

## **An Examination of Dysfunctional Sport Fans: Method of Classification and Relationships with Problem Behaviors**

Kirk L. Wakefield  
Hankamer School of Business  
Baylor University  
Daniel L. Wann  
Department of Psychology  
Murray State University

Past examinations of highly identified sports fans have typically focused on the positive aspects of identification with the team in terms of attitudes, participation, attendance at events, merchandise purchases, and other pro-team related behaviors. The current research, however, investigates the dark side of what may be seen as excessive fan identification—characterized by dysfunctional behaviors such as excessive complaining and confronting others at sporting events. This study presents a measure useful in classifying highly identified fans in terms of their dysfunctional nature and delineates associated problem behaviors (viz., event drinking, blasting officials, aberrant media consumption) and differentiating individual characteristics.

**KEYWORDS:** *Identification, sports, violence, alcohol, fan attendance.*

### Introduction and Literature Review

Recently, a number of social scientists interested in the psychology and management of sport spectators have turned their attention to fans' level of team identification. Team identification concerns the degree that the fan views the team as an extension of self-identity, that is, the extent to which the fan feels a psychological connection to the team (Trail, Fink and Anderson, 2003; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). Psychology and management professionals have examined a number of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses that are linked to team identification. Many of these investigations have targeted the benefits of team identification for the individual fan, the team, and the community as a whole.

With respect to individual benefits of team identification, recent studies have found a positive relationship between level of team identification with a local team and social psychological well-being because the identification provides an important connection to society at large (Wann et al., 2001). For instance, Wann (1994) found that levels of team identification were positively correlated with collective (i.e., social) self-esteem while Branscombe and Wann (1991) reported data indicating that team identification was negatively related to loneliness and alienation. More recently, Wann, Dunham,

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Address correspondence to: Kirk L. Wakefield, Department of Marketing, Baylor University, PO Box 98007, Waco, Texas 76798. Email: [Kirk\\_Wakefield@Baylor.edu](mailto:Kirk_Wakefield@Baylor.edu).

Byrd, and Keenan (2004) found that team identification was positively correlated with extroversion. Although the majority of work in this area has targeted U.S. college basketball fans, Wann, Dimmock, and Grove (in press) were able to replicate the aforementioned relationships in an Australian sample targeting Australian Rules Football. Madrigal (2003) found that highly identified fans who are more satisfied with game performances and outcomes are more optimistic about the future performances of the team.

As for benefits to the team, recent research in sport marketing and management indicates that team identification is related to both attendance and merchandise purchasing. With respect to attendance, work by a number of authors indicates the importance of team identification in spectators' attendance decisions (e.g., Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Madrigal 1995; Pease & Zhang, 1996; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; Wakefield, 1995). In summary, this body of research indicates that team identification is one of the best predictors of sporting event attendance (i.e., greater levels of team identification predict more frequent attendance). As for merchandise purchases, research indicates that team identification is positively correlated with this form of consumption as well. For example, Kwon and Armstrong (2002) investigated impulse buying of team-licensed merchandise. Based on a review of the impulse buying and sport consumption literatures, these researchers predicted that four factors would predict impulse buying: shopping enjoyment, time availability, money availability, and team identification. However, in contrast to their predictions, their data indicated that only team identification was a significant predictor of impulse purchasing. Similarly, in a study of college football fans, Madrigal (2000) found that fans are more likely to purchase products associated with team sponsors if they are highly identified with the team. Gibson, Willming and Holdnak (2002) found that highly identified Florida Gator fans typically wear blue and orange earrings, shoes, shirts, hats, and shorts—perhaps the entire week during football season—as a consequence of their identification with the team.

Finally, social scientists have also suggested that sport team identification can be beneficial to communities as a whole by encouraging and strengthening community integration (Lever, 1983; Melnick, 1993; Wilkerson & Dodder, 1987). Wann and his colleagues (2001) have suggested a number of levels in which sport fandom and team identification can assist in integration. For instance, team loyalty aids in the integration of individual communities, towns, and cities (e.g., high school football on Friday nights in Texas) as well as on a larger scale at the state (e.g., Indiana state high school basketball championship), national (e.g., the Superbowl and World Series), and international levels (e.g., the Olympic Games and World Cup Soccer).

Thus, it appears that there are a number of tangible benefits to high degrees of team identification. Consequently, both team management personnel (e.g., professional team general managers and scholastic/collegiate team athletic directors) and communities in general likely desire a large number of individuals who are highly identified with their team. Such indi-

viduals tend to be psychologically healthy, involved in the community, and consume the sport in question via game attendance and team merchandise purchases. However, a trip to most any sporting venue reveals that there is a darker side to high levels of team identification.

