

***Research Quarterly  
for Exercise and Sport***

**Aggressor – Victim Dissent in Perceived legitimacy of  
Aggression in Soccer: The Moderating Role of Situational  
Background**

Journal:	<i>Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport</i>
Manuscript ID:	08-05--PS-07.R3
Manuscript Type:	Psychology
Keyword:	Aggressive behavior, Sport, Perception, Perspective
Manuscript Category:	Original Article



review

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4 The Moderating Role of Situational Background

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For Peer Review

## 1 Abstract

2 This study **investigates** the aggressor – victim difference in perceived legitimacy of  
3 aggression in soccer as a function of score information (**tied, favorable, unfavorable**), sporting  
4 penalization (**no risk, yellow card, red card**), and type of aggression (**instrumental, hostile**).  
5 French male soccer players ( $N = 133$ ) read written scenarios and rated the legitimacy of the  
6 described aggressive act depending on specific perspective (aggressor or victim) and  
7 **situational information**. Significant aggressor – victim difference in perception of instrumental  
8 aggression was found in situations where the score was tied or where there was no risk to be  
9 caught. In addition, aggressors were affected by such information, whereas victims were not.  
10 The discussion focused on explanations and implications of such divergences in aggressive  
11 sport situations.

12  
13 Key word: Aggressive behavior, Perception, Perspective, Sport

1 Aggressor – Victim Dissent in Perceived legitimacy of Aggression in Soccer:

2 The Moderating Role of Situational Background

3 Over the three past decades, a substantial amount of research has focused on  
4 understanding aggression in sport. Thus, several sport scientists have devoted considerable  
5 effort to studying perceived legitimacy of aggression among athletes and factors influencing  
6 aggressive behaviors in sports (Conroy, Silva, Newcomer, Walker, & Johnson, 2001; Gardner  
7 & Janelle, 2002; Maxwell, Visek, & Moores, in press; Silva, 1983; Visek & Watson, 2005).  
8 Most researchers have defined aggression in sport as overt acts violating the formal rules and  
9 intentionally causing harm (Stephens, 1998; Widmeyer, Dorsch, Bray, & McGuire, 2002).  
10 However, aggression may also be conceptualized as a kind of *social interaction* involving at  
11 least two persons and characterized by a specific perspective interpretation of the act  
12 (Mummendey & Mummendey, 1983). This means there is always an aggressor and a victim,  
13 and that the perception of harm and rule-violating behaviors may differ according to the  
14 perspective of individuals (Widmeyer et al., 2002).

15 In that view, Mummendey and her coworkers pointed out that a decisive characteristic in  
16 the development of aggressive situations is an aggressor – victim dissent in the evaluation of  
17 the action (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten, Mummendey, & Wenzel, 1995). Such  
18 perspective-related differences in evaluation of aggressive acts have been demonstrated in  
19 several empirical studies in school (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten et al., 1995) and  
20 justice contexts (Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, 1998). Mummendey and  
21 Otten (1989) used a perspective taking experiment and revealed that pupils in a position of  
22 aggressor considered their own behavior as less intentional and inappropriate than pupils in a  
23 position of victims. In a similar vein, Mikula et al. (1998) found that victims reported negative  
24 and aggressive incidents as more unjust and less justified than aggressors did. In a team-sport  
25 context, results of recent research (Tracllet, Rasclé, Souchon, Cabagno, & Dosseville, 2008)

1 supported these findings and a similar aggressor-victim difference was observed: soccer  
2 players perceived a series of aggressive acts in soccer as more legitimate when they were  
3 placed in the aggressor's than in the victim's role.

