted violently toward each other and their professors would not lead one to conclude that "college students are aggressive people" (similar arguments can be made

for members of the clergy, U.S. postal workers, moviegoers, and a plethora of other groups).

To accurately critique the argument that sport fans are aggressive, one must conduct two separate analyses: one each for the fans' state aggression and trait aggression. With respect to fans' state levels of aggression, on rare occasions sport fans and spectators do become violent (see chapters 5, 6, and 7). But the fact that sport fans occasionally exhibit aggressive behaviors does not make them aggressive individuals *per se*. Rather, additional research is needed to justify this claim. In one such study (Wann, 1994b; see also Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999) college students were asked to indicate their level of identification for their favorite team and to complete the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (Buss & Durkee, 1957). Correlations computed between levels of identification and the various forms of aggression failed to yield any significant relationships.

Wann, Fahl, Erdmann, and Littleton (1999) asked college students to complete a measure assessing their identification with the role of sport fan. The participants were also asked to complete the Buss-Durkee Inventory. Correlational analyses failed to reveal any significant relationships between fandom and trait aggression. Research by Russell and Goldstein (1995; but see also S. Miller, 1976) found similar results. These authors asked Dutch spectators attending a football game and a comparable sample of nonattenders to complete the assault subscale of the Buss-Durkee Inventory. Their results indicated that attenders and those having no interest in sport did not differ in levels of aggressiveness.

A final study on the trait aggression of sport fans was conducted by Koss and Gaines (1993). The researchers examined a number of potential predictors of sexual aggression among college students, including the extent to which they followed sport news and watched televised sport. To test the relationship between the predictor variables and sexual aggression, Koss and Gaines asked several hundred male college students to complete a questionnaire that assessed their self-reported sexual aggression as well as participation in a fraternity or varsity sport team and alcohol consumption. Although some of the predictor variables were positively related to self-reported sexual aggression (including membership in a fraternity, participation in a varsity sport, and alcohol consumption), there was no relationship between sport consumption and sexual aggression.

Based on the research described here, it appears that two conclusions regarding the aggressiveness of sport fans and spectators are warranted. First, fans do exhibit high levels of state aggression,

although the occurrence of such outbursts remains quite rare. Second, sport fans neither score unusually high in trait aggression, nor do they differ from nonfans on this personality characteristic. It should be noted that this does not mean that sport fan aggression and personality are unrelated. Rather, as noted previously in this text, there are certain personality traits that may predispose some fans to act violently. In addition, it is possible that the most violent fans possess high levels of trait aggression (i.e., those exhibiting state aggression are also higher in trait aggression). However, even if this were the case, the problem would lie at the individual level of analysis (i.e., the individual's propensity toward violence) rather than with sport fandom because fans and nonfans do not differ in trait aggression.

Does Sport Lead to the Adoption of Negative Values and Maladaptive Behaviors?

Another common criticism of sport fandom is that sport leads to the adoption of negative values and maladaptive behaviors. For instance, it has been argued that sport facilitates beliefs in winning at all costs, strict authoritarianism, and that violence, corruption, cheating, sexism, and racism are acceptable forms of behavior (Brohm, 1978; Cullen, 1974; Hoch, 1972; Schwartz, 1973; Sloan, 1989; G. J. Smith, 1988). This criticism is based on the logic that, because athletes and sport administrators often display questionable values, sport fans may internalize these values. Certainly, it is not difficult to find instances when athletes, coaches, and administrators have exhibited highly questionable behaviors. For instance, the greed and corruption of the International Olympic Committee and academic fraud at the University of Minnesota each received a great deal of media attention in the late 1990s (Patrick, 1999; Swift, 1999). Conversely, others have countered by suggesting that if sport teaches negative values, it must teach positive values as well. For instance, sport may instruct viewers on the importance of fair play and adhering to the rules, teach the value of perseverance and a strong work ethic, and assist in character building (Schafer, 1969; Sloan, 1989; G. J. Smith, 1988; Zillmann et al., 1989).

Which position is correct? To answer this, we must once again consult the available research. Unfortunately, the belief that sport encourages the adoption of negative values is difficult to support or refute empirically because of a scarcity of relevant research. Although it is quite clear that athletes, coaches, and administrators exhibit both positive and negative values and behaviors, it is difficult to document the degree to which these values and behaviors are learned and imitated by fans.

An exception is the work by Wann (1998a, 1998b), who examined the relationship between sport fandom and the use of alcohol and tobacco. Athletes' consumption of alcohol and tobacco are well-known. Sport and tobacco (particularly smokeless tobacco) use have enjoyed a long-term relationship. Professional athletes, and in particular baseball players (D. Snyder & Koenig, 1998), have used and endorsed tobacco products for many decades despite their negative health effects. The relationship between tobacco and sport is also evident at the collegiate level. For instance, the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association decided to drop Montana State University as the host of the 1999 collegiate rodeo finals when the school refused to allow Copenhagen and Skoal to pass out tobacco samples during the event. With such a clear relationship between sport and tobacco, one might expect fans to report disproportionately high rates of tobacco use. That is, fans (especially younger fans) might imitate the behaviors of their heroes and, consequently, use tobacco products to a larger degree than nonfans do.

