

**Does High ID mean Hostility? Comparing Behavioral Responses of Collective Narcissists and Highly Identified Fans**

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**25-minute oral presentation**

**(including questions)**

Team identification is among the most widely studied constructs by sport consumer behavior scholars. This is likely rooted in the fact that highly identified fans have shown significantly higher purchase intentions than those low or moderate on team identification, including a greater propensity to attend games, purchase team merchandise and generally higher behavioral loyalty (Wann et al., 2001). Despite these positive outcomes, scholars have argued that this segment has a proclivity to display significantly greater aggression (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wakefield & Wann, 2006), likely as a result of their greater passion for the team and increased centrality of the team to their self-concept. Nevertheless, while scholars have found consistent evidence of an ingroup bias or favoritism on the part of highly identified fans, no evidence of outgroup negativity in the context of rivalries has been found across numerous studies (e.g., Smith & Schwarz, 2003; Wann & Dolan, 1994), a paradox with critical research implications. Indeed, this is curious given that we have seen repeated instances of fan-on-fan violence at sporting events, particularly amongst fans of rival teams, sometimes even resulting in death (Bender, Gomez, & Melvin, 2013). If not highly identified fans that are responsible for such tragic outcomes, then who?

Wakefield and Wann (2006) argued that it is a subset of highly identified fans that are responsible for such behavior, a subset they labeled as “dysfunctional fans.” In the current study, we take this a step further in arguing that it is collective narcissists that are the likely culprits. Collective narcissism is an exaggerated and insecure collective self-esteem that produces an inflated and grandiose image of an ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Individuals who identify in this manner are believed to be emotionally invested in an excessive image of an ingroup, an image that requires chronic validation and is particularly vulnerable to any and all challenges from both inside and outside the group (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Because collective narcissists hold on to this grandiose image so tightly, collective narcissism has been shown to be a strong predictor of intergroup attitudes and relations (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Collective narcissists have been shown to be unwilling to forgive and forget past slights and unfairness, both real and perceived, and they’ve been shown to hold prejudice against certain groups with whom they share a tenuous history (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). In fact, specific outgroups are often targeted and perceived as consistently threatening (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). Accordingly, these groups are regularly met with hostile responses. The magnitude of one’s collective narcissism increases following a negative evaluation of an ingroup (Golec de Zavala, 2011). Such evaluation is typically interpreted as a threat and is met with hostility and unwavering defense. These hostile reactions might include violent and coercive acts even in ambiguous situations (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). This construct has been studied extensively in the context of individuals’ national identities and international relations. While it has never been studied in the context of sport fandom, we believe it has a great deal of relevance and can add to the understanding of aggressive and dysfunctional sport fan behavior. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are offered:

**H1:** Collective narcissists will be significantly more likely than mere highly identified fans to interpret ambiguous comments made about the team as (a) threatening, and respond by (b) derogating the source, and (c) expressing aggression intentions, but only when the source of such comments is a rival as opposed to a neutral party

**H2:** Collective narcissists will be significantly more likely than mere highly identified fans to interpret critical comments made about the team as (a) threatening, and respond by (b) derogating the source, and (c) expressing aggression intentions regardless of whether the source of such comments is a rival or a neutral party

To investigate these hypotheses, a study involving team criticism in the context of the National Football League’s New England Patriots was conducted. Across two studies, participants were randomly assigned to one of two

comment source conditions in a 2 (Source of Comments: Rival vs. Neutral) x 2 (Fan Type: Collective Narcissists vs. Highly Identified) design. In the first study (designed to test H1), fans were asked to read an article that was ambiguous in nature (i.e., it was not intended as a criticism, but conceivably could be interpreted as such by some fans). This article was simply a report from the Associated Press on what transpired in the court room when the judge did not believe Patriots' Quarterback Tom Brady's appeal. Fans were either told this was written by a USA Today writer (neutral) or an Indianapolis Colts beat writer (rival). Subsequently, participants were asked to complete a survey containing measures of collective narcissism, team identification, and the three aforementioned dependent variables. Fan Type was determined using a median split. The second study used the exact same procedure, but exposed participants to an article that was legitimately critical in nature. It was a scathing column casting the Patriots as perpetual cheaters. In both studies, a confirmatory factor analysis was completed to assess the fit of the measurement model. Adequate model fit was achieved per widely accepted SEM Guidelines (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999) in both cases. In addition, convergent validity was displayed with all AVE values exceeding the 0.50 cutoff and discriminant validity per Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria. In the first study, the results of the two-way MANOVA revealed that the hypothesized interaction effect was not significant for Perception of Threat ( $F_{(1,210)} = .00518, p = .943$ ), Derogation ( $F_{(1,210)} = .51769, p = .473$ ), or Aggression Intention ( $F_{(1,210)} = 1.45, p = .230$ ). Therefore, H1 (a, b, and c) was not supported. However, the MANOVA results did reveal a significant main effect of Fan Type on Perception of Threat ( $F_{(1,210)} = 53.49, p < .001$ ), Derogation ( $F_{(1,210)} = 16.80, p < .001$ ), and Aggression Intention ( $F_{(1,210)} = 33.08, p < .001$ ). In short, collective narcissists showed a greater tendency to perceive the comments as a threat, derogate the source, and exhibit greater aggression intentions, regardless of whether the comments came from a rival or neutral party. This same pattern was repeated in Study 2, as was hypothesized in H2a, b, and c. There was a significant main effect of Fan Type on Perception of Threat ( $F_{(1,212)} = 35.181, p < .001$ ), Derogation ( $F_{(1,212)} = 19.56, p < .001$ ), and Aggression Intention ( $F_{(1,212)} = 33.390, p < .001$ ), but no interaction effect was found.

These findings extend the literature on team identification and fan aggression. Rather than the general conclusion that aggression stems from a mere subset of highly identified fans, the current findings underscore the notion that it may be the *type* of identification exhibited by these fans—the collectively narcissistic aspect—that is responsible for such behavior. We extend this literature and also answer Branscombe and Wann's (1992) call for research examining unmeasured variations in team identification that may be responsible for conflicting results in past studies. Practically speaking, the current study illustrates the role of the media in priming collective narcissism and the subsequent hostile and aggressive responses on the part of fans.

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