4 Although empirical evidence of systematic perspective-related differences in  
5 interpretation of aggressive acts has been obtained in non-sport and sport domains, very few  
6 researchers have examined the relevant variables influencing the judgmental dissents between  
7 the two protagonists in the aggressive situation. For instance, the aggressor and his/her victim  
8 would differently select and weigh aspects of the situation as relevant (Mummendey & Otten,  
9 1989) and this raises the question about the triggers (e.g., score, absence of sanction) that  
10 incite players to approve aggression in specific situations and affect the divergence in  
11 perspectives. The answer to this question may increase our understanding of a complete  
12 portrait of aggressive sport situations and may broaden a complementary knowledge base for  
13 researchers working on aggression. In addition, this question has not only a scientific interest  
14 but also practical implications. Indeed, the perspective-related differences may predict the  
15 course of the interaction and may lead to an escalation of violence (Mummendey & Otten,  
16 1989; Otten, et al., 1995). For instance, a dissent between the two protagonists in the  
17 legitimacy of an aggression may provide a better understanding of why victims turn around  
18 and retaliate. Taking into account the importance of perspective-related differences for the  
19 development of the conflict, a crucial issue to consider is to clarify the risk factors likely to  
20 increase the extent of the perspective-related differences (Otten et al., 1995). The central  
21 purpose of this study, then, was to examine aggressor – victim dissent in perceived legitimacy  
22 of aggression in soccer as a function of situational information and type of aggression.

23 Perceptions of legitimacy for aggressive sport behavior have frequently been studied in  
24 terms of sex differences, years of participation, competitive level, or types of sports (Conroy  
25 et al., 2001; Gardner & Janelle, 2002; Maxwell et al., in press; Silva, 1983; Toker & Parks,

1 2001; Visek & Watson, 2005). The role of situational considerations was less often taken into  
2 account, and to our knowledge, no study has dealt with the potential impact of situational  
3 information on perspective-related differences in the interpretation of sport aggression.

4 In an effort to explain the situational determinants of sport aggression, some research has  
5 suggested the influence of score information, that is, score differentials (e.g., 1-1, 2-0) or  
6 status (i.e., tied vs. (un)favorable). The frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989)  
7 stated that some aggression would emanate from frustration. In sports, frustration may be a  
8 result of an unsuccessful or unpleasant event, and situations presumed to be frustrating such  
9 as losing or unfavorable score situations would be associated with a higher endorsement of  
10 aggression (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1997). However, empirical evidence related to this topic  
11 is not convincing and often produces conflicting findings (Widmeyer et al., 2002).  
12 Specifically, aggression was sometimes associated to lose situations rather than to win  
13 situations (Widmeyer & Birsch, 1984; Widmeyer & McGuire, 1997), or the reverse (Cullen &  
14 Cullen, 1975; Worrell & Harris, 1986). In competitive team sports, Vaez Mousavi and Shojaie  
15 (2005) found that aggressive behaviors were significantly higher both in lose and win score  
16 situations when compared with tie score situations. In contrast, other observational studies  
17 indicated that the majority of aggressive acts in ice hockey transpired in tie score situations  
18 rather than large win and lose score situations (i.e., three goals and more in score differentials;  
19 Gee & Leith, 2007; Gee & Sullivan, 2006). Lastly, some research has failed to find a  
20 relationship between aggression and current state of scores (Jones, Bray, & Olivier, 2005;  
21 McGuire, Courneya, Widmeyer & Carron, 1992). These few studies and their contradictory  
22 results do not provide evidence of the association between aggression (and its endorsement)  
23 and score information. However, there are difficulties in interpreting past findings when the  
24 studies were based on the final results of the game or on the situation at the time aggression  
25 happens, and when they did not differentiate among different types of aggressions.

