

interpretation of the act (Mummendey & Mummendey, 1983). This means that the perspective of the individuals (e.g., aggressor vs victim) may modify the perception of aggressive behavior (Widmeyer, *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the main purpose of the present study was to explore perspective-related differences in the players' perceived legitimacy of aggression in soccer.

In a school context, Mummendey and Otten (1989) noted that pupils in the position of aggressor considered their own behavior as less intentional and more legitimate than individuals in the role of victim. To date, little is known about the influence of perspective-related divergences on the perceived legitimacy of aggression in team sports. Yet, such divergences seem to be reasonable in team-sport context concerned with frequent aggressive confrontations between opponents who are working towards one end, to beat the other team. It is a crucial question because perspective-related differences between aggressors and victims may predict the course of the interaction (Mummendey & Otten, 1989). For instance, a dissent between the protagonists in the legitimacy of an aggression may provide a better understanding of why victims turn around and retaliate (Otten, Mummendey, & Wenzel, 1995). According to these authors, one may hypothesize that soccer players perceive aggressive behaviors as more legitimate in an aggressor's rather than in a victim's perspective.

A second interest concerned effects of type of aggression on perspective-related differences. Indeed, evaluation of aggressive behaviors may be also influenced by the specific types of aggression usually described in the sport research, instrumental and hostile aggressions (e.g., Silva, 1978; Stephens, 1998). The ultimate goal of hostile aggression is only to do harm to someone else, and this conduct may decrease the athletic performance rather than help it (Silva, 1978). In contrast, the ultimate goal of instrumental aggression is to obtain a competitive advantage, not to harm. There is some evidence that team-sport athletes were more tolerant of their aggression when its nature is instrumental rather than hostile (Conroy, Silva, Newcomer, Walker, & Johnson, 2001; Loughhead & Leith, 2001). Thus, one may hypothesize that the soccer players in an aggressor's position would perceive aggressive behaviors as more legitimate when the ultimate goal of the act was instrumental rather than hostile. However, not much is known about how victims consider the instrumental and hostile values of aggression or even how the two types of aggression concerned divergence of aggressor and victim.

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 120 French male soccer players, ages 18 to 23 years ($M = 19.2$, $SD = 1.03$) and with an average of 8.4 seasons of experience playing soccer ($SD = 1.2$). They were members of eight departmental soccer

AGGRESSOR AND VICTIM PERSPECTIVE-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED LEGITIMACY OF AGGRESSION IN SOCCER

ALAN TRACLET

UFRSTAPS, Université de Caen Basse Normandie

OLIVIER RASCLÉ

UFRSTAPS, Université de Rennes 2

NICOLAS SOUCHON

GENEVIÈVE COULOMB-CABAGNO

UFRSTAPS, Université de Rennes 2

School of Psychology, Cardiff UK

FABRICE DOSSEVILLE

UFRSTAPS, Université de Caen Basse Normandie

Summary.—The purpose of this role-playing study was to explore the perceived legitimacy of aggression in soccer as a function of perspective-related differences (aggressor vs victim) and type of aggression (instrumental vs hostile). 120 soccer players watched videotaped aggressive interactions in soccer and took the perspective of the actors (aggressor then victim or the reverse). Then they rated the legitimacy of each aggressive behavior depending on its ultimate goal (instrumental then hostile or the reverse). When participants adopted the aggressor perspective, they perceived instrumental aggression as more legitimate than hostile aggression. In contrast, when participants took the perspective of the victim, no significant difference was found regardless of the type of aggression. The discussion focused on implications and consequences of such divergences in aggressive sport situations.

