



## Uncovering hockey fans' motivations behind their derogatory behaviors and how these motives predict psychological well-being and quality of social identity

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This article tested whether hockey fans' self-determined and non self-determined motivation for engaging in derogatory behaviors against an outgroup team predicted the frequency of these behaviors, fans' psychological well-being, and the quality of their social identity as a fan of their team. The two psychological theories we employ in the current research (i.e., self-determination theory and social identity theory) have different assumptions concerning the motivation behind derogatory fan behavior.

**Design:** Three correlational studies were conducted among hockey fans.

**Methods:** Fans of rival hockey fans (Study 1;  $N = 45$ ), fans of the Montreal Canadiens (Study 2;  $N = 181$ ), and fans of NHL teams (Study 3;  $N = 105$ ) completed measures of self-determination to engage in derogatory behaviors, frequency of these behaviors, psychological well-being, and quality of social identity. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test if the frequency, well-being, and quality of social identity variables were predicted by the self-determined and non self-determined motivations to engage in derogatory behaviors.

**Results:** As expected based on self-determination theory (SDT), the more hockey fans engage in derogatory behaviors for non self-determined reasons, the lower their well-being and the less frequently they report engaging in the derogatory behaviors. Moreover, as expected based on social identity theory (SIT), the more hockey fans engage in the derogatory behaviors for self-determined reasons, the higher their well-being, the frequency of these behaviors, and the more positive their social identity.

**Conclusions:** These results are interpreted in light of SDT and SIT's theoretical propositions. Comparisons are made with prior studies conducted on this topic.

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Sports are an engaging social context, in which strong motivational and affective processes take place. At the group level, sport teams represent important social identities that convey meaning and belongingness to their members (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, 2006). Even if "just" a game, players, coaches, and fans alike are affected by the sports they engage in and by the teams they identify with, and some display strong emotional reactions to their team's wins and losses (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). In fact, sports can be seen as a microcosm of society, where strong motivational and identity processes operate (Wann, 2006). Given the competitiveness of many sports contexts, sport fans also engage in derogatory behaviors that involve downgrading and denigrating an

outgroup team (Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2003, 2006). Why do sport fans engage in such derogatory and potentially harmful social behaviors? A diversity of motivational approaches have been applied to understanding sport fans behaviors (e.g., Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). In the current research, we specifically apply a self-determination theory (SDT) perspective to understanding fans' reasons for engaging in derogatory behaviors against outgroup teams. Doing so represents a key novelty of this research that also has the potential to test how SDT principles operate in competitive intergroup contexts.

In this context, the more specific goals of the current studies are to investigate hockey fans' motivations – i.e., self-determined and non self-determined – for engaging in derogatory behaviors against members of other sports teams, and test if these motivations predict fans' well-being, the frequency at which they engage

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in these derogatory behaviors, and the quality of their social identity as a fan of a sports team. To this aim, we bring together two main social psychological theories that are only beginning to be used conjunctly: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002) and intergroup theories based on the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These divergent viewpoints are integrated in the current studies to test if derogatory behaviors manifested in the realm of sports can be engaged in freely and out of self-determined motives and determine what impact this self-determined motivation has on important individual- and intergroup-level outcomes.

### **Self-determination theory and its links with well-being and behavioral engagement**

The first theoretical building block for this research is self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002). SDT is a motivational humanistic theory which proposes that humans are geared toward becoming more self-determined and autonomous, and that provided the right social context, they can endorse new behaviors and social mores autonomously and out of choice – out of self-determination. According to this theory, the more behaviors are endorsed autonomously and are engaged in for self-determined reasons, the more the person should experience well-being benefits. This is because self-determined motives are driven by the person's important objectives (in the case of identified regulation) and one's own personal values (integrated regulation), and also include behaviors that are engaged in for their inherent pleasure (intrinsic motivation). Conversely, non self-determined behaviors – those that are emitted out of internal pressure (introjection) and to obtain external rewards and avoid punishment (external regulation) – are associated with lower psychological well-being (for reviews, see Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Another consequence associated with higher self-determination pertains to behavioral engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002). That is, if a behavior is engaged in freely and out of choice, it is more deeply internalized in the person's self and more likely to be repeated and engaged in frequently. In a longitudinal study, Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) showed that the more students report self-determined reasons for their academic studies relative to non self-determined reasons, the less likely they were to actually drop out of school one year later. Similar associations were observed in the context of sports, where the more athletes reported higher intrinsic motivation toward their sport, the less likely they were to drop out of their sport over a one-year period (Jöesaar, Hein, & Hagger, 2011). Daley and Duda (2006) also found that the more individuals engage in physical activity out of self-determined motivations (i.e., identified regulation and intrinsic motivation), the more they report engaging frequently in exercise behaviors. In experimental settings, promoting participants' feelings of choice and autonomy leads to greater persistence at a perceptual computer task during a free-choice period (e.g., Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994).