1 Social learning theory (Bandura, 1973; Silva & Conroy, 1995) states that athletes approve  
2 and adopt aggressive behaviors by observing others, by relating aggression with rewards,  
3 and/or based on their expectations of cost-benefit available in the *immediate* situation.  
4 According to this theory, score information at the time of the infraction may provide to the  
5 aggressor some precise details about benefits of his/her action, and therefore, its legitimacy  
6 (Silva & Conroy, 1995). For instance, behaving aggressively may be viewed by aggressors as  
7 more beneficial (e.g., taking a decisive advantage or avoiding an important disadvantage) and  
8 thus more legitimate when the score is tied between the teams than favorable (and success  
9 certain) or unfavorable (and failure certain). Conroy et al. (2001) precisely demonstrated that  
10 when team sports athletes assessed aggressive actions in a variety of situational  
11 circumstances, they more often approved of aggressive behaviors in situations where the score  
12 was tied or uncertain.

13 The social learning view in sport (Silva & Conroy, 1995) has also suggested that athletes  
14 may be socialized to accept misconduct in regard to their expectations about *immediate*  
15 situational costs of their actions. In team sports, penalization is the most frequent and costly  
16 consequence for players and teams using illegal or aggressive acts (e.g., ejection from the  
17 game and playing shorthanded; Widmeyer et al., 2002). Thus, such conduct may be viewed as  
18 less risky and as more acceptable when the game officials do not see the infraction or when  
19 the player does not get caught. Dodge and Robertson (2004) collected potential justifications  
20 for unethical and aggressive behaviors and indicated that “not getting caught” was the second  
21 most frequently reported justification by varsity athletes. Conroy et al. (2001) also revealed  
22 that team sport athletes described aggressive behaviors as more legitimate in situations where  
23 there was no risk to be caught than when the risk was high. In soccer, the risk or cost for  
24 deviant players can range from receiving a warning (i.e., yellow card) to being banished from  
25 the game (i.e., red card). Thus, athletes would more likely approve their aggression when



1 there is no risk of being caught by the officials rather than when the risk/cost is a yellow card  
2 and furthermore a red card. This reasoning in terms of benefits and cost values for aggressors  
3 to legitimize their conduct would be relevant for instrumental compared to hostile aggressive  
4 behaviors (Bandura, 1973; Silva & Conroy, 1995).

5 Indeed, if sport aggression includes all behaviors that violate the formal rules and  
6 intentionally harming another, the main goal and situational reinforcements related to such  
7 conducts may be different (Silva & Conroy, 1995). Instrumental aggression is performed as a  
8 means to a competitive end (e.g., to gain the ball), whereas hostile aggression is performed  
9 solely for the purpose of harming an opponent and may decrease the athletic performance  
10 rather than help it (Silva, 1978). This last type of aggression often falls outside of what is now  
11 considered admissible in sport (Conroy et al., 2001). On the contrary, the ultimate goal of  
12 instrumental aggression is to obtain a competitive benefit and this conduct seems to be part of  
13 a socialization process (Silva & Conroy, 1995). There is evidence that players in the aggressor  
14 role were more tolerant of their acts that appeared to be instrumental as opposed to hostile  
15 (Conroy et al., 2001; Tracllet et al., 2008). For instance, Tracllet et al. (2008) revealed that  
16 when players were placed in the aggressor perspective, they portrayed aggressive acts as more  
17 legitimate in situations where the instrumental value (rather than hostile value) of the act was  
18 high. In contrast, no significant difference was found in the victim perspective. Similarly, in a  
19 school context, Mummendey and Otten (1989) indicated that pupils in the position of  
20 aggressor considered the amount of seriousness of an act as well as the presence (or not) of  
21 provocation. Specifically, the participants judged unprovoked and serious aggression as less  
22 intentional but more inappropriate than others aggressive events. In contrast, perceiving the  
23 other's behaviors in the position of victim led to a stable evaluation of aggression, regardless  
24 of the circumstances.

1 Based on the above discussion, we can hypothesize that aggressors would consider their  
2 instrumental aggressive behaviors as more legitimate in situations where (a) the score was tied  
3 rather than favorable or unfavorable, and (b) there was no risk of penalization rather than a  
4 risk/cost of yellow or red card. In addition, we can hypothesize that the situational and  
5 behavioral clues would be less important for victims to evaluate aggressive acts, even if it is  
6 difficult to state precisely in hypotheses about how situational information and types of  
7 aggression influence their perceptions.