There is also a clear connection between sport and alcohol. For instance, most professional and college sports are partially sponsored by alcohol and beer companies. Further, a number of prominent athletes have had well-publicized battles with alcohol addiction and/or DUI arrests. Again, because of the close ties between alcohol and sport, one may expect fans to consume alcohol to a greater extent than nonfans do.

To examine whether or not sport fans tend to adopt the maladaptive behaviors of athletes, Wann examined the relationships between sport fandom and tobacco (1998b) and alcohol consumption (1998a). Sport fandom was operationalized in three ways: a Likert-scale item was used to assess degree of fandom, the amount of money spent on sport consumption, and the amount of time spent on sport consumption. Two forms of tobacco use (cigarettes and smokeless) and two forms of alcohol consumption (beer and liquor) were examined. The results revealed no relationship between sport fandom and the consumption of tobacco or alcohol. Similarly, in their investigation of the behaviors exhibited by sport fans prior to watching sport on television, Wenner and Gantz (1989) found that alcohol consumption was the least common preparatory behavior. Koss and Gaines (1993) also failed to find a positive relationship between sport fandom and the consumption of alcohol and nicotine. Although the aforementioned studies are far from conclusive, they do seriously challenge the position that sport fans adopt the negative and harmful values and behaviors associated with sport. However, it is also clear that additional

research is needed before one can fully dismiss this argument against sport fandom.

Do Sport Fans Have Poor Interpersonal Relationships?

In a recent issue of *Reader's Digest* ("Game Plans," 1997), a wife recounted a conversation she had had with her husband as he sat watching football on a Sunday afternoon. When she asked her husband what he intended to do the following evening, he stated that he was planning on watching *Monday Night Football*. When she reminded him that it was their anniversary, he simply said, "Okay, we'll hold hands while we watch the game" (p. 91).

This story speaks to another popular criticism of sport fans, namely, that their interest in sport has a disruptive effect on their interpersonal and intimate relationships. Consistent with this criticism, Quirk (1997) authored a book entitled *Not Now, Honey, I'm Watching the Game*, in which he describes what he calls "sportsaholics." A sportsaholic is someone who has become so addicted to sport that his involvement with the pastime disrupts his relationship with his wife or girlfriend (Quirk believes that the vast majority of sportsaholics are male).

Quirk's book paints a very negative picture of the interpersonal relationships and social skills of sport fans. If one accepts his research data, it appears as though there is strong empirical support for the criticism that sport interferes with fans' close relationships. However, one should be extremely cautious when interpreting Quirk's data because of his research methodology. For instance, rather than relying on standard random sampling techniques, Quirk simply asked individuals to contact him if they felt they were addicted to sport or if they were married to a sportsaholic. Consequently, it is hardly surprising to find that sport fandom had a negative impact on almost everyone described in the book (indeed, Quirk uses the phrase "what to do when sports come between you and your mate" rather than what to do *if* it does). Such a methodology is problematic because it leads to an inaccurate and biased perception of sport fans. Using the same methodology, one could also find individuals whose intimate relationships were disrupted by their significant other's interest in the stock market, world affairs, the opera, and so on. However, this does not mean that all or even most of the individuals with an interest in these activities have problems with their relationships.

Thus, to arrive at a more accurate picture of the impact of sport consumption on interpersonal relationships, one should largely disregard Quirk's survey results and focus instead on quantitative and

authors have done just that (incidentally, none of this work was cited or described in Quirk's book). For instance, a detailed examination of the impact of sport fandom on relationship quality was conducted by Roloff and Solomon (1989). They asked college students to list (1) the sports they enjoyed watching on television and attending that their partner did not enjoy watching/attending, (2) the sports their partner enjoyed that they did not enjoy, and (3) the sports they and their partner enjoyed together. The participants were also asked to complete items assessing their satisfaction with their relationship. Roloff and Solomon found greater similarity than conflict in sport interests as 63 percent of the participants listed at least one sport they and their partner enjoyed watching together on television, and 72 percent listed at least one sport they enjoyed attending together. There was no correlation between the number of sports listed that only one partner enjoyed and relationship satisfaction. They concluded that there was "no support for the notion that conflict over sports adversely affects relational quality" (p. 308).