Although the majority of highly identified fans attending sporting events are well-behaved and act in a manner consistent with society's standards of conduct at games, a handful of these persons appear to be overly zealous and abusive. In their study of highly identified Florida Gator fans, Gibson et al. (2002) found a few who were abusive to opposing fans and noted that "these fans have arguably taken identification to the extremes and are not representative of all of the fans in this study." We refer to such highly identified fans as dysfunctional fans. In psychological terms, dysfunctional fans are abnormal or have impaired functioning as it relates to socialization and social groups in the sports context. Aggressive behavior directed at others in the form of verbal abuse is typical of those who are clinically diagnosed as socially dysfunctional (cf., Sjoestroem, Eder, Malm, & Beskow, 2001). Social dysfunction often leads to other forms of aggressive behavior and violence (Bech, 1994), as has been evidenced at sporting events. In the sports context, dysfunctional fans are no more highly identified with their team than other loyal fans who are not dysfunctional, yet these persons are highly confrontational and tend to frequently complain about a variety of components of the sporting environment (e.g., the decisions of officials and coaches). These persons are often loud and obnoxious at sporting events, freely and readily directing their anger toward other fans, players, and officials. These are the kinds of fans who obsess over the performance of the team to the point of actively seeking out forums such as sports radio talk shows, website forums and the like to express their viewpoints. In this sense, their participation and identification with the team goes beyond passive spectating to something approaching or beyond serious leisure (*viz.*, Gibson et al., 2002; Stebbins, 2001), given that these individuals appear to that make a career out of engaging in confrontational behaviors extending well beyond the arena or stadium walls on game days.

Therefore, the focus of the current investigation was two-fold. First, we developed an instrument designed to assess the degree of dysfunctionality among sport fans (i.e., the extent to which they are confrontational and complaining). Such a measure needed to be separate from (but correlated with) team identification because we believe that although these two variables should be positively related, highly identified fans will differ in their degree to which they are dysfunctional. Second, using the dysfunctionality scale, two groups of fans could be established: highly identified fans with low dysfunctionality (i.e., persons who rarely if ever complain and are rarely if ever confrontational) and highly identified persons with a high level of dysfunctionality. We then used these two groups to test a series of predictions concerning various behaviors exhibited by these individuals, as well as demographic differences (e.g., gender, marital status) that differentiate high and low dysfunctional fans.

*Behavioral Differences in Highly Identified Dysfunctional vs. Non-Dysfunctional Fans*

First, we expected that the highly dysfunctional fans would be more likely to be verbally aggressive toward officials. Previous research indicates that highly identified fans are more likely than less identified persons to act in an aggressive fashion (Wann, 1993; Wann, Peterson, Cothran, & Dykes, 1999) and this includes actions directed at officials and referees (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999). However, we expected that highly identified dysfunctional fans to be particularly likely to report being verbally abusive to sport officials because these fans view confrontation as a natural component of the spectating experience. Armstrong and Giulianotti's (2002) work suggests that dysfunctional fans may identify specific spaces or locales, such as football stadiums, as appropriate venues for confrontations and abusive behavior. Hence, we expect that dysfunctional fans will deem blasting the referees as an acceptable behavior at the game.

Second, we expected that highly identified dysfunctional fans would be more likely to report the need to consume alcohol in the sporting environment than their highly identified low dysfunctional counterparts. Our logic here was based on the notion that dysfunctional fans may use alcohol to reduce their inhibitions and increase their confidence in acting in a dysfunctional (i.e., confrontational and complaining) manner. Nelson and Wechsler's (2003) study of collegiate sports fans suggests that these fans may be more likely to engage in a heavy drinking style than those who are not sports fans. Further, some research (Robertson, 1999) indicates that individuals engaging in delinquent leisure behavior frequently associated the use of alcohol with leisure activities.

Finally, we examined a series of sport related behaviors to determine if the two groups differ with respect to their actions as fans. Specifically, we examined the extent to which highly identified dysfunctional fans differed from highly identified low-dysfunctional fans with respect to:

1. their reports regarding the food service quality provided at the game by their home team,
2. consumption of sport via various key media outlets (i.e., radio, television, and the Internet), and
3. attendance at their team's home and road games.