## 8 Method

### 9 *Participants*

10 The study included 133 French male soccer players aged from 18 to 23 years old ( $M =$   
11  $19.3$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ). They belonged to 15 teams in western France competing at the departmental  
12 level. This competitive level is the lowest one that exists in French adult soccer championship  
13 (the highest level being professional). At the time of data collection, participants had been  
14 playing organized soccer for an average of 11.3 seasons ( $SD = 1.1$ ). They were recruited and  
15 gave their informed consent during a summer soccer tournament.

### 16 *Instruments*

17 In accordance with the prior research on aggression (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Tractlet  
18 et al., 2008), a scenario and perspective taking procedure was conducted. In a previous study  
19 (Tractlet et al., 2008), elbowing, kicking, tripping, and holding acts were mentioned by soccer  
20 players, coaches and chief referees as the most representative intentional rule-breaking  
21 behaviors in soccer. In the present study, eight written scenarios were made to illustrate the  
22 same list of behaviors. In each scenario, one soccer player intentionally attacks an opponent  
23 (including aggressive kicking, tripping, elbowing, or holding acts) when the latter player won  
24 back the ball in the middle field. Half of the scenarios depicted these aggressive acts with an  
25 instrumental ultimate goal (i.e., to gain the ball), whereas half depicted the same behaviors

1 with a hostile ultimate goal (i.e., to harm the opponent). Because of the way behavior was  
2 measured, the term “behavior” refers to reported rather than actual behavior. The scenario  
3 with instrumental kicking is presented in the Appendix as an example.

4 Following each of the eight written scenarios, the participants were asked to assess  
5 whether the behavior portrayed is okay (i.e., legitimate) for them depending on several  
6 situational-related items. Three items were related to the game score at the time of the  
7 infraction: “if the score between the teams was tied in the situation (e.g., 0-0; 2-2)”, “if the  
8 score was clearly in favor of the player A in the situation and success was quite assured (e.g.,  
9 2-0; 3-0)”, and “if the score was unfavorable to the player A in the situation and failure was  
10 quite assured (e.g., 0-2; 0-3)”. The other three items were linked to the risk of penalization: “if  
11 there was no risk to be caught by the referee”, “if there was a risk to be penalized by a yellow  
12 card”, and “if there was a risk to be penalized by a red card”). The responses for the six items  
13 were indicated on an 8-point Likert scale (1-2 = Never OK [legitimate], 3-4 = seldom OK  
14 [legitimate], 5-6 = Often OK [legitimate], 7-8 = Always OK [legitimate]). This format of  
15 items and scale were similar to those employed by Conroy et al. (2001) in their research on  
16 legitimacy judgments regarding aggressive sport behaviors.

17 In the present study, the aggressive condition (i.e., instrumental vs. hostile) and the  
18 situation-related items order were randomly presented to participants to avoid potential order  
19 effects: (a) instrumental then hostile, or the reverse, (b) tied, in favor, and in disfavor in all  
20 possible ordered sequences; and (c) no risk, yellow card, or red card, in all possible ordered  
21 sequences. Similarly, the order of the written scenarios was counterbalanced, presenting each  
22 aggressive act in first, second, third, and fourth place. No order effect was found for  
23 aggressive condition, score information, sanction information, and written scenarios order ( $p$   
24  $> .05$ ). Copies of the complete questionnaire can be obtained upon request from the second  
25 author.