Gantz, Wenner, Carrico, and Knorr (1995a) also published a methodologically sound investigation of the impact of sport fandom on interpersonal relationships (see also Gantz, Wenner, Carrico, & Knorr, 1995b). They conducted several hundred telephone interviews with individuals living in large metropolitan areas. The participants were asked to report their perceptions of how their partner felt about the participants' sport television viewing. The majority of participants (70 percent) believed that their partner thought their television viewing was fine, while an additional 19 percent felt that their partner accepted the behavior. Only 2 percent of the participants believed that their partner was angry or frustrated by their viewing behavior. Similar figures were found when the individuals were asked to evaluate their partner's televised sport viewing behavior. When asked about the role of televised sport in their relationship, 81 percent of the respondents stated that televised sport played a small or very small role. Further, 93 percent of the respondents stated that televised sport had either a positive effect (54 percent) or a neutral effect (39 percent). Similar to the conclusions drawn by Roloff and Solomon (1989), Gantz and his colleagues summarized their findings by stating that "televised sport viewing appears to be a minor and nondisruptive activity in most ongoing relationships" and that "our data appear to refute . . . the much publicized football widow phenomenon" (p. 371).

Based on the research by Roloff and Solomon (1989) and Gantz et al. (1995a, 1995b), claims of sport fandom disrupting interpersonal

relationships have been largely overstated. Instead, fandom tends to have either a positive or neutral impact. At this point, the most accurate conclusion suggested by the research is that the vast majority of relationships are not adversely affected by a partner's interest in sport fandom.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND SPORT FANDOM

Some social scientists have suggested that there may be psychological benefits associated with sport fandom. For instance, Brill (1929) asked his readers, "Are you a fan? It is altogether to be hoped, for your psychic health and well-being, that you are" (p. 429). Other authors have shared Brill's belief that sport fandom and spectating can enhance psychological well-being and the quality of life (Curtis, Loy, & Karnilowicz, 1986; Giamatti, 1989; S. J. Grove et al., 1982; Iso-Ahola & Hatfield, 1986; G. J. Smith, 1989; G. J. Smith et al., 1981). Here we investigate the psychological well-being of sport fans. We will begin with a review of the empirical research on the subject. We then examine the strategies fans use to maintain their psychological health when it is threatened by their team's poor performance.

The Psychological Health of Sport Fans

It has been argued that identification with sport teams may serve to replace traditional but declining social ties such as religion and the family (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Melnick, 1993; Putnam, 1995). Social connections resulting from sport team identification may prove beneficial to one's psychological health by serving as a buffer against depression and alienation while increasing self-esteem (Pan et al., 1997; G. J. Smith, 1988, 1989; Zillmann et al., 1989). Branscombe and Wann (1991) asked college students to complete the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) for their university's men's basketball team. The investigators also assessed the participants' self-esteem and depression levels. Correlational analyses revealed a positive correlation between level of identification and self-esteem and a negative correlation between identification and frequency of depression. In a second study, again involving college students, Branscombe and Wann found that higher levels of identification were positively correlated with the frequency of positive emotions and negatively correlated with the frequency of negative emotions and alienation. Similarly, Wann (1994b) demonstrated that team identification was positively correlated with collective self-esteem (i.e., group-level self-esteem; see Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990).

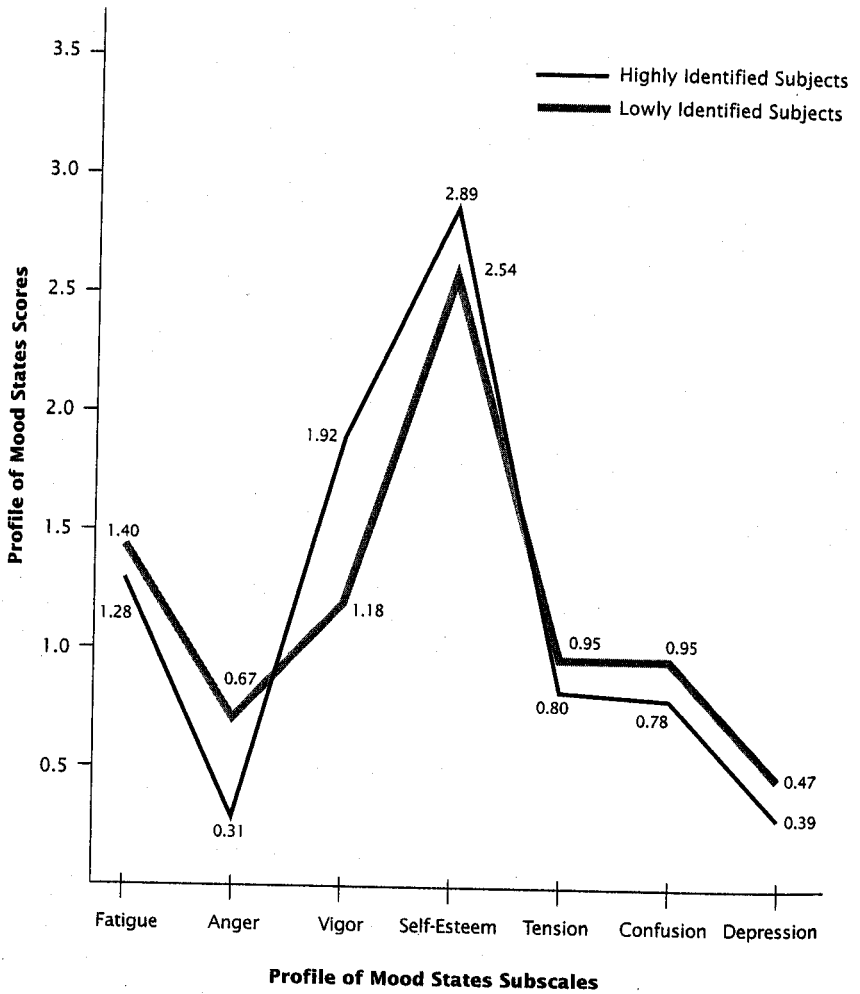
Another examination of the psychological health of sport fans was recently published by Wann, Inman, Ensor, Gates, and Caldwell (1999). These authors used the Profile of Mood States (POMS, J. R. Grove & Prapavessis, 1992; McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971) to compare the psychological health of highly identified and lowly identified fans. A comparison of the psychological health of fans and nonfans was also undertaken. The POMS assesses seven components of psychological well-being: fatigue, anger, vigor, tension, self-esteem (personal), confusion, and depression. In the first study, Wann and his colleagues asked college students to complete the POMS and the SSIS for their university's men's basketball team. The participants also stated the extent to which they considered themselves a sport fan. The data revealed an "iceberg profile," as highly identified participants exhibited a more healthy psychological profile than lowly identified participants (see figure 8.1). There were no differences in the psychological well-being of fans and nonfans. Thus, Wann et al. found that it was not mere sport fandom that predicted psychological health. Rather, psychological health was related to a high level of team identification with a local university sport team.