We hypothesized that the behaviors reported by these two groups would differ to the extent that the behaviors of the highly dysfunctional fans would reflect a desire to voice complaints about the team (even extending to the service quality at the stadium) and engage in confrontation with others (e.g., players and other fans). For instance, consider sport talk radio. By the late 1990s, it was estimated that there were approximately 150 stations dedicated to 24-hour-a-day sport programming (Mariscal, 1999). Goldberg (1998, p. 213) referred to sport talk radio as "the church of athletic self-opinion," as a place where fans can voice their frustrations and confrontations, and com-

plaints are not only commonplace, but often the preferred method of discourse. Consequently, one should expect highly identified dysfunctional fans to be particularly interested in consuming sport talk radio and to be even more likely than low dysfunctional fans to actually call in to the programs and voice their opinions (i.e., to engage in confrontations and complaining). We also expected that traveling to away games provides an *avenue* for these fans to express their dysfunctional identity with the home team in a place where standing up and vocalizing their support for their team will very likely, if not guarantee, confrontation with others.

## Methods

### *Participants and Procedures*

Data were collected in a similar manner for each of two waves in the study. Subjects were recruited from non-student sections to participate in the study as they entered a major college football game featuring opponents from the Southeastern Conference.<sup>1</sup> From the time the gates opened until prior to the kick-off, spectators were systematically intercepted at each gate once every 60 seconds. Research assistants identified themselves as affiliated with the local university and requested the fan's name and email address for the purpose of sending them directions to an online survey to ostensibly measure fan's perceptions regarding game management. For the 216 subjects (76.6% male; 23.4% female) who did not have an email address, each was asked to complete a brief demographic survey.<sup>2</sup> In either case (with or without email address), non-response was minimal. To each of the 1029 individuals who provided an email, an email was sent within 48 hours directing them to a website containing the online survey. In this wave, 294 (28.6%) responses to the survey were received (70.4% male; 29.6% female).

As a means to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative subject online recruitment methods, the data collection method was altered in obtaining a second wave of subjects. As with the first wave, subjects were intercepted at each gate once every 60 seconds at the same stadium as the first as they attended another conference game. Each spectator intercepted was handed a small flyer (2.5" × 8.5") that invited them to visit the survey website. The instructions specified the need to identify themselves (online) as being randomly selected to complete the survey to represent the home team's fans. The response to this approach resulted in 160 responses from the 1000 flyers

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<sup>1</sup>The Southeastern Conference led the nation in attendance in 2002 with an average of 73,315 per team in the conference. For each game in which subjects were recruited for this study, attendance was at stadium capacity.

<sup>2</sup>Compared to those respondents with e-mails, individuals without e-mail addresses were significantly ( $p < .05$ ) less educated (3.8 vs. 4.5), older (43 vs. 38), but with higher incomes (3.6 vs. 2.9) and were more likely to own their home (82.5% vs. 76%) rather than rent. The two groups do not differ with respect to marital status (62%). Interestingly, those with e-mails were more likely ( $p < .01$ ) to have season tickets (75.2%) than those without e-mails (50.5%).

that were distributed. Of the 160 responses (81.4% males, 18.6% females), 104 indicated that they specifically received the flyer at the game. See Table 1 for a comparison in the response groups. As the response rate indicates, the more costly, time-intensive, personal method of emailing each respondent appears to be more effective than the oral and printed request directing individuals to participate in an online survey. In either case, these response rates compare favorably with other online recruiting methods (see Wilson & Laskey, 2003).

### Measurement

Five items were developed for this study to measure aspects of complaining (3 items) and confrontational (2 items) dysfunctional behavior ( $\alpha = .72$ ). Spectator identification with the team was measured using a scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ) developed by Wakefield (1995). Two items developed to capture elements of spectators' attitudes toward event drinking were highly correlated ( $r = .58$ ;  $\alpha = .72$ ). The items measuring dysfunctional behavior, identification, and event drinking each employed 10-point scales ranging from 1 (*inaccurate*) to 10 (*accurate*). Using the same 10-point scale (inaccurate–accurate), we measured the extent to which fans blast officials: "When the referees blow a call, I make sure they are as verbally abused as possible." Sports fan behaviors ( $\alpha = .73$ ) related to calling into talk shows, listening to sports talk radio, watching ESPN SportsCenter, visiting sports-related websites, and the home team's website were each measured with a six point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). See Table 2 for the framing and wording of each item in the multiple-item scales.

TABLE 1  
Descriptions of the Two Response Methods

Team Record		Team Note	Method	Response	Dysfunctional
Before Game	After Game			Rate	
6-2	6-3	Started 6-1	Direct e-mail	28.6% (294/1029)	4.50
6-4	7-4	Had lost 3 straight, including last game to underdog arch-rival to fall out of major bowl contention.	Flyer (randomly selected)	10.4% (104/1000)	4.91
			Others responding but not randomly selected via flyer at game	5.6% (56/1000)	5.45

<sup>a</sup>The three response groups are significantly different,  $F(2, 452) = 6.475, p < .05$ , with respect to their scores on the dysfunctional behavior items.

