

Wearing the Warm Glow of Success: A (Football) Field Study

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While it is spoken of quite often in our society, as yet no psychological research has undertaken to investigate the phenomenon of "basking in reflected glory". It is a common and understandable tendency among people who have been successful in some way to want to make others aware of their connection with their accomplishment. The "basking in reflected glory" phenomenon would seem to work somewhat differently. Here, the tendency appears to be to make others aware of one's connection with a successful or highly positive other person or group of persons. The most interesting form of this phenomenon occurs when one who basks in the reflected glory of another has done nothing himself to bring about the others' success. In this case, a simple case of identity or membership seems sufficient to produce the tendency to publicly announce the critical connection.

One arena in which we might examine this phenomenon is that of athletics. Fans of athletic teams often seem as affected by victories and losses as the players themselves; they will fall into despair after failures and will become wildly elated after victory. All this, even though most of these fans have provided nothing more instrumental to the team's outcome than their presence in front of a T.V. or radio. Consistent with what might be expected from a "basking in reflected glory" effect, we can often witness the tendency of such fans to claim for themselves part of their team's glory; the chant is always "We're number one", never "They're number one."

To test whether and how a "basking in reflected glory" effect might manifest itself in a sports context, an experiment was conducted at seven powerful inter-collegiate football universities (Arizona State, Louisiana State, Notre Dame, Michigan, Ohio State, Pittsburgh, and Southern California) during part of the 1973 football season. It was predicted that students at these universities would be more likely to wear apparel which clearly identified the university of their attendance on the Mondays following the university football team's victories, than on Mondays following nonvictories.

Method

From the third week of the 1973 collegiate football season through the last week of regular season play, the apparel of students enrolled in sections of introductory psychology classes at the seven universities was monitored. At each school, three types of data were recorded in the same classes every Monday during the season: (1) the number of students present in class; (2) the number of students with "apparel identifying the university of attendance," and (3) the number of students with "apparel identifying a university other than the university of attendance." Data recorders received the following definitions prior to data collections: "Apparel identifying the university of attendance is defined as apparel which unambiguously identifies your school through names, insignia, or emblems. Apparel which appears university-related solely through the use

of colors would not qualify." "Apparel identifying a university other than the university of attendance are those which meet the same criteria for inclusions as above but which identify a school other than your own."

Results

Over all schools and across all weeks, an average of 176.8 students were present in the monitored classes; an average of 8.4% of these students wore apparel identifying the university of attendance while 1.9% of them wore apparel identifying a school other than the university of attendance. Despite the low percentage of students wearing university of attendance apparel, the data were remarkably consistent in indicating that more such apparel was worn on Mondays following a football team victory than on Mondays following a nonvictory (i.e., a loss, a tie, or an open date). At six of the seven schools, an index of university of attendance apparel wearing showed more such wearing after victories than after nonvictories; at all seven schools the maximum percentage of such wearing followed a victory. Because of the nonnormality of the percentage data, the scores were converted to ranks, and a Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was performed using school as the unit of analysis; with an N of 7, $T=2$ ($p < .05$, two-tailed). This result indicated that Mondays following victories ranked significantly higher in university of attendance apparel wearing than Mondays following nonvictories. The mean rank for victories was 3.2, while the mean rank for nonvictories was 4.9. A similar test for other-university apparel did not show any effect, suggesting that the obtained significant relationship is not attributable to a simple tendency to wear clothes of a certain type (e.g., athletic team jackets, sweat-shirts, tee shirts, etc.) after an athletic team victory.

A final result of interest concerns the correlation between the ranked scores for university of attendance apparel wearing and the outcome of the previous game in terms of point margin. The correlation ($r = -.47$; $p < .01$) indicates that the more successful the university of attendance team was in the Saturday game score, the more frequently students wore university of attendance apparel on the following Monday. Thus, the most resounding victories produced the greatest tendency to wear apparel which announced one's university affiliation. Again, no such effect was found in the wearing of other-university apparel ($r = .00$; $p = n.s.$).

Discussion

It does seem that university students will wear apparel that connects them with their school more often after a football team victory than after a nonvictory; the mean rank data, with one exception, are perfectly consistent in this regard across the monitored schools. The exception to the pattern is instructive in itself, however. The reversal in our data occurred at the University of Michigan on the Monday following a 10-10 tie with Ohio State. As a result of that game, most observers thought that Michigan would represent the Big Ten Conference in the 1974 Rose Bowl game. It is likely that most Michigan students dressed for class that Monday morning thinking that their team would be selected to represent the Big Ten Conference. The amount of wearing of university of attendance apparel was extremely high that Monday (the second highest of the season). This high level of wearing after a technical nonvictory brought about the lone reversal in our data.

It might be reasonable to believe that the "basking in reflected glory" process occurs not only for university students and their wearing of school apparel, but also for a variety of other behaviors under other circumstances. For example, we believe that victories, athletic or political, should elicit more identification with the victor and first

person verbalizations, such as "we won", than political or athletic losses. This notion is currently under investigation.

A final comment concerns the cross-university methodology of the present study. Through a network of friends, it proved surprisingly easy to arrange for the conduct of this experiment at seven universities with strong football teams. Other researchers might find such an approach attractive when planning studies with easily standardizable procedures. We found the advantage of this approach in terms of increased confidence in the reliability and generality of a finding to far outweigh the difficulties inherent in any such coordination of effort.