Despite the lack of consensus, sport aggression has been often defined as overt acts violating the formal rules of the considered activity and intending to harm (Stephens, 1998). In sport psychology, aggressive behaviors are examined largely from two approaches (Widmeyer, Dorsh, Bray, & McGuire, 2002). The first one is based on observed and measured conduct in a natural competitive situation with no consideration of the actor's emotions or cognitions. A second approach has centered on players' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of aggressive behaviors. The current study is an example of the second approach. In that perspective, an individual may perceive his behavior as aggressive but legitimate in regard to the circumstances in which the act occurred (Widmeyer, *et al.*, 2002). For instance, a soccer player may consider his aggressive act as legitimate if it prevents the opponent from scoring. However, aggression may be conceptualized as a social interaction involving at least two persons and characterized by a specific perspective

¹Address correspondence to Dr. Alan Traclet, UFRSTAPS, Université de Caen Basse Normandie, 2 boulevard du Maréchal Juin, 14032 Caen cedex, France or e-mail (alan.traclet@unice.fr).

teams (i.e., the lower French soccer competitive level) of the western area of France.

Measure

A panel of departmental level soccer players, coaches, and chief referees ($N=6$) were asked to describe different clearly aggressive behaviors, that is, intentional and rule-breaking behaviors, which usually occurred in soccer. "Kicking", "tripping up", "elbowing", and "holding" were mentioned by all of them and were retained for the study. Four video clips were then recorded from real soccer games to illustrate the four aggressive behaviors mentioned by the panel of experts. Each clip depicted one aggressive behavior (i.e., kicking, tripping up, elbowing, or holding) in which an unknown soccer player, the aggressor, intentionally attacks an opponent, the victim, during a championship match when the latter won back the ball in the middle field. The aggressor was introduced to participants as "player A" and the victim as "player B". Using videos in this way allowed players to be close to the action, more surely than only presenting a written scenario (Visek & Watson, 2005). Following each video clip, participants were asked to assess the perceived legitimacy of the depicted behavior by answering the question, "Do you perceive your/this behavior as OK (legitimate) in this situation?", using an 8-point Likert scale with anchors or '': Never OK/legitimate and 8: Always OK/legitimate. This format was similar to the one used in research on legitimacy judgments regarding aggressive sport behavior (Conroy, et al., 2001; Visek & Watson, 2005).

Procedure

The study was introduced as a "research about competitive situations in soccer". Upon agreeing to take part in the study, participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential and they were encouraged to provide honest responses. They were questioned individually during their training sessions in two phases that took about ten minutes for each participant. In the initial phase (Week 1), participants gave their birth dates and watched the video clips, assuming that they were either the player A or the player B in the video. The designations of "aggressor" and "victim" were not used. Each video clip was shown twice, and each aggressive behavior was verbally described as instrumental (i.e., "in order to gain the ball"), then hostile (i.e., "in order to harm the opponent"), or the reverse. In other words, by random assignment, half of the participants were provided the verbal instrumental instructions first and the other half were provided the verbal hostile instructions first. After watching each video clip twice, participants were asked to assess in a counterbalanced way the legitimacy of the act depending on its ultimate goal ("when the act was to gain the ball" vs "when the act was to harm the opponent"). A similar procedure was used in the second

phase (Week 2). The four video clips were shown twice again, and participants were asked to complete the questionnaire (a) assuming that they were the other player than during the initial phase and (b) according to the two verbally described ultimate goals (instrumental vs hostile).

To sum up, each participant watched the four video clips four times: once from each perspective (aggressor/victim) and for the two types of aggression (instrumental/hostile). Both perspective (aggressor then victim or the reverse) and type of aggression (instrumental then hostile or the reverse) were randomly presented to participants to avoid potential order effects. Similarly, the order of the four videotaped aggressions was counterbalanced, presenting each behavior in first, second, third, and fourth place. No order effect was found for: perspective, type of aggression, and video clips order ($ps > .05$).