In the second study, Wann, Inman, et al. (1999) tested the prediction that high levels of identification with a distant team would not be related to psychological well-being. The hypothesis was based on the argument that the psychological benefits of team identification result from the sense of belongingness associated with ties to nearby teams (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Eastman & Land, 1997; Melnick, 1993). If a fan is highly identified with a distant team, she will have a difficult time using her identification to gain increased connections with others. Consistent with this logic, the data from the second study revealed no differences in the psychological health of participants high and low in identification with a distant team (see also Wann, Roberts, et al., 1999).

Thus, one can conclude that psychological connections with a geographically close sport team are related to psychological well-being, while simply being a sport fan or being a "displaced" fan with a high level of identification with a distant team is not. However, before concluding this section, several important points warrant mention. First, it should be noted that the previously described research was correlational in nature. Consequently, it is not possible to determine if higher levels of identification cause better psychological health or vice versa. Although the relationship is most likely reciprocal, additional research is needed to pinpoint the exact directionality of the relationship. Second, although highly identified fans

FIGURE 8.1

Profile of Mood States scores for highly and lowly identified sport fans



of a close team do appear to have a healthier psychological profile than lowly identified fans, the magnitude of the effect is quite modest. Although this fact allows one to debate the extent to which highly identified fans are more psychologically healthy than lowly identified fans, one clearly cannot argue that highly identified individuals possess poorer psychological health. And third, because high identification leads to increased social connections, there may be societal benefits associated with sport fandom as well. This possibility is examined in the next chapter.

Highly Identified Fans' Maintenance of Their Psychological Health

The research just described suggests that highly identified sport fans possess a healthy psychological profile. This finding is interesting in light of the fact that highly identified fans often view their team's performances as a reflection of themselves. That is, the team's wins are experienced as personal victories while losses are perceived as personal defeats. Consequently, highly identified fans often experience strong negative reactions to watching their team perform poorly (Bernhardt, Dabbs, Fielden, & Lutter, 1998; Wann et al., 1994). Watching their team lose can make fans feel depressed and negative about life in general (Eastman & Riggs, 1994; Lever, 1969). For instance, consider the following statement of a Pittsburgh Steelers football fan (quoted in Quirk, 1997): "If the Steelers win a big game, I'm happy. I yell, give high-fives and hugs to everyone around me. If they lose and it's a crushing loss I get an empty feeling in my stomach and feel angry and depressed for a month or two" (p. 47).

Several studies have examined the extent to which a team's poor performance negatively affects the psychological state of sport fans. For instance, Schwarz, Strack, Kommer, and Wagner (1987) interviewed German residents immediately prior to and after their country participated in two contests during the 1982 Soccer World Championships. In one game the team was victorious, while the other game ended in a tie (0-0). The results revealed that game outcome had a strong impact on participants' global well-being and satisfaction with work, as both increased after the victory but decreased following the tie.

Schweitzer, Zillmann, Weaver, and Luttrell (1992) examined the impact of a sporting event on expectations of a war erupting between Iraq and the United States and its allies. College student fans of two rival schools were asked to view a football contest between the two universities. After the contest, the participants reported their estimates of the likelihood of war between Iraq and America and, in the

event of war, the number of American casualties. The results revealed that supporters of the losing team were more likely to believe that the Gulf War was imminent. In addition, these fans also predicted a greater number of American casualties than did fans of the winning team.