TABLE 2  
Factor Analysis of Scales

Factor Analysis <sup>1</sup>	Mean	SD	Dysfunctional Behavior		Team Identification	Event Drinking	Sport Behaviors	Service Quality Value
			Complain	Confront				
<i>Scale Item</i>								
I can't help but complain when there is something wrong related to the [home] team.	5.93	2.80	.743					
When a coach or player makes mistakes, I let others know about it.	5.07	2.72	.916					
I speak my mind when I see players or coaches screwing up.	4.45	2.87	.787					
I am one of those that stand up and yell even when others don't like it.	5.65	3.32		.755				
I have had confrontations with others at [home team] games when I voiced my opinion.	2.47	2.48		.789				
I am a loyal (team) fan.	9.28	1.78			.919			
I like to let people know that I am a [team] fan.	8.93	2.13			.880			
Win or lose, I will always be a [team] fan.	9.27	2.01			.909			
I think most people need to have at least a little bit of alcohol to enjoy themselves at the game.	2.52	2.46				.874		
Fans ought to be able to drink as much as they want during the game to enjoy themselves.	2.62	2.65				.853		
Call into sports talk shows.	0.53	.95					.506	
Listen to sports talk radio.	3.25	1.42					.755	
Watch ESPN SportsCenter.	3.68	1.27					.720	
Visit sports-related websites.	3.59	1.49					.768	
Visit the [home team] website.	2.77	1.73					.584	

TABLE 2  
(Continued)

Factor Analysis <sup>1</sup>			Dysfunctional Behavior		Team Identification	Event Drinking	Sport Behaviors	Service Quality Value
	Scale Item	Mean	SD	Complain	Confront			
Variety of food entrees	6.96	2.58						.696
Variety of drinks	8.77	2.15						.709
Variety of snacks and sweets	7.97	2.34						.818
Quality of food entrees	7.75	2.47						.798
Quality of drinks	9.22	1.96						.703
Quality of snacks and sweets	8.71	2.16						.836
Service provided by concessions workers	9.04	2.29						.771
Service provided by mobile food vendors	8.69	2.34						.792
Service provided by vendors in stands	8.40	2.58						.759
Appearance of permanent concessions areas	7.78	2.77						.776
Appearance of mobile vendor service areas	7.81	2.57						.822
Appearance of concessions employees	8.61	2.18						.771

<sup>1</sup>The six factors account for 69.5% of the variance in the data.

To evaluate the value of the food service provided at the games, respondents prefaced with "Given what you pay" were asked to grade (F, D-, D . . . B+, A-, A) on an 11-point scale the food and beverage variety, food and beverage quality, employee service quality and appearance of the physical facilities of the food service provided at the stadium. These 12 items ( $\alpha = .94$ , see Table 2) accounted for 88.4% of the variance in predicting respondents' overall rating of service quality value. With the same preface ("Given what you pay") respondents were asked to provide a grade on the same 11-point scale for the "overall food service quality" at the stadium. We used the overall service quality value score in our analysis.

Table 2 displays the factor analysis and item means for the multiple-item scales used to measure the constructs of interest. Each construct produced clear first-order factor loadings as expected. Second-order factor loadings between the identification scale items and the dysfunctional scale items are all low (viz., range between .102 to .288). Hence, as theorized, identification and dysfunctional behaviors are distinct, though correlated ( $r = .306$ ,  $p < .01$ ), constructs.

### *Analyses*

Based upon mean-score responses to the team identification items, individuals who reported not being highly identified (i.e.,  $<6.67$  on the 10-point scale; 30/452; 6.6% of the sample) with the home team were removed from further analysis. Of the remaining highly identified respondents ( $n = 424$ , 93.6%), individuals were classified according to their mean-score responses to the five items measuring complaining and confrontational dysfunctional behavior. Based upon one-third scale split (viz., 1.00-3.33, 3.34-6.66, 6.67-10.0), individuals were classified as low ( $n = 92$ , 22.06%), moderate ( $n = 285$ , 68.3%) and high ( $n = 75$ ; 18.0%) dysfunctional fans.