Manipulation Check

Two additional questions were added before the perceived legitimacy item to assess (a) if participants could imagine themselves in a specific perspective (aggressor or victim) using a "Yes" or "No" response ("Are you able to imagine yourself in this kind of situation, in A's or B's position?"), and (b) their knowledge of the soccer rules ("Is this behavior aggressive, that is intentional and illegal according to the soccer rules?") using an 8-point scale (anchors 1: Totally nonaggressive and 8: Totally aggressive). Although all participants considered that the video clips depicted clearly aggressive behaviors ($M=7.1$, $SD=1.0$), six of them answered "no" to the first question so their answers were excluded from the analysis.

RESULTS

Internal Consistency

The analysis of internal consistency on the responses across the four different aggressive behaviors yielded an overall reliability coefficient alpha of .91. In addition, no item could be removed to improve the reliability of the measurement since coefficients alpha with items removed were ranging from .91 to .94. This indicated high interrelatedness of the items and consistency in responses across different behaviors. Then for each perspective, the four perceived legitimacy scores were averaged together to provide a mean score for the instrumental aggressive behaviors and a mean score for the hostile ones.

Analysis of Variance

A 2 (Perspective) \times 2 (Type of Aggression) analysis of variance with repeated measures on these two factors was used to analyze the perceived legitimacy of aggressive behaviors. The alpha level was set at .05 for this analysis. Significant main effects with moderate effects size included main effects

for (a) perspective ($F_{1,18} = 20.7, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$) and (b) type of aggression ($F_{1,18} = 26.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$). Participants perceived aggressive behaviors as more legitimate (a) in the aggressor than in the victim's position ($M = 3.3, SD = 1.8$ vs $M = 2.2, SD = 1.2$), and (b) when its ultimate goal was instrumental rather than hostile ($M = 3.1, SD = 1.7$ vs $M = 2.4, SD = 1.2$).

Moreover, a significant two-way interaction with a moderate effect size emerged from the analysis ($F_{1,18} = 23.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$). Participants in the aggressor perspective perceived instrumental aggression as more legitimate than hostile aggression ($p < .001$; cf. Table 1). In contrast, no significant difference was found in the victim's perspective. Lastly, the aggressor-victim difference was significant for instrumental aggression only ($p < .001$).

TABLE 1
PERCEIVED LEGITIMACY OF INSTRUMENTAL AND HOSTILE AGGRESSIONS
IN AGGRESSOR'S AND VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

| Aggression | Aggressor Perspective | | Victim Perspective | |
|--------------|-----------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Instrumental | 3.96 ^a | 1.63 | 2.25 | 1.23 |
| Hostile | 2.37 | .96 | 2.22 | 1.15 |

Note.—Perceived legitimacy of aggression was measured on an 8-point Likert scale (anchors, 1: Never OK/legitimate and 8: Always OK/legitimate). Mean with superscript significantly differs from others ($p < .001$) by Scheffé test.

Discussion

In support of the hypothesis, the findings of the present study show that players with an aggressor perspective perceived aggressive behaviors as more legitimate than did those with a victim perspective and that participants more approved instrumental than hostile aggression. This is consistent with past research (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten, et al., 1995; Conroy, et al., 2001; Loughhead & Leith, 2001). Moreover, the two-way interaction indicated that the difference in perceptions of instrumental versus hostile aggression was significant only in the position of aggressor. In the role of victim, participants similarly perceived the two types of aggression.

These findings suggest that the specific circumstances may affect the aggressors' perceptions, providing essential information to judge their actions (Widmeyer, et al., 2002; Visek & Watson, 2005). The social learning view in sport (Silva & Conroy, 1995) has often analyzed instrumental aggression and its legitimacy in terms of the actor's expectancies of costs-benefits available in the immediate situation. In the current study, aggressors could infer potential benefits of their instrumental aggression [e.g., to take or avoid an important (dis)advantage] and perceive it as aggressive but more legitimate than their hostile aggression, with regard to the situation in which the behavior

occurred. In contrast, the role of being victim seems to lead to a stable evaluation of aggression. One possible reason would be that participants in such position use different considerations to assess aggression. Past research in sport has often confronted situational and moral approaches of aggression. If aggressors may be associated with situational aspects of aggression, victims may be more linked with moral considerations, for which aggression is usually against the values of fair play or respect (Conroy, et al., 2001).