A third study examining the impact of team performance on the mood and outlook of highly identified fans was completed by Hirt and his colleagues (1992). They asked college students to watch a live broadcast of one of their university's men's basketball games. The participants were asked to report the extent to which they felt "depressed" or "elated." They were then given descriptions for a series of additional tasks, including tasks assessing mental skills and social skills. First, the respondents were shown an example of a five-letter anagram in both the scrambled and unscrambled form. They then estimated the number of similar anagrams they could solve in five minutes (this was the "mental skills task"). Next, the respondents were presented with a series of slides depicting attractive members of the opposite sex. Subsequent to viewing each slide, the participants estimated the likelihood that the individual depicted in the slide would accept the participant's invitation to attend a concert (the "social skills task"). The results revealed that the team's performance had a profound effect on the mental state of the participants. Those who watched the team lose were higher in depression (and, consequently, lower in elation) than those who watched the team win. Spectators who witnessed a losing performance also reported significantly lower estimates of their mental skills and social skills (i.e., they estimated completing fewer anagrams and were less likely to believe their invitation to the concert would be accepted). These outcome-based differences in depression/elation and skill estimates were only found among participants with a high level of team identification.

Once again we have a contradiction involving the behaviors and attributes of sport fans. On the one hand, research indicates that highly identified fans (at least those identified with a local team) have a more healthy psychological profile than lowly identified persons. On the other hand, research also suggests that these fans often experience negative affect, a poor outlook on life, and depression subsequent to watching their team lose. To understand this contradiction, one must consider the methods highly identified fans use to handle the threat of their team's poor performance. Research indicates that individuals with high and low levels of identification respond differently to perceived threats (see Dietz-Uhler, 1999, for a review), with

those possessing a high level of identification employing a variety of tactics to protect and enhance their psychological health. In the following sections, we examine four such tactics: strategic associations with the team, biased attributions of the team's performance, biased recollections and predictions of the team's performance, and ingroup favoritism toward other fans of the team.

The Maintenance of Psychological Health through Strategic Associations with the Team One of the most common tactics used by fans to maintain their psychological health is to strategically adjust their associations with their team. These strategies are self-presentational in nature because they involve conscious attempts to alter one's public association with the team (Leary, 1992, 1995). Two of these self-presentational strategies are found in response to success-

TABLE 8.2

Self-Presentational Strategies Used by Sport Fans to Enhance or Protect Their Psychological Well-Being

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
<i>Strategies following team success</i>	
1. Basking in reflected glory (BIRGing)	Involves increasing one's association with successful teams to enhance psychological health.
2. Cutting off future failure (COFFing)	Involves decreasing one's association with a currently successful team to protect one's future psychological health should the team perform poorly at a later date.
<i>Strategies following team failure</i>	
1. Cutting off reflected failure (CORFing)	Involves decreasing one's association with an unsuccessful team to protect one's psychological health.
2. Blasting	Involves derogating an individual or group to regain one's psychological health.

ful team performances and two are used in response to unsuccessful performances. These strategies are briefly described in table 8.2.

Strategies used in response to successful team performance • Researchers have identified two strategic association tactics used following a team's successful performance. One such strategy, termed basking in reflected glory (BIRGing), involves increasing one's association with successful teams to enhance psychological health. The BIRGing phenomenon was first identified in a series of studies conducted by Cialdini and his associates (1976). In one study, these experimenters recorded the proportion of college students who wore clothing that identified their university. As predicted by BIRGing, the proportion of students who wore university-identifying apparel increased following a win by the university's football team. In a second study, Cialdini and his associates telephoned respondents and asked them to describe a recent contest involving their university's football team. Again, consistent with the BIRGing phenomenon, participants were more likely to use the pronoun "we" to describe a recent win and "they" to describe a defeat. A number of other authors have replicated Cialdini's work (Burger, 1985; Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Kimble & Cooper, 1992; McHoul, 1997; Sloan, 1989). Thus, one important method fans use to maintain their psychological health is to increase their relationships with their team when it performs well.

End and his associates (1999) recently suggested that sport fans use BIRGing in a premeditated fashion prior to a season. They argue that fans spontaneously BIRG by supporting teams with a history of successful performances, thereby diffusing damage to their psychological well-being before it occurs. End and his colleagues found strong support for this proactive form of BIRGing in their college student sample. The participants were asked to list their favorite sport teams (in order of first favorite on down) and to report their identification for each team. The researchers then used a variety of indicators of team success (e.g., winning percentage, participation in postseason play) to examine the relationship between team identification and team performance. The results showed that participants were more likely to support successful teams than unsuccessful teams, and that their favorite teams tended to be particularly successful. By engaging in this strategy, these fans were able to increase the likelihood that they could bask in the glory of their team's future successes.