1 *Internal reliability of the instrument*

2       The analysis of internal reliability on each situation-related item across the different  
3 aggressive behaviors yielded reliability coefficients ranging from .78 (Yellow-card item) to  
4 .93 (Tie-Score item). Further analysis of the instrument comprising the responses to the six  
5 legitimacy-items for instrumental scenarios and hostile scenarios yielded alpha coefficients of  
6 .78 and .81, respectively. This indicated high interrelatedness of the items and consistency in  
7 responses across different behaviors. Then for each perspective, the perceived legitimacy  
8 scores were averaged together to provide a mean score of the instrumental aggressive  
9 behaviors and a mean score of the hostile ones.

10 *External validity of the instrument*

11       A separate sample of participants ( $N = 40$ ) was recruited to assess the external validity of  
12 the instrument and measure, that is, to evaluate whether the responses to the written situations  
13 were related to those in the real situations. Several authors have used similar written sport  
14 scenarios depicting aggressive behaviors with satisfactory external validity (Conroy et al.,  
15 2001; Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Maxwell et al., 2008). However, researchers have often  
16 focused on comparisons between responses to written situations and those to psychometric  
17 measures such as anger and aggressiveness questionnaires, neglecting responses to actual  
18 aggressive situations. In the present study, different departmental soccer games were  
19 videotaped and twenty aggressive situations were retained according to two randomly selected  
20 scenarios of the current study (i.e., kicking and elbowing situations). The actual aggressors ( $n$   
21 = 20) and victims ( $n = 20$ ) were individually approached following each game to watch their  
22 own video and to evaluate the perceived legitimacy of the perpetrated behavior (“real”  
23 condition). One week later, the same participants were contacted in their club to evaluate the  
24 perceived legitimacy of the same behavior presented in a written scenario (“hypothetical”  
25 condition), assuming that they were again the aggressor or the victim. The presentation of the

1 real and hypothetical conditions was counter-balanced to avoid potential order effects.  
2 Correlations were conducted to determine whether the players' perceived legitimacy scores in  
3 these two conditions were related to each other. Regardless of the perspective, the correlations  
4 were at .62, suggesting a correspondence between evaluations of hypothetical and real  
5 aggressive situations<sup>1</sup>.

### 6 *Procedure*

7 The investigation was conducted two hours before the entire summer soccer tournament  
8 began and was introduced as "research about competitive situations in soccer". Participants  
9 were questioned in small groups of approximately ten players, regardless of their team  
10 membership, by one of the investigators or by two graduate students familiar with the  
11 aggression literature in a sport context. Participants were informed that questions needed to be  
12 completed individually and all answers would be kept confidential. They signed an informed  
13 consent form and were encouraged to provide honest responses to maximize internal validity.

14 Following the signing of the consent forms, we used the scenario and perspective taking  
15 procedure to manipulate participants' perspectives. Specifically, each group of participants  
16 was randomly assigned to a perspective (aggressor,  $n = 67$ ; victim,  $n = 66$ ), and the eight  
17 scenarios were accompanied by the same written instructions to empathically take the role of  
18 a specific protagonist (either aggressor/player A or victim/player B) and to experience and  
19 evaluate the situation from this perspective (See Appendix). However, the designations of the  
20 terms "aggressor" and "victim" were not used; the aggressor was introduced as "player A"  
21 and the victim as "player B". In other words, each participant read the eight written scenarios  
22 and completed the six questions for each scenario assuming that they were the same  
23 protagonist in all situations. The experimental session took approximately five minutes for  
24 each group of participants.

### 25 *Manipulation Check*

1 Before the perceived legitimacy questions, we tested (a) the players' knowledge of the  
2 soccer rules and definition of aggression ("Is this behavior aggressive, that is intentional and  
3 illegal according to the soccer rules?") using an 8-point scale (anchors 1: Totally  
4 nonaggressive and 8: Totally aggressive), and (b) whether participants could imagine  
5 themselves in a specific position (aggressor or victim) using a "Yes" or "No" response. All  
6 participants were able to adopt the imposed perspective and understood that each scenario  
7 depicted a clearly aggressive behavior ( $M = 7.2$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ), even if there was a less negative  
8 judgment by aggressors.