SDT and the important body of research it has generated have primarily focused on the motivations that underlie constructive aspects of human functioning, such as work motivation, positive interpersonal relations, volunteering, and leisure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Few studies to date have investigated individuals' motivations to engage in potentially harmful behaviors (e.g., playing violent video games; Przybylski, Ryan, & Rigby, 2009), and have linked self-determination to lower socially harmful actions such as road rage (Knee, Neighbors, & Vietor, 2001), antisocial behaviors (Moller & Deci, 2010), and prejudice (Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & De Witte, 2007). The present research is part of a novel line of research that investigates the motivations underlying

potentially socially harmful intergroup behaviors (Amiot, Sansfaçon, Louis, & Yelle, 2012), such as derogatory behaviors against outgroup teams.

The SDT perspective is quite clear about whether derogatory behaviors against members of an outgroup sport team can be emitted out of self-determined motives or not: From this point of view, derogatory behaviors are unlikely to be fueled by self-determined motives. Rather, it is when the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, that behaviors are self-determined, that the self is more integrated intrapersonally, and that behaviors are more prosocial (Ryan, 1995). It is when basic needs are unfulfilled that behaviors become dysfunctional, egoistic, and defensive – such as derogatory behaviors – and that psychological functioning is impaired (Deci & Ryan, 2000; see Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011 for an example in the realm of sports). From the SDT view, derogatory behaviors would be triggered by external pressures and non self-determined motives, and such motivations would predict lower well-being and lower engagement.

Supporting SDT, we found in two experiments (Amiot et al., 2012) that discrimination – as a harmful intergroup behavior – was less likely to be engaged in out of self-determination than parity, a pro-social intergroup behavior that involves distributing resources equally between different social groups of similar size, status, and needs. This pattern of findings was obtained even when participants were told that their ingroup encouraged a norm in favor of discrimination. Using a highly similar experimental design, we replicated these findings by referring to an illegal behavior (Sansfaçon & Amiot, submitted for publication). These findings support the SDT idea that harmful social behaviors are less likely to be internalized and engaged in autonomously and more likely to be fueled by coercive and externally controlling forces.

In the current research, we test the extent to which SDT principles operate in the context of a real and engaging sport context, in which intergroup dynamics are salient and quite strong and likely to yield to conflictual interactions among the members of different sports teams. Doing so is important given that research has confirmed the applicability of SDT principles in leisure contexts that involve some forms of violence (Przybylski et al., 2009); at this point, we seek to extend these findings and test if they replicate in diverse research contexts, including in the realm of sports. More specifically, we investigate how self-determination and non self-determination predict different well-being and behavioral outcomes. Building on the aforementioned theoretical principles and empirical findings, SDT would expect that non self-determination to engage in derogatory behaviors will predict lower well-being and a lower frequency of the derogatory behavior. We now turn to another perspective that offers a different point of view on these questions, and that leads to different predictions.

### **Social identity theory, well-being, and quality of social identity**

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is another relevant theory to understand the motivations that underpin intergroup behaviors in the realm of sports and to capture the consequences associated with these actions. However, in comparison to SDT, SIT offers a divergent outlook on human motivation and on what fuels intergroup behaviors, such as derogatory behaviors. From SIT's point of view, individuals in intergroup contexts seek a distinct and positive social identity. In the sports context, discriminatory behaviors against members of an outgroup sport team allow group members to compare positively with this outgroup on relevant dimensions of social comparison (c.f. Brewer, 1999). Acquiring or maintaining a positive social identity through

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