### **Results**

Table 3 displays the differences between the low and high dysfunctional groups with respect to blasting referees, event drinking, sports behaviors, stadium food service evaluations, game attendance and individual characteristics (gender, marital status, income, education, dependents at home, and home ownership). Including the middle group (neither low nor high dysfunction) in this analysis produces similar results in accordance with expectations (i.e., their scores are in-between the scores for low and high dysfunction groups). For clarity of discussion we focus on the contrasting behaviors of fans that can be classified as low or high dysfunctional fans.

### *Complaining and Drinking*

As expected, compared to less dysfunctional fans ( $M = 2.59$ ), highly dysfunctional fans ( $M = 6.31$ ) were much more likely ( $p < .01$ ) to report that they blast referees (viz., verbally abuse as much as possible) at the game

TABLE 3  
*Mean Scores and Statistical Comparisons between Low Dysfunction  
 and High Dysfunction Fans*

Behaviors & Attitudes	Low Dysfunction ( <i>n</i> = 92)	High Dysfunction ( <i>n</i> = 75)	Scale Range	F ( <i>df</i> = 1, 165)	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )
Blasting: When the referees blow a call, I make sure they are as verbally abused as possible.	2.37	6.54	1-10	37.92***	.404
Event Drinking	1.83	3.80	1-10	30.89***	.168
Service Quality Value	8.96	8.14	1-11	4.82**	.032
Sport Media Consumption $M_{(1,5)}$	2.64	3.18	0-5	21.59***	.123
1. Call in to sports talk radio	0.33	0.81	0-5	9.77***	.057
2. Listen to sports talk radio	3.10	3.67	0-5	5.55**	.029
3. Watch ESPN SportsCenter	3.41	4.13	0-5	16.30***	.083
4. Visit sports-related websites	3.10	4.13	0-5	16.50***	.101
5. Visit the team's website	2.57	3.19	0-5	5.02**	.039
Home games attended	4.94	5.09	1-6	0.301	.003
Away games attended	1.27	1.75	1-5	3.31*	.032
Demographics					
Education (some high school, High School, Some college, 2-YR degree, BA/BS, Masters, Doctorate/ MD)	4.61	4.02	1-7	8.64***	.050
Income (<\$25,000; \$25-49,999; \$50- 74,999; \$75-99,999; \$100,000+)	3.12	2.68	1-5	2.88*	.017
Age	42	33	16-67	20.43***	.110
Season ticket holder	83%	74%	0,1	1.69	
Gender (males)	61%	82%	0,1	8.56***	
Marital status (married)	77%	48%	0,1	15.02***	
Rent or own home (own)	84%	68%	0,1	5.78**	
Kids at home	47%	36%	0,1	1.96*	

\* $p \leq .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .005$

when a call is blown. Similarly, or relatedly, individuals who agreed that alcohol consumption is a necessary element of the game experience were significantly more likely ( $p < .01$ ) to be classified as highly dysfunctional fans ( $M = 3.49$ ) than less dysfunctional fans ( $M = 1.87$ ). Individuals' viewpoints regarding the need for alcohol consumption and reports of blasting referees were correlated ( $r = .410$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in this sample. Highly dysfunctional fans provided more critical (lower) stadium service quality evaluations ( $M = 8.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ) when compared to less dysfunctional fans ( $M = 8.80$ ), confirming

our hypothesis that these individuals are not only negative toward aspects of the game, but of the whole game environment.

### *Sports Media Consumption*

As anticipated, highly dysfunctional fans reported significantly higher levels ( $p < .01$ ) of consumption ( $M = 3.18$ ) in sports media that accommodate complaining and confrontational tendencies (e.g., calling and listening to sports talk radio, visiting sports and team-related websites, watching ESPN Sportscenter), than did those classified as less dysfunctional ( $M = 2.64$ ). Interestingly, although relatively few people are frequent callers to sports talk radio<sup>3</sup> in this sample ( $n = 25$ ; 5.5%) of predominantly highly identified fans, a disproportionate number of those who frequently call sports talk radio shows are highly dysfunctional ( $n = 9$ ; 36%) fans and very few could be classified as less dysfunctional fans ( $n = 3$ ; 12%). Perhaps at least as interesting, 68% of this overwhelmingly highly identified sample of fans reported *never* calling into sports talk radio shows. Of these who never call in, 82.8% can be classified as non-dysfunctional fans. Put differently, the average dysfunctional scale score for those who never call in to sports talk radio is 4.49, compared to 6.67 for those who report calling in all the time. Consequently, these results have intriguing implications regarding the makeup of the individuals who dominate the sports talk radio airwaves as callers.