### 9 *Data Analysis*

10 Analyses of variances with repeated measures were used to examine the contribution of  
11 the four independent variables (perspective, aggressive condition, score information, and  
12 sanction information) on the perceived legitimacy of aggression. Without a conceptual reason  
13 for looking for an interaction between score and sanction or a possible 4-way interaction, the  
14 impact of score and sanction information was assessed with two different and separate sets of  
15 questions rather than directly including information in multiple repetitive scenarios.  
16 Consequently, the design was two 2 x 2 x 3 mixed models (Perspective x Type of Aggression  
17 x Score [or Sanction]). Perspective (aggressor and victim) was a between-subjects factor,  
18 whereas the aggressive condition (instrumental and hostile), the score information (tied, in  
19 favor, and in disfavor), and the sanction information (no risk, yellow card, and red card)  
20 served as within-subject factors. The alpha level was set at .05 and measures of effect size ( $\eta^2$ )  
21 were conducted for these analyses.

### 22 Results

23 In this sample, although all the average legitimacy scores were below the midpoint of the  
24 scale (4.5), aggressive behavior was perceived differently depending on each independent  
25 variable (see Table 1). For instance, aggressors seemed indicate more approval of aggressive

1 behavior in soccer than did victims. The two 2 x 2 x 3 analyses of variances were computed  
2 and the results indicated a violation of Mauchly's test of sphericity (from .67 to .90,  $ps < .002$ ,  
3  $\epsilon = .75$  to .90); Consequently, a Greenhouse-Geisser corrected F test and post-hoc tests using  
4 Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) were conducted. All main effects were  
5 significant with moderate to large effect sizes, but more importantly results revealed  
6 significant three-way interactions with moderate effect sizes (see Table 2), suggesting that the  
7 aggressor – victim perspective and situational information need to be considered together.

8 For the three-way interaction with score information, Tukey's post-hoc analyses  
9 supported our hypothesis and revealed aggressors perceived instrumental aggression as more  
10 legitimate when the score was tied than in their favor or disfavor ( $ps < .001$ ; Figure 1). In  
11 contrast, victims similarly perceived instrumental aggression under all the score conditions  
12 ( $ps > .10$ ). As a result, significant aggressor-victim dissent was found only in the "tied score"  
13 situation for instrumental aggression ( $p < .001$ ). Lastly, Tukey's post-hoc tests did not reveal  
14 statistically significant differences for hostile aggression, regardless of the perspective and  
15 score information.

16 For the three-way interaction with sanction information, Tukey's post-hoc analyses also  
17 supported our hypothesis indicating that aggressors considered instrumental aggression as  
18 more legitimate when there was no risk to be caught than when there was a risk of yellow or  
19 red card ( $ps < .001$ ). In contrast, victims were not affected by sanction information and no  
20 difference was found in their perceptions of instrumental aggression ( $ps < .001$ , see Figure 2).  
21 As a result, significant aggressor-victim dissent was found only in the "no risk of sanction"  
22 situation for instrumental aggression ( $p < .001$ ). Once again, regardless of the sanction  
23 information, no significant difference was found in the aggressors' and victims' perceptions  
24 of hostile aggression.

25 Discussion

1           The central strength of this study was to examine the aggressor – victim dissent in  
2 perceived legitimacy of aggression in soccer as a function of score information, risk of  
3 penalization, and type of aggression. While the data clearly supported the position that  
4 aggressors showed greater approval of aggressive behaviors than did victims, this finding is  
5 qualified by three-way significant interactions. These indicate that both perspective and  
6 situational information have a joint influence on athletes' perceptions. In particular,  
7 aggressors and victims differently perceived instrumental aggression depending on the  
8 circumstances, suggesting they refer to different values to evaluate aggression. The  
9 interactions, therefore, are the central focus of the discussion.

