

Sex Differences in the Aspects of Team Sport Participation Viewed as Enjoyable

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Eight situations dealing with team sports were described to 63 male and 63 female undergraduates. Each situation depicted a team competition involving same-sex members, and subjects were told specifically about the affiliation, acquaintance, and skill of one of the participants. Subjects indicated how enjoyable they viewed each of the eight sports situations, how many years they had participated in team sports, and how much experience they had in team sport competition. The results suggested that men and women similarly enjoyed aspects of team sport participation that improved their chances of winning and interacting cooperatively with friends, but men seemed to enjoy the ego-challenging aspects of team sports more than women.

This paper specifies within the framework of group processes what aspects of team sports participation people find enjoyable. The results of such an analysis bear upon psychological theory regarding group processes and upon the motivations underlying team sports participation.

A collection of three or more individuals can be classified as a group, which can be further classified as a functional group, a descriptive category (or "grouping"), or an aggregate (see Hollander, 1981). A functional group refers to a group held together by a common objective that cannot be accomplished through the effort of any single group member. A sports team is the prototypical functional group. A group that does not share a common goal but does share a common characteristic is referred to as a grouping. The grouping characteristic (e.g., a friendship, the sex of the

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subject) is referred to as the descriptive category. Finally, a cluster of individuals who share neither a common objective nor a stable characteristic is referred to as an aggregate. The spectators at a team sport competition would classify as an aggregate. Because the focus of this paper is on team sport participation, the effects of factors associated with functional groups and descriptive categories are examined.

Hollander (1981) uses the term "functionality" to refer to the dimension of group processes along which functional groups and descriptive categories differ. A factor associated with the functional group should bear upon the explicit objective of the group and therefore be more important in determining a participant's enjoyment in team sports participation than a factor associated with a descriptive category. For instance, the skill of a participant would be more important in achieving the explicit objective of team sport competition (i.e., to win) than would the nature of the friendship that existed between two participants. The skill of a teammate, therefore, should be a determinant of individuals' enjoyment of team sports, whereas friendships should not. Although not explicit in the rules of most team sports, however, a number of implicit goals are operating, such as affiliating with friends and challenging one's abilities. Any factor that alters the likelihood of achieving one or more of these implicit goals can also be expected to have corresponding effects on individuals' enjoyment as a member of the group (cf. Steiner, 1972). Hence, affiliating with teammates who are friends should be more enjoyable than participating with teammates who are not friends, and challenging contests should be more enjoyable than unchallenging contests.

This analysis, although straightforward, would seem to be overly simplistic. Weick (1976) has noted that membership in groups is in most instances a "fluid" experience for people. But the preceding analysis assumes that individuals have the same commitment to the various dimensions along which team sports can vary (e.g., skill of participants). Violations of this assumption, of course, are likely. This means that the preceding predictions should be influenced by differences in the degree to which the individuals are motivated to be identified with a functional group or grouping (i.e., to attain a particular goal).

Consider the effects that can be expected because of gender identification. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) have characterized men as being more in search of challenges, particularly those that reflect favorably upon their sense of potency (i.e., ability to determine the outcome of events) than women. How might this difference in gender role affect the aspects of team sports participation that people find enjoyable? The explicit goal for both men and women is to win. Hence, both men and women should enjoy participating with a skilled in contrast to an unskilled teammate. An implicit goal tied to gender role, however, is the ego-challenge that team sport participation provides. For example, although a skilled opponent represents a serious obstacle to achieving the explicit goal of the group—to win the competitive contest—a skilled opponent also provides the most ego-challenging contest and satisfying victory (i.e., implicit goal attainment). Because this goal may be more important to men than women, men may find competing against a skilled opponent more enjoyable than women.

Similarly, various authors have suggested that women may be more affiliative or more concerned with social harmony than men. If this is the case, then the prediction that participating with friends should be more enjoyable than participating with people who are not friends should be altered such that women confirm this prediction more strongly than men. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) discuss the commonly held

beliefs that enjoyment from team participation for males is based on the skill of their teammates, whereas for females it is based on their personal attraction to teammates. Eagly (1978) deals with the related notion that females have more "social" goals in group settings than males. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) argue against the first notion, and Eagly (1978) argues that the evidence supporting the second thesis is restricted to situations involving coalition formation and bargaining. Hence, one might expect, contrary to the above commonly held beliefs, that the friendship of a participant would not have differential impact on men and women. That is, participating in team sports with friends and with skilled participants may be expected to be enjoyable for both men and women.

In sum, the following predictions were tested:

1. Participating with a friend should be more enjoyable than participating with a person who is not a friend.
2. The preceding effect should be stronger when friends are teammates than when they are opponents because affiliative as well as competitive motives are served.
3. Prediction 2 should be more apparent for women than men if affiliative motives in team sports are stronger for women than men.
4. Participating with a skilled team member should be more enjoyable than participating with an unskilled team member.
5. Competing against a skilled opponent should be more enjoyable for men than women if ego-challenging motives are stronger for men than women.

Method

Subjects

Male ($n = 63$) and female ($n = 63$) undergraduates were recruited from the University of Iowa campus to complete a brief questionnaire about team sport participation. Subjects independently completed the questionnaires, although up to 12 subjects were tested in a single session.