### *Game Attendance*

Highly identified dysfunctional fans reported attending virtually the same ( $p = .30$ ) number of the team's six home games ( $M = 5.09$ ) as those who are less dysfunctional ( $M = 4.94$ ). As hypothesized, highly dysfunctional fans reported attending significantly ( $p = .07$ ) more away games ( $M = 1.75$ ) than low dysfunction fans ( $M = 1.27$ ).

### *Individual Differences*

In addition to the attitudes and behaviors so far elucidated, compared to the low dysfunction fan group, highly dysfunctional fans in this sample (see Table 3) can be characterized as likely to have less education (4.02 vs. 4.61;  $p < .02$ ), have lower incomes (2.68 vs. 3.12;  $p < .10$ ), be younger (33 vs. 42;  $p < .01$ ), male (82% vs. 61%,  $p < .01$ ), single (52% vs. 23%,  $p < .01$ ), apartment dwellers (32% vs. 16%,  $p < .05$ ), with no kids at home (64% vs. 53%,  $p < .10$ ). This sample was drawn from admission-paying fans (viz., not students who do not purchase tickets to receive admission at this venue).

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<sup>3</sup>Frequent callers were those responding 3, 4, or 5 on the six-point (0-5) scale regarding the frequency with which they call in to sports talk radio shows.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide an initial empirical glimpse of the highly identified dysfunctional fan—and it is not a pretty picture. As expected, we found that highly identified dysfunctional fans (compared to less dysfunctional fans) can be characterized as individuals likely to blast referees, believe alcohol consumption is a necessary game day activity, be critical of stadium services, and be frequent consumers of sports media. We address four implications of this research for managers and future researchers related to fan violence, event drinking and fan control, characterizing dysfunctional fans, and multi-phasic spectator behavior.

### *Fan Violence*

Nearly 25 years ago, Roadburg (1980) suggested that crowd violence, or hooliganism, at professional football (soccer) games would be unlikely to occur in America as it has in Europe. While this prediction may have come true with respect to soccer and crowd violence, violence at sporting events in America seems to occur as a result of acts of violence or disruption by individual fans (e.g., fan attacks a Kansas City Royals coach; man shoots and kills another man following a sports-related argument at Dodger baseball game, etc.)—rather than larger groups of hooligans who join together with the desire or intent to engage in violent acts.

Prior work (cf., Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1986; Russell, Arms, & Mustonen, 1999; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001) has focused on violent behavior of *crowds*, suggesting that violent outbursts, in large part, occur for reasons of social identity (in-group vs. out-group) and identification with the team. The findings of this study of American football fans indicate that identification with the team is not the differentiating factor predicting anti-social behavior. Rather, being anti-social seems to be a characteristic or pattern of behavior of the *individual* dysfunctional fan (likely aided by the effects of alcohol consumption) that feels compelled to express *any* frustration via complaining and confrontation with others about anything related to the game. The behavior of these dysfunctional fans does not appear to be confined to merely the game and its outcome. The dysfunctional behavior transcends into their daily activities to include calling into talk shows to complain or confront, to complete surveys to complain about the food service at the stadium, and even into their plans to take road trips to opposing venues where confrontation (for these individuals) is largely assured.

Future research would benefit from examining the effects of individual dysfunctional characteristics versus sociological group membership characteristics in explaining fan violence and hooliganism. Based upon our findings, we suspect that individuals most involved in crowd violence at sporting events have deeper, more troubling, personal characteristics (e.g., chronic anti-social attitudes and behaviors) that emerge not only in the sports setting, but likely elsewhere. In any case, we anticipate that fan violence is not so much a matter of being overly identified with the team or being extremely

high in identification, but instead is a (dys)function of other individual characteristics. Further, the understanding (and classification) of dysfunctional fandom may aid researchers in answering the question, "Where are the American hooligans?" (Wann et al., 2001, p. 148). That is, although hooliganism is found in many sport spectating contexts (e.g., Europe), it has been seemingly absent from North American venues. Roadburg's (1980) analysis indicates that there are a number of precipitating factors that differ between sport spectating in Europe and North America that influence that lack of hooliganism in North America, including that in North America, one finds modern, comfortable stadia, fixed seating, few standing fans, less crowding, and less use of mass transit to the venue. However, while it is true that these and other factors had decreased the hooliganism of North American sport spectators, it is possible that North American hooliganism simply takes a different form. That is, rather than being physically aggressive, as is the case with European hooligans, perhaps North American hooliganism manifests itself through dysfunctional fandom in the form of high levels of complaining and confrontational behavior. Consequently, we join Young (2002) in calling for a revival in research on North American fan disorder.