10           Aggressors considered instrumental aggression as more legitimate in situations where  
11 the game score was tied or there was no risk of penalization, as compared to clearly  
12 (un)favorable scores or a risk of yellow/red card. Although not all studies support these  
13 findings, Conroy et al. (2001) also showed team sports athletes more accepted aggression  
14 with instrumental values, in tie situations, or when there was no risk to be caught. Our results  
15 also support an association between actual sport aggressions and tie situations (Gee & Leith,  
16 2007; Gee & Sullivan, 2006). This may mean that the games' circumstances may affect the  
17 aggressors' perceptions, providing essential information to judge their actions (Widmeyer et  
18 al., 2002). The social learning perspective underlined the necessity of analyzing  
19 (instrumental) aggression and its legitimacy in terms of functional values for the actor and the  
20 social and situational context (Bandura, 1973; Silva & Conroy, 1995). Clearly, the situational  
21 expectancies of cost-benefit available in the immediate situation (e.g., time elapsed, score  
22 opposition) may influence athletes in terms of whether or not it is appropriate to exhibit  
23 instrumental aggression. For instance, it may be better to neutralize the opponent with an  
24 aggressive behavior than to let him score a goal or get near the goal (Vaz, 1982). In the  
25 present study, it could be easier for aggressors to approve and rationalize aggressive acts in



1 perceived beneficial or less costly situations (i.e., when the score at the time of the offense is  
2 tied or when there is lower probability of punishment).

3 In addition, research on moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Boardley &  
4 Kavussanu, 2007) has illuminated how individuals justify their reprehensible conduct and  
5 preserve their self-worth by using some psychosocial maneuvers as distortion of  
6 consequences, displacement of responsibility, and/or relying on compelling or mitigating  
7 circumstances. For instance, there may be some specific circumstances in the situation that  
8 prompt aggressors to attribute their behavior to external factors or to judge them as justified.  
9 In soccer, impunity (i.e., unseen and unpunished aggression) and typically tie situations might  
10 convey compelling or mitigating circumstances (e.g., limited attention resources of the  
11 officials, coaches' expectations of success) and might prompt aggressors to believe their  
12 conduct as excusable or justifiable (Bandura, 1999; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007). Research  
13 designed to reduce aggression in sport will need to consider situational contingencies that  
14 influence this shift in perceptions of legitimacy and that play an important part in the  
15 perpetrators' endorsement of aggression.

16 Although aggressors showed a high variability in their judgments and considered the  
17 aggressive and situational conditions, victims perceived aggressive behaviors equally  
18 illegitimate across all the situational information. This finding appears to support the literature  
19 on perspective-related differences about aggression (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Tractlet et  
20 al., 2008), suggesting that victims may use different considerations to assess aggression. In  
21 the sport context, there may be a fundamental difference between situational (local) and  
22 general (global) athletes' perceptions of aggression (Conroy et al., 2001). The former are  
23 specific to whether it is acceptable to act aggressively when placed in a given situation,  
24 whereas the latter are reflective of a more general acceptability of such behaviors in the sport  
25 domain. In the present study, the invariance of the victims' judgments could be related to

1 these global norms, for which all aggression makes victims suffer (regardless of the situation)  
2 and is against the ideological conventions of fair-play in sport.

3 Moreover, Mummendey and her coworkers have outlined that victims of harm-doing  
4 often apply social norms of reciprocity (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten et al., 1995). The  
5 norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is the well-accepted societal standard dictating that we  
6 should treat other people as they treat us. When one person does something to benefit another,  
7 a norm of positive reciprocity can be initiated whereby the recipient approves of the other's  
8 conduct and feels obligated to return the favor. Conversely, when someone harms another  
9 person, a norm of negative reciprocity can be invoked, leading the victim to claim that the  
10 other's aggressive act was fully inappropriate and incomprehensible, which justifies eye-for-  
11 an-eye retaliation (Gouldner, 1960; Otten et al., 1995). Within the context of the game, the  
12 larger context of provoked versus unprovoked actions would be interesting to consider from  
13 the victim's viewpoint.