In some situations, supporters of winning teams may be reluctant to bask in their team's victory. For instance, consider a sport fan who is highly identified with his university's men's basketball team, a

team that has had a history of poor performances and typically finishes last in its conference. Imagine further that this team somehow manages to gain a home court victory over the conference powerhouse. Research on BIRGing suggests that the fan would increase his association with his team, thereby enhancing his psychological well-being. However, what might happen if the two teams were scheduled to meet a second time at the rival school's home court? Would the fan be as willing to boast about his team's surprising victory? Research by Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, and Hodges (1995) on cutting off future failure (COFFing) suggests that he may not. COFFing is found when individuals resist the urge to bask in a team's success and, instead, distance themselves from the team out of concern the team will be unsuccessful in the future. Although individuals may maintain a private connection to the team, publicly they tend to downplay their association. Thus, COFFing helps one maintain a positive psychological state by avoiding association with a potential loser, even though that team is currently experiencing success.

Strategies used in response to unsuccessful team performance • Researchers have also identified two strategies used in response to a team's poor performance. One such tactic is cutting off reflected failure (CORFing). You may recall that CORFing involves decreasing one's association with an unsuccessful team to protect one's psychological well-being. For instance, C. R. Snyder et al. (1986) had participants complete a cognitive task followed by bogus feedback about their performance (positive, negative, or no feedback). After receiving the feedback, respondents were given the opportunity to take and wear badges identifying their group. In support of the CORFing phenomenon, respondents were reluctant to take and wear team badges after receiving negative feedback. In support of BIRGing, participants were quite willing to take and wear badges following positive feedback.

Thus, following a poor team performance, "fair-weather" fans decrease their association with the team. However, research indicates that this self-presentational strategy may not be available to all fans. Rather, for fans with a high degree of team identification, CORFing is not a viable method for protecting their psychological health (Hirt et al., 1992; Wann, 1993; Wann & Branscombe, 1990a). Because the concept of team follower is such a central component of the self-identity of highly identified fans (see chapter 1), they cannot dissociate themselves from the team when it plays poorly. Rather, these "die-hard" fans stick with the team through thick and thin, maintaining their allegiance even during trying times (e.g., members of the Chicago

Cubs Die-Hard Fan Club). As a consequence of not CORFing following their team's poor performance, the psychological well-being of highly identified fans is jeopardized. Indeed, as indicated by the literature described earlier in this chapter, highly identified fans may experience depression and an intense negative affective state and adopt a poor outlook on life subsequent to their team's defeat. These problems are less likely among lowly identified fans who simply use CORFing to protect their psychological well-being.

To return to a positive state of psychological well-being, highly identified fans who support a losing team may utilize a second response to poor performance. This strategy, referred to as blasting, involves derogating an individual or group to regain one's psychological health (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wann, 1993). By acting in a hostile manner toward members of the other team, derogating the officials, and so on, highly identified fans can feel they are better than the others, thereby restoring their psychological health.

Thus, self-presentational strategies for responding to a team's poor performance vary among fans. Fans with a low level of team identification use CORFing, while highly identified fans use blasting. This does not mean that highly identified fans will always act in a hostile and derogatory manner subsequent to their team's defeat. Rather, blasting is but one alternative available to these persons to help them cope with their team's defeat.

The Maintenance of Psychological Health through Biased Attributions Another common method used by sport fans to help maintain their psychological health involves biased attributions. Previously, we discussed the locus of causality dimension and noted the differences between internal and external attributions. Although this dimension is germane to the current topic, there are other attributional dimensions that play a role in the maintenance of psychological health. These dimensions have been termed stability and controllability (Weiner, 1979, 1980).

The stability dimension concerns the extent to which an individual believes that a behavior was due to features that are variant. Stable attributions reflect the belief that a behavior was caused by permanent or near permanent personality traits or environmental features. The belief that an athlete performed well because of his or her ability would be classified as a stable attribution. Unstable attributions reflect the belief that a behavior was caused by variable traits

or environmental features. The perception that a player performed poorly because he or she had the flu reflects an unstable attribution.

The second dimension, controllability, concerns the extent to which an individual believes that the cause of a behavior was under the voluntary control of the individual. Controllable attributions reflect the belief that the individual had control over the behavior, while uncontrollable attributions reflect the belief that a behavior was beyond the control of the actor. For example, the belief that a player performed poorly because she or he did not exert enough effort would be classified as a controllable attribution (athletes typically have voluntary control over their level of effort). Conversely, the perception that a poor performance was caused by a lack of natural ability would be classified as an uncontrollable attribution (natural ability is a given).

The self-serving bias • Strategic use of the aforementioned attributions may help individuals maintain their psychological well-being. One such strategy, referred to as the self-serving bias (D. T. Miller & Ross, 1975), involves an attributional pattern in which individuals externalize failures (an ego-protecting component) while internalizing successes (an ego-enhancing component). As applied to sport fans and spectators, the self-serving bias implies that fans will often use internal attributions to explain their team's victories (e.g., they won because they are talented, intelligent, put forth a high level of effort, etc.), but assign external causes to account for their team's defeats (e.g., they were defeated because the other team was too skillful, the referees were biased, etc.).

