

Title: The positive relationship between sport team identification and belief in the trustworthiness of others.

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The current investigation examined the relationship between team identification and beliefs in the trustworthiness of others. Based on the Team Identification--Social Psychological Health Model (Wann, 2006), it was hypothesized that a positive relationship would emerge between these two variables. The hypothesis was tested by asking 127 university students to complete a questionnaire packet assessing level of identification with a local collegiate basketball team and a measure assessing the trustworthiness of others. Consistent with predictions, a significant correlation between identification and beliefs in trust was found.

Social scientific research (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Linville, 1987) has documented the psychological benefits of membership in a variety of groups including religious organizations (Diener & Clifton, 2002), school peer groups (Brown & Lohr, 1987), and the deaf community (Bat-Chava, 1994). In fact, this effect is so profound that Compton (2005, p. 48) concluded that "positive social relationships" were one of the "core variables that best predict happiness and satisfaction with life." Recently, sport scientists have suggested that a similar pattern should emerge for sport fans (Melnick, 1993; Smith, 1988; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). To explain the relationship between sport fandom and identification, Wann (2006) recently presented a theoretical framework labeled the Team Identification--Social Psychological Health Model. According to this perspective, identification with a salient sport team (but not mere sport fandom per se, see Wann, 2006) will be correlated with social psychological health because it will result in increased social connections with others (team identification is defined as the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team, see Wann et al., 2001). The increased social connections are then predicted to result in positive levels of well-being.

Empirical evidence for Wann's (2006) model is quite strong. In fact, over the last 20 years, research indicates that high levels of identification with teams with readily available social connections are associated with many indices of social well-being, including lower levels of loneliness and alienation, and higher levels of collective self-esteem, personal self-esteem, frequency of experiencing positive emotions, extroversion, conscientiousness, and social life satisfaction (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, Dimmock, & Grove, 2003; see Wann, 2006, for a complete review of this literature).

In the current study, we extended prior work on the relationship between team identification and well-being by documenting the correlation between identification and beliefs in the trustworthiness of others, another dimension of well-being. According to Keyes (1998), trust in others is a component of the social acceptance dimension of social well-being. If team identification does lead to increased social connections, it stands to reason that persons would feel good about those connections and evaluate them in a positive way, such as viewing members of society as trustworthy (for additional discussions of social connections, social capital, and trust in others, see Maynard & Kleiber, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Thus, it was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between level of identification with a team and beliefs in the trustworthiness of others.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 127 Murray State University students (31 male, 96 female) receiving extra college course credit. Subjects had a mean age of 20.65 years (SD = 3.66; range = 18 to 47). Well over 90% of the participants were Caucasian (European/Anglo American).

Materials and Procedure

Upon entering the testing room and providing their consent, participants (tested in groups) completed a questionnaire packet containing three sections. Section one contained demographic items assessing age and gender. Section two contained the seven-item Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), a Likert-scale measure assessing identification with a sport team. Response options were from 1 (low identification) to 8 (high identification). Wann and Branscombe presented data indicating that the identification scale is a highly reliable (e.g., Cronbach's alpha ranged from .91 to .93) and valid instrument (see Wann et al., 2001). Subjects were asked to target their university's men's basketball team when completing this scale (e.g., "How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of the M.S.U. basketball team?").

Section three contained the Doubt about the Trustworthiness of People Scale (DTPS) from the Social Life Feeling Scale (Scheussler, 1982). The DTPS contains eight items to which participants answer either "agree" or "disagree" and assesses the extent to which individuals believe that others are fair, honest, and trustworthy. A sample item reads, "It is hard to figure out who you can really trust these days." Responses were coded as either "1" or "2" in such a manner that higher numbers indicated greater levels of trust in others. Scheussler (1982) reports a reliability of .80 for the scale.

After the participants had completed their questionnaire packet (approximately 10 minutes), they returned it to the researcher who handed them a debriefing statement. This statement disclosed the purposes and hypotheses of the study and contained information on contacting the author for a report of the research. Once each participant had received the debriefing statement, he or she was excused from the testing session.