Procedure

Subjects were told that the situations they were to evaluate involved themselves, another person, and some (unspecified) team sport. Each subject rated eight distinct team sport situations listed in a random order. In each situation, it was specified that another participant was (a) either a teammate or an opponent, (b) either a "friend" or "not a friend," and (c) either a "skilled player" or "not a skilled player." For example, subjects read that "You and another person are on the same team, and this other person is a friend and a skilled player." Subjects were instructed to indicate how enjoyable they viewed each situation as being. Subjects typically pulled from their past experience in team sports to determine their judgments. Ratings were made using a 10-point scale (1 = "very unpleasant," 10 = "very pleasant"). Afterwards, subjects were asked to indicate their sex, the number of years that they had participated in team sports (including gym classes), and their personal experience in team sports (using a scale from 1 = "no experience" to 10 = "very much experience").

Design

The factors of team membership of participant, interpersonal relation with parti-

participant, and skill of participant were varied within subjects and sex of subject was treated as a between-subjects factor in the analyses of the pleasantness ratings of team sport participation. Thus, the pleasantness ratings were examined using a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed model analysis of variance.

The measures of experience in team sport participation were collected only once from each subject to determine whether the hypothesized sex differences might in fact be due to differences in prior knowledge about or experience in team athletics. Thus, a one-way analysis of variance using sex of subject as a between-subjects factor was performed on these measures. Subsequent reanalyses of the pleasantness ratings were planned if significant effects were obtained in this one-way ANOVA. However, no sex differences emerged in the analysis of the number of years of participation in team sports or of subjects' self-rated "experience" in team sports. Thus, these data will not be discussed further.

Results and Discussion

A number of significant effects supported predictions derived from the psychological literature on group processes: (a) Subjects rated participating in team sports with a friend as being more enjoyable ($M = 6.67$) than participating with a person who was not a friend ($M = 4.91$), $F(1, 123) = 130.35$, $p < .001$. (b) Cooperating in a team effort with a friend was viewed as being more enjoyable ($M = 7.16$) than competing against a friend ($M = 6.15$), whereas having someone who was not a friend on the same ($M = 4.85$) or opposing team ($M = 4.96$) was judged equally unpleasant, $F(1, 122) = 32.95$, $p < .001$. Thus, interacting with friends, but particularly cooperatively as teammates, enhanced subjects' judgments of enjoyment. (c) Participating with a skilled teammate ($M = 6.10$) was judged to be more enjoyable than participating with an unskilled teammate ($M = 5.46$), $F(1, 123) = 15.72$, $p < .001$.

These findings were influenced in the expected manner by the sex of the subject. Although the nature of the interpersonal relation between the subject and another participant had a number of effects, there were no sex differences in subjects' pleasantness ratings as a function of interpersonal relation; the sex of subject by interpersonal relation, the sex of subject by interpersonal relation by team membership, and the sex of subject by interpersonal relation by team membership by skill of participant interactions did not approach significance ($ps > .20$). These results are contrary to the stereotype that women are more responsive to the social aspects of group settings than men (see Eagly, 1978).

Although men and women were affected differently by the skill of the other participant, inspection of Table 1 reveals that their reactions across conditions were predictable, $F(1, 122) = 5.49$, $p < .02$. Men and women both found the most enjoyable situations to be those in which they would be participating with a skilled teammate. Among the least enjoyable situations were those in which they would be participating with an unskilled teammate, and among moderately enjoyable situations were those in which they would be competing against an unskilled person (see Table 1). The difference between the enjoyment ratings of men and women was found in their reactions to a skilled opponent. Men rated this situation as moderately enjoyable, whereas women judged it to be among the least enjoyable of team sport situations. Compared to women, men have been characterized as being more

Table 1
Mean Enjoyment Ratings as a Function of Sex of Subject,
Team Membership, and Skill of Other Participant

Other Participant	Sex		Female	SD
	Male	M		
Same team				
Skilled	6.98 ^a	2.29	6.83 ^a	2.55
Not skilled	5.10 ^b	2.24	5.11 ^b	2.12
Opposite team				
Skilled	5.89 ^c	2.48	4.68 ^b	2.51
Not skilled	5.76 ^c	2.21	5.87 ^c	2.00

Note. Unlike superscripts designate a statistically significant difference between means by the Duncan Multiple Range Comparison ($ps < .05$).

adventurous and in search of challenges (see Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Thus, men more than women could be expected to enjoy competing against a skilled opponent.¹

In sum, the assumption of the present study was straightforward: Aspects of team sport participation that facilitate achievement of one's goals make the participation more enjoyable. This simple thesis yields complex results, however, when examined in a particular naturalistic setting (i.e., participating in team sports). Participants pursue implicit as well as explicit goals (e.g., fostering friendships vs. winning a contest). Furthermore, individual differences among the participants modify the importance of these implicit and explicit goals, adding to the complexity of those aspects of the team sport participation that are viewed as being enjoyable. For instance, in the present study the ego-challenge of team sport participation was suggested to be a more important determinant of enjoyment for men than women. Thus, the incentive model of group processes yielded accurate predictions only when additional information was considered about the specific individuals and circumstances involved.

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¹Some of the effects observed here might be restricted to a sports context, which at least up to this point has been a masculine domain.

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