A number of studies have found support for the self-serving bias among sport spectators (Lau, 1984; Lau & Russell, 1980; Mann, 1974; Tanner, Sevrer, & Ungar, 1989; Winkler & Taylor, 1979). Perhaps the most often cited study was conducted by Hastorf and Cantril (1954). In this study, Dartmouth University and Princeton University students were asked to describe a football game involving the two schools. The spectators' descriptions of the game revealed a biased pattern of attributions. For example, while 25 percent of the Dartmouth supporters classified the game as "rough but fair," only 2 percent of the Princeton fans viewed the game in the same way. Instead, the Princeton fans saw the game as "rough and dirty." Further, when asked whether Dartmouth had intentionally injured Princeton's star player, only 10 percent of the Dartmouth supporters agreed with the accusation. Conversely, 55 percent of the Princeton fans reported that the injury was intentional. Hastorf and Cantril concluded that supporters for the two teams observed two different games.

Thus, sport fans may use the self-serving bias to help maintain their psychological well-being by forming internal attributions when the team plays well and external attributions to account for the team's poor play. In this manner, fans can enhance their well-being after victories and protect their well-being after defeats. However, research indicates that the self-serving bias is not found among all spectators. Rather, only those with a high degree of team identification utilize this strategy; lowly identified persons tend not to engage in self-serving attributions (Branscombe, N'gbala, Kobryniewicz, & Wann, 1997; J. R. Grove, Hanrahan, & McInman, 1991; Wann, 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Wilson, in press). Because the psychological well-being of highly identified fans is related to their team's performances, these fans have the most to gain through biased beliefs about the causes of an outcome. Indeed, this line of reasoning is consistent with research suggesting that highly identified fans generate a particularly large number of potential explanations for their teams's performance (Wann & Wilson, in press).

Two recent studies highlight the relationship between level of team identification and use of the self-serving bias. In the first study, conducted by Wann and Dolan (1994a), college students met prior to one of two basketball games involving their university's men's team: a home team win and a home team loss. The participants were asked to complete the SSIS and then watched the contest. At the conclusion of the game, the respondents completed a questionnaire assessing their attributions of the game's outcome. The questionnaire assessed both internal attributions (i.e., the outcome was due to the home team or to the home crowd) and external attributions (i.e., the outcome was due to the opponent, the referees, or luck). As expected, spectators formed internal attributions following a win and external attributions after a loss. However, these self-serving attributions were only exhibited by highly identified fans.

Although most work on the self-serving bias has focused on the locus of causality dimension, the stability and controllability dimensions may also be used in a self-serving manner. The self-serving use of these dimensions was demonstrated by Wann and Schrader (in press). College students were asked to attend a win or a loss by their university's men's basketball team. Immediately following the conclusion of the contest, they completed a questionnaire packet that assessed their level of identification with the basketball team and their attributions for the outcome of the game. The attribution items examined the extent to which the participants believed that the outcome was due to internal or external factors (i.e., locus of causality), stable or

unstable factors, and controllable or uncontrollable factors. Consistent with past research, the participants reported a self-serving attributional pattern. For instance, when explaining the team's successful performance, the respondents relied on internal, stable, and controllable attributions. However, these self-serving attributions were only reported by highly identified fans. It should also be noted that the self-serving attributions of the highly identified fans were most prevalent after the team was victorious (see also Wann & Dolan, 1994a). This finding suggests that highly identified fans are more likely to use the self-serving bias to enhance rather than protect their self-esteem.

The Maintenance of Psychological Health through Biased Recollections and Predictions of the Team's Performance A third method sport fans employ to help maintain their psychological well-being is to develop biased predictions and recollections of their team's performances (Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Wann, 1996). That is, fans protect and enhance their psychological health by believing that their team performed well in the past and will continue this success in the future. Once again, these biased evaluations of team performance are more common among highly identified fans than those low in team identification (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Hirt et al., 1992; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). For instance, consider the research by Wann and Dolan (1994b). In this study, college students were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing their level of identification with the university's men's basketball team (using the SSIS). The questionnaire also asked the participants to estimate the number of games the team had won during the previous season and the number of games they would win in the current season. Respondents were to base their estimates on a 30-game season. As expected, the highly identified participants were more biased in their estimates than were lowly identified participants. Those high in identification estimated that the team had won 20.4 games during the previous season and that they would win 19.1 games during the current season (both estimates were higher than the actual number of wins, as the team had won 17 games during the previous season and would win 18 during the current season). However, those low in identification estimated the wins to be only 18.7 and 17.6 for the past and current seasons, respectively. Wann (1994a) was able to replicate these biased estimates among highly identified fans of a historically unsuccessful college football team.