RESULTS

The items comprising the SSIS (Cronbach's alpha = .95) were combined to form a single index of identification ($M = 21.84$, $SD = 12.44$, actual range = 7 to 55, potential range = 7 to 56). The items comprising the DTPS (alpha = .80) were combined to form a single index of beliefs in the trustworthiness of others ($M = 11.11$, $SD = 2.43$, actual range = 8 to 16, potential range = 8 to 16). Gender differences in identification and trustworthiness were examined using analyses of variance. The analysis on identification scores indicated that males ($M = 22.55$, $SD = 11.09$) and females ($M = 21.62$, $SD = 12.89$) did not differ, $F(1, 125) = 0.13$, $p = .72$. Similarly, the analysis of beliefs on the trustworthiness of others failed to find differences between males ($M = 11.07$, $SD = 2.48$) and females ($M = 11.13$, $SD = 2.43$), $F(1, 125) = 0.01$, $p = .91$. Thus, all additional analyses were conducted across gender.

The hypothesized relationship between level of team identification and beliefs in the trustworthiness of others was examined via a correlational analysis. In support of the hypothesized pattern of effects, this analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between identification and trust, $r(125) = .198$, $p = .026$.

DISCUSSION

As expected, the data revealed a significant correlation between team identification and belief in the trustworthiness of others. This effect is consistent with Wann's (2006) Team Identification--Social Psychological Health Model and extends prior work documenting the relationship between team identification and well-being (e.g., Wann et al., 2003). Two points warrant mention here. First, Wann notes that, consistent with work in other areas of social psychology (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), previous research on sport fans has revealed that team identification is more consistently related to social measures of well-being (e.g., loneliness) than personal well-being (e.g., depression; see Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2003). Thus, one should expect the significant findings here, given that trust in others is typically viewed as a dimension of social well-being (Keyes, 1998). Had we assessed one's own trustworthiness (a personal variable), the results would likely have been different.

Second, it is important to note that the Team Identification--Social Psychological Health Model (Wann, 2006) predicts that team identification can lead to two different forms of social connections: enduring and temporary. According to the model, enduring social connections will be established when a fan resides in a community that supports the team in question and, consequently, the social connections are readily available (e.g., a fan who roots for the New York Yankees professional baseball team who lives in New York City). Temporary social connections are thought to occur when individuals not residing in such an environment find themselves in the company of other fans of the team (e.g., a fan who roots for the New York Yankees professional baseball team who lives in Boston but watches Yankees games on television with several of his or her friends who are also Yankees fans). According to Wann's framework, enduring social connections are expected to result in trait (e.g., chronic) levels of social well-being while temporary social connections are hypothesized to lead to an increase in state (i.e., momentary) levels of well-being. In the current investigation, because the target team involved the local university's team, and hence, we were investigating

enduring connections, it was appropriate to assess trait levels of beliefs in the trustworthiness of others. Had we been interested in temporary social connections, it would have been more appropriate to assess state levels of trust in others.

It also warrants mention that the measure of trust used in the current study assessed general beliefs in the trustworthiness of others. That is, individuals were not asked to comment on the trustworthiness of any particular group, such as fellow fans of their team. Rather, they were asked to evaluate people in general. This is an important distinction given the rather impressive body of literature indicating an in-group bias among fans in which they view fellow fans in a more positive fashion than they perceive fans of rival teams (Platow et al., 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1995; Wann & Dolan, 1994). Based on this literature, one would expect highly identified fans to perceive fellow in-group fans as a trustworthy set of individuals, at least more trustworthy than rival fans. In the current research, however, highly identified fans were not simply stating that other fans of their team were trustworthy but, rather, all individuals were trustworthy. Thus, the data reported above are not simply a function of in-group bias but instead reflect another domain of social psychological well-being (Keyes, 1998) that is significantly related to team identification.

However, the discussion of an in-group bias in beliefs about the trustworthiness of others does lead to an interesting suggestion for future research. Specifically, as noted, previous research indicates that highly identified fans view fellow fans in a particularly favorable light. Additionally, the work being reported here indicates a positive relationship between identification and general beliefs in the trustworthiness of others. Future researchers should attempt to elaborate on these relationships by asking participants to complete the Doubt about the Trustworthiness of People Scale specifically targeting certain fan groups. For instance, respondents could complete the scale for fans of their team, fans of a neutral team, and fans of a rival team. One could hypothesize that there would be a particularly strong relationship between level of identification and fans of their team, a modest relationship with fans of a neutral team, and no relationship with fans of a rival team. In fact, it would not be surprising to find a negative relationship between team identification and perceptions of the trustworthiness of rival fans, given the strong negative perceptions fans can hold for supporters of rival teams (Wann & Grieve, 2005).

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