Chapter 23
Rivalry In and Out of Sport:
An Essay on How Sport Rivalry Can Teach People About Group Behavior and Group Member Relations

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ABSTRACT

The current chapter offers (1) an overview of what is known regarding sport rivalry and (2) how that knowledge can be applied to both sport and non-sport settings. In particular, the authors discuss what is known about rivalry and intergroup relations, detailing specific examples from the sport setting. Then, the essay addresses how non-sport organizations, and society at large, can benefit from the literature on sport rivalry. Included in this are examples of responsible promotion of rivalry and group competition, along with a discussion of the Adventures with Sport Rivalry Man comics, cartoons, and curriculum, a program intended to teach people about rivalry and appropriate behavior toward others. Suggestions for responsibly promoting rivalry and competition outside of the sport setting are offered along with areas for future consideration. Finally, a challenge is presented to future researchers and practitioners to improve the use of rivalry to promote products and decrease group member deviance.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of each college football season in the United States, fans prepare and cheer for the heavily promoted "Rivalry Week". This is not to say that the final full weekend of the college football regular season is the only time rivalry games are played, for example, the Texas Longhorns and Oklahoma Sooners play their annual rivalry game in October, and in 2018 met again in the conference championship game. However, the final full of the season in particular is filled with matchups between teams either bidding for interstate or intrastate bragging rights, and the games often carry post-season implications. Supporters of the teams competing in rivalry games, not just during "Rivalry Week", use the outcomes of the contests to say something about themselves and how their groups compare to others. Many times,

office water cooler bragging rights for the next year, family bragging rights, and hopefully friendly banter is on the line when rival teams compete.

After all, rivalry adds an elevated level of interest to sport and can provide a lot of entertainment to the fans that treat it as such. For instance, people are more likely to attend (Havard, Shapiro, & Ridinger, 2016), pay higher ticket prices to attend (Sanford & Scott, 2016), watch on television (Havard, Eddy, & Ryan, 2016), read about, and wear favorite team merchandise for a rivalry game than a non-rivalry game (Havard, Eddy, & Ryan, 2016; Havard, Shapiro, & Ridinger, 2016; Sanford & Scott, 2016). Further, fans are more likely to consume when playing a main or primary rival than a secondary rival (Havard, & Hutchinson, 2017). However, fans that allow their group identification and membership to supersede their need to react rationally in situations can carry very negative consequences for herself or himself, for other fans, for the organizations and teams, and even for society at large. For example, over multiple studies in various method settings, one to two percent of respondents indicated they would definitely consider either physically harming or even murdering a participant or fan of a rival team if they could remain anonymous and there was no way they would get into trouble (Havard, Wann, & Ryan, 2013, 2017; Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003; Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999; Wann & Waddill, 2013).

So, how can rivalry in sport teach inform us about group member behavior and in-group bias/out-group derogation[1]? For example, how can what we know about rivalries in sport teach us about group competition and rivalries in other settings such as politics and business. Further, can the group member behavior and group competition we see in sport inform us about situations where numerous groups exist, such as race relations, religious factions, and the like? Finally, can sport help shed light on how language, group behavior, and group promotion impact individuals? And can sport show us that messaging can help alleviate negative views between groups and group members? The current chapter seeks to address these questions by first discussing what is known about rivalry in the area of sport and how this information can be used by practitioners in the non-sport setting. Next, the chapter identifies ways to possibly alleviate societally deviant behavior between out-group members, in both sport and non-sport settings. The current chapter introduces Sport Rivalry Man and discusses a project in which comic strips are used to teach about rivalry and appropriate group member behavior before calling future research in the area of rivalry and group member behavior.

BACKGROUND

What the Literature Tells us About Rivalry

Social identity states that a person seeks membership in groups that are going to reflect positively on them (Tajfel, 1978). In short, we identify as a member of groups we feel will positively reflect on us, thereby making us feel better ourselves, and giving others a positive view of us. For instance, if a person wants to be perceived by others as having specific positive characteristics such as hard work or the *blue-collar mentality*, they will seek membership in a group they believe embodies those attributes. A person who views themselves in this manner may choose to follow a team such as the Pittsburgh Steelers, known for the cities' work ethic in the steel industry. Likewise, someone living in the state of Nebraska may identify with the Cornhuskers football and athletic teams as a way to keep them rooted to their state and ideas of hard work and perseverance (Aden, 2008).

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