The literature cited here is strong evidence that highly identified fans use biased predictions and recollections to help cope with

threats to their psychological well-being. However, to fully understand the relationship between performance estimates, team identification, and psychological health, one must also consider the length of time since the team's last contest. The importance of this variable was highlighted in the aforementioned research by Hirt et al. (1992; see also Hirt & Ryalls, 1994). Recall that in this project college students watched one of their school's men's basketball games and then completed a questionnaire assessing their psychological health (e.g., depression, estimates of social skills, etc.). Subsequent to watching the contest, the participants were also asked to estimate the team's future performances. The data revealed that the estimates of highly identified fans were strongly influenced by the team's performance in the game they had just witnessed. The outcome had no effect on the estimates of lowly identified fans. When the team was victorious, highly identified respondents were quite positive about the team's future. Conversely, and in opposition to the data just described (e.g., Wann, 1994a; Wann & Dolan, 1994b), these persons were quite negative about their team's future subsequent to watching them lose. This finding reflects the depression and negative affect highly identified fans experience when their team performs poorly. However, after a certain amount of time has passed (the exact amount of time is not currently known), they begin to adjust their estimates in a manner that is biased in favor of their team. In this way, they get beyond the team's poor performance and return to a positive state of psychological health.

The Maintenance of Psychological Health through Ingroup Favoritism A final method fans utilize to help maintain their psychological health is through biased perceptions of supporters of their team and rival teams. Fans may be able to deflect some of the negative impact of their team's losses by believing that "our team may have lost the game, but our fans are still better than your fans." Certainly, this "ingroup favoritism effect" has been well-documented in general social psychology (e.g., Brewer, 1979; Gerald & Hoyt, 1974; J. W. Howard & Rothbart, 1980). With respect to research on sport fans, a number of authors have found that fans possess a more favorable impression of fellow fans than rival fans (Franco & Maass, 1996; Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, & Leggett, 1996). In fact, Sage (1996) argues that professional sport teams in the United States often attempt to capitalize on the ingroup bias by marketing their team as "patriotic." For instance, team logos often involve nationalistic colors (i.e., red, white, and blue). Sage notes that this marketing strategy is rather hypocriti-

cal in light of the fact that the merchandise used to present these "patriotic" logos is often manufactured in foreign countries!

Research suggests that highly identified fans are especially likely to possess a biased perception of fellow fans (Wann & Branscombe, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Wann & Dolan, 1994c; but see also Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993). Wann and Branscombe (1995a) placed college students into one of two groups based on their responses to the SSIS: highly identified with the university's men's basketball team or lowly identified with the team. The participants were asked to list the positive, negative, and neutral traits, characteristics, and attributes they believed best described fellow fans of the team. The respondents were asked to generate a similar list they believed to be descriptive of fans of a rival team. The findings revealed a rather complex pattern of results. The most favorable descriptions (i.e., the largest percentage of positive traits) were provided by highly identified participants describing fellow fans. The highly identified participants also reported a significantly higher percentage of negative traits when asked to describe the outgroup. This trend was absent among lowly identified fans.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

In this chapter, we examined the impact of sport fandom on the psychological well-being of the individual fan. We began by critiquing four microlevel criticisms of sport fans and spectators (i.e., they are lazy, overly aggressive, adopt negative values and maladaptive behaviors, and have poor interpersonal relationships). Using empirical analyses to evaluate the merits of these hypothesized psychological costs of sport fandom, the following conclusions appear warranted. First, each criticism of sport fandom can probably be supported anecdotally. For instance, some fans do consume large amounts of alcohol (W. O. Johnson, 1988; Stainback, 1997; Wolfe, Martinez, & Scott, 1998). Similarly, high levels of sport involvement have led to marital problems for some fans (Quirk, 1997; G. J. Smith et al., 1981). Further, some fans do become violent when watching their favorite team compete. However, the existing data indicate that these problems are the exception rather than the rule—most fans do not have a drinking problem, marital strife, or violent tendencies. Thus, it appears that the pastime is a harmless leisure activity.

We also investigated the possibility that, rather than having a detrimental effect on a fan's psychological health, sport fandom (or, more specifically, identification with a local team) actually facilitates

one's psychological well-being. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that strong attachments to a geographically close sport team is positively (albeit modestly) related to a number of indexes of psychological stability, including personal and collective self-esteem, affective expression, alienation, and vigor. In light of the fact that sport fans are often bitterly disappointed by their favorite team's poor performance, the finding that highly allegiant fans generally possess a sound psychological makeup may well be the most compelling paradox in all of sport spectating. It would seem more logical for these persons to possess an unhealthy and perhaps fragile psychological profile. Clearly then, highly identified fans must find ways to protect and even enhance their psychological health in the face of constant threats to a highly valued and central component of their self and their social identity. Although we addressed a number of possible methods employed to maintain a state of psychological well-being, more research is needed before we arrive at a complete understanding of the mechanisms through which highly identified sport fans ensure that their spectating activity is personally beneficial.