Such divergence in the evaluation of aggression may have important applied interest in actual situations. Mummendey and her associates have suggested that the perspectives dissects may lead to an escalation of violence (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten, et al., 1995). For instance, the higher perspective-related difference in perceptions, the more likely is hostile retaliation from the victim. The fact that instrumental aggression in sport is often associated with the continual rise of hostile behaviors (Gardner & Janelle, 2002) would be explained by the aggressor-victim divergence about the perceived legitimacy of the former. Additional studies are thus needed to enhance our understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences of these perspective-related divergences in sport.

One should, however, be duly cautious in interpretations of the results. Indeed, this investigation employed a scenario procedure that did not reproduce or lacked some emotions (e.g., anger) commonly experienced in aggressive situations, particularly concerning hostile aggression. Therefore, perception of aggression may be somewhat different when individuals watch a hypothetical event than when they are fully part of the playing situation. In fact, if emotional states are not present or taken into account, results would lack generalization (Stephens, 1998). Subsequent investigations may provide more meaningful conclusions on the real perspective dissects about the legitimacy of aggression. What would be interesting are the ways in which the actual aggressors and victims explain and justify the transgression as well as to explore the risky situational conditions (e.g., time elapsed, score differentials) that may increase the extent of divergence. This may broaden a complementary knowledge base for sport researchers working on aggression.

REFERENCES

- CONROY, D. E., SILVA, J. M., NEWCOMB, R. R., WALKER, B. W., & JOHNSON, M. S. (2001). Personal and participatory socializers of the perceived legitimacy of aggressive behavior in sport. *Aggressive Behavior*, 27, 405-418.
- GARDNER, R. E., & JANELLE, C. M. (2002). Legitimacy judgments of perceived aggression and assertion by contact and noncontact sport participants. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 33, 290-306.
- LOUGHEAD, T. M., & LEITH, I. M. (2001). Hockey coaches' and players' perceptions of aggression and the aggressive behavior of players. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 24, 394-407.
- MUMMENDY, A., & MUMMENDY, H. D. (1983). Aggressive behavior of soccer players as social interaction. In J. H. Goldstein (Ed.), *Sports violence*. New York: Springer-Verlag, Pp. 111-118.

- MUMMEDEY, A., & OTTEN, S. (1989). Perspective-specific differences in the segmentation and evaluation of aggressive interaction sequences. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 19, 23-40.
- OTTEN, S., MUMMEDEY, A., & WENZEL, M. (1995). Evaluation of aggressive behavior interactions in interpersonal and intergroup contexts. *Aggressive Behavior*, 21, 205-224.
- SILVA, J. M. (1978). Understanding aggressive behavior and its effects upon athletic performance. In W. F. Straub (Ed.), *Sport Psychology: an analysis of athletic behavior*. Ithaca, NY: Movement. Pp. 177-186.
- SILVA, J. M., & COSKOR, D. E. (1995). Understanding aggressive behavior and its effects upon athletic performance. In K. Horvath & W. Straub (Eds.), *Sport psychology: an analysis of athletic behavior*. Longmeadow, MA: Movement Publ. Pp. 149-156.
- STEPHENS, D. E. (1998). Aggression. In J. L. Duda (Ed.), *Advances in sport and exercise psychology measurement*. Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc. Pp. 277-292.
- VISKE, A., & WATSON, J. (2005). Ice hockey players' legitimacy of aggression and professionalization of attitudes. *The Sport Psychologist*, 19, 178-192.
- WINDMEYER, W. N., DORRIS, K. D., BRAV, S. R., & MCGUINE, E. J. (2002). The nature, prevalence, and consequences of aggression. In J. M. Silva & D. E. Stevens (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of sports*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Pp. 328-351.