#### *Event Drinking and Fan Control*

Carruthers (1993) suggests that some individuals expect alcohol to reduce tension and inhibitions and to increase the sensations derived from leisure activities. This research delineates characteristics of individuals participating as spectators at sporting events who are likely to abuse alcohol to the point of disrupting the pleasure of others attempting to enjoy the same leisure activity.

This research has important implications for the NCAA and other leagues or organizations wishing to control unruly fans. The NCAA, in response to over a dozen alcohol-related violent incidents in three years, held a Sportsmanship and Fan Behavior Summit in February, 2002, to determine the role of schools in monitoring and controlling fan behavior. The findings of this study suggest that the individuals most likely to be responsible for engaging in confrontational behavior are those that also believe that alcohol consumption is an integral part of the sports fan's experience. Interestingly, in the present study, the vast majority (81.1%) of respondents to the survey disagreed that alcohol was necessary to enjoy the game experience. So, rules and regulations that prohibit alcohol consumption at sporting events is likely to be seen as disruptive to only a relatively small proportion of fans—and these fans are the ones most likely to behave in a dysfunctional fashion. For instance, of those fans who agreed that alcohol was an important part of the game experience (19.9%), 34% of these are classified as highly dysfunctional fans—which as a group, dysfunctional fans make up only about 18% of the sample. Similarly, of those reporting that they strongly believe ( $> 7.0/10$ ) that alcohol consumption is an important part of the game experience (26/454, 5.7% of the total sample), those classified as dysfunctional fans are rep-

resented over two times more than would otherwise be expected. In contrast, only one individual classified in the low dysfunction group strongly agreed with the alcohol consumption items in the survey. Hence, it appears that controlling alcohol and alcohol abuse by the NCAA (and perhaps other organizations) is likely to benefit the vast majority of fans and to most affect the dysfunctional fan as intended.

Sports organizations have at their disposal a variety of remedies to limit or manage dysfunctional fan behavior. Table 4 provides examples of pre-game and game-day procedures to help sports organizations control misbehaving fans. Wakefield and Sloan's (1995) study of nearly 1500 college football fans representing five major college stadium venues offers evidence that fans are more likely to want to stay at the game (rather than exit) if offensive fans were well-monitored and controlled. While not all of the procedures outlined in Table 4 will work in all venues, those sport organizations interested in improving the game experience for the vast majority of fans will be proactive in controlling fan behavior. In particular, the practice of educating fans to place cell phone calls to security when abusive fans disrupt the en-

*TABLE 4*  
*Managerial Remedies to Control Fan Behavior*

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*Game Day Procedures*

1. Strict scrutiny at gates for alcohol or other potentially harmful items (e.g., Colorado's "Competing with Class" campaign).
2. Award points or match points to opposing teams when unruly fans disrupt play (e.g., European soccer).
3. Ban or suspend fans guilty of disruptive or violent behavior (i.e., identify and track disruptive fans and don't allow them to return).
4. Limit alcohol distribution or consumption (e.g., allow sales only during early part of event).
5. Enlist fans help in identifying abusive fans (e.g., Red Sox posting of # to call via cell phone).
6. Prohibit signs, clothing or verbal assaults that denigrate rivals and ban such offenders from games.
7. Hire undercover officers and increase game day security and training at high-risk events.
8. Move [unruly] fans further from the action so as to not disrupt play (e.g., PGA) or to abuse players.
9. Issue and require wristbands for legal age drinkers to purchase or consume alcohol.

*Pre/Post Game Procedures*

1. Limit attendance in terms of total or by segments (adults, parents, students) likely to cause disruption (e.g., youth or high school games).
  2. Fines for home club and limitations on use of home venue for future matches/games (e.g., World Cup Soccer matches).
  3. Avoid scheduling rivalry games late in the day or evening (e.g., Ohio State and Michigan on Saturday night).
  4. Install and employ the use of closed circuit televisions to monitor high risk fan areas.
-

joyment of the game (as practiced by the Boston Red Sox) does three things. First, it effectively increases the monitoring and control of fans to include the majority of fans who are likely to be offended by dysfunctional fan behavior. Second, it communicates to the fans that the team cares about fan control. Third, it sends a clear message to dysfunctional fans that everyone around them has the power to get them removed from the venue.

### *Dysfunctional Fan Portrait*

The individual characteristics associated with the dysfunctional fan drawn from this study illustrates a picture of a less educated, lower income, younger, single, with no children at home, male who spends an inordinate amount of his time consuming sports media and, presumably, beer. This snapshot suggests that these individuals may lack other meaningful connections or relationships that provide direction and that promote self-control. Characteristically, the response pattern of respondents (see Table 1) suggests that some individuals, more dysfunctional in nature, are even willing to seek out unsolicited opportunities to vent—via online surveys such as the one presented in this study.