14 It has been already mentioned that such differences in perceptions of aggression would  
15 have important scientific and/or applied interests in real situations. In a school context,  
16 Mummendey and her associates have suggested that perspective-related divergences may  
17 predict the course of the interaction and may explain some aggressive conflicts (Mummendey  
18 & Otten, 1989; Otten et al., 1995). For instance, an aggressive episode may be brief if the  
19 aggressor and victim agree on the illegitimate aspect of the act. In contrast, differences in  
20 perceptions of these two protagonists may lead to anger and retaliation from the victim, and  
21 may produce an escalation of violence. In a sport context, instrumental aggression is often  
22 associated with the continual rise of hostile and angered aggression (Gardner & Janelle,  
23 2002). This might be explained by a pronounced aggressor-victim difference in the perceived  
24 legitimacy of instrumental aggression, which may generate hostile feelings or reactions from  
25 the victim player. Moreover, it sounds reasonable that a divergence in perceptions between

1 the aggressor and an observer (e.g., the referee) may prompt the referee to severely penalize  
2 and the deviant player to contest and even attack the official. Further research and practice  
3 interventions and educational programs should investigate possibilities to reduce these  
4 judgmental differences about aggressive sport situations. For instance, role-playing and  
5 perspective-taking techniques (Batson, 1991; Day, Gerace, Wilson, & Howells, 2008) would  
6 challenge aggressors' way of perceiving situations as rationalizations and lead them to  
7 consider the other's point of view.

8         The main contribution of this study to the sport aggression literature may be the fact  
9 that both perspective-related differences and situational considerations have a joint influence  
10 on athletes' perceptions. We should, however, be duly cautious in interpretations and  
11 generalizations of our results. Indeed, this role-playing study did not reproduce or lacked  
12 some emotions (e.g., anger) that may be commonly experienced by hostile players and may  
13 affect their perceptions. Moreover, situational information may lose a part of its influence  
14 when it is given independently, since such information interacts in the game in a cumulative  
15 manner. In fact, if these variables are not taken into account together, similar results might not  
16 be found in real world contexts. Stephens (1998) argued that the major limitation of the  
17 measures used to assess legitimacy perceptions of aggression (e.g., scenarios, questionnaires)  
18 failed to meet requirements of ecological validity. Therefore, a full understanding of the  
19 athletes' perceptions of aggressive behavior in sport would require examination of the context  
20 of the entire game rather than isolated situations. In addition, it would be interesting to  
21 examine the accounts given by actual aggressors and victims and the ways in which they  
22 explain or justify aggressive sports behaviors according to the "heat of the moment". This  
23 may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of aggressive sport situations, the role of  
24 emotions, and of why victims sometimes turn around and retaliate.

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## 1 Appendix

2 *Instrumental kicking act scenario: General instructions*

3 Different stories are presented at the top of the eight pages. Each story is about two  
 4 soccer players your age who play the ball in the middle field. Please experience and read  
 5 each story carefully assuming you are player A [or B]. Similarly, answer the questions  
 6 that follow each situation by circling the number (from 1: Never Ok/legitimate to 8:  
 7 Always Ok/legitimate) that best describes the way you feel about it assuming you are  
 8 player A [or B]. There is no right or wrong answer; just choose the answer that most  
 9 accurately shows what you think. Please try to be as honest as you can in answering these  
 10 questions.

## 11 SCENARIO #1

12 During a championship match, player A loses the ball after bad control of it. An  
 13 opponent, player B, gets the ball back and rushes to counterattack in the middle  
 14 field. Before player B runs two meters, player A intentionally kicks him in order  
 15 to gain the ball.

16 Is the behavior portrayed okay (i.e., legitimate) for you in the following situations?

	Never OK [legitimate]	1	2	Seldom OK [legitimate]	3	