This portrait also points to the possibility that other personality traits and behaviors may be related to dysfunctional fan behavior. For instance, given the relationship between fans' reported views on the necessity of alcohol consumption, related research suggests that impulsivity (Gerald & Higley, 2002), antisocial personality disorders (Thomasson & Vaglum, 1996), or other psychopathic deviance and mania (Vallian & Scanlan, 1996) may be characteristic of dysfunctional fans. Perhaps less dramatic, dysfunctional fans may represent those individuals with maladaptive perfectionism and low self-esteem (see Ashby & Rice, 2002). Such individuals may seek perfection from the players, the coaches, the referees, the stadium food service, and the local sports radio show host, but due to poor self-esteem and coping techniques tend to complain and confront others as a means to satisfy their malfunctioning perfectionist attitudes. Finally, Ruiz (2001) finds that "narcissism and hostility [traits] are both characterized by dysfunctional social interactions, including tendencies to perceive slights, experience anger, and behave aggressively." As a means of coping with inflated and fragile self-esteems, these individuals respond aggressively to any downward revision of the self-concept (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Ruiz, 2001.) Taken together, we anticipate that future research may find that the anti-social behavior of dysfunctional sports fans is not confined to the stadium or arena—but that the sporting event context gives rise to circumstances where the true nature of the individual quickly rises to the surface.

### *Multi-phasic Spectator Behavior*

Madrigal (2003) draws attention to the evolving nature of sporting events and the positive and negative responses spectators may have *during a*

sporting event. Our study brings into focus other related issues for future research regarding the evolving leisure experience that includes consumption experiences during the event, but also extends beyond the event.

First, the individual characteristics of leisure participants may be such that they primarily experience and accentuate negative responses to the outcomes of the event. Highly identified dysfunctional fans may be found to be most attentive to those instances that reflect negatively on their self-esteem and are less attentive to positive outcomes and associated positive affective responses. Hence, differences observed by Madrigal (2003) might be explained or amplified, in part, by examining individual differences related to functional or dysfunctional behavior of highly identified fans.

Second, our findings relative to the nature of the survey responses following the two games (see Table 1) indicates that team losses—after rising expectations throughout the season prior to the losses—may generate increasingly negative behaviors and may reduce positive related behaviors. The circumstantial nature of this evidence regarding (a) reduced survey response rates following a string of three losses by the home team and (b) the prevalence of more negatively-inclined individuals seeking out avenues to vent their frustrations via web surveys, indicates the need for future research to examine in more detail the dynamic nature of identification processes throughout the course of a game, season, and across seasons from year to year. It is also unclear whether poor team performance brings out more dysfunctional individuals or brings more of the dysfunction out of the individuals attending games. We further analyzed the differences in behaviors between the respondents from the first wave of data when the outlook for the team was still relatively positive and the respondents in the second wave of data that were collected following a loss to an in-state rival (leading to dropping out of major bowl contention). One must use caution in interpretation, since this is a between-subjects (not within-subjects) analysis. However, the results indicate that the second wave of fan responses differed significantly from the first wave in terms of consuming sport-related media (more call-ins and listening to sports talk radio; more visits to sports and team-specific websites), being more critical of the service quality at the football games, and being more identified with the team. Although this may suggest that fans become more obsessed with the team following poor team performance, we suspect that these findings may be associated with the possibility that fewer of the less identified fans remain in the sample pool. In other words, it may be that only the most identified fans continue to attend games (and are available to sample) and the fair-weather fans remove themselves from associating with the team.

Third, the nature of the behaviors studied here (media consumption, call-in shows, etc.) transcend spectating during the game. Consequently, the study of linkages regarding the ebb and flow of identification (which may fluctuate between functional and dysfunctional for some individuals dependent upon the won/loss circumstance) and the (r)evolving phases individuals pass through when following the sport are worthy of future investigation.

Finally, this study focused on individuals and behavior at the major college football level. Are the fans that manifest dysfunctional behavior at these games the same individuals or same types of individuals who show up at high school or professional sporting events? Is the form or the intensity of the dysfunctional behavior the same at football games as they are for other sports? Or is there something about football that brings out the dysfunctional nature in what are otherwise socially functional individuals? These questions call for a stream of what should be fruitful research to expand our understanding of the phases or contexts that facilitate/hinder dysfunctional social behavior among highly identified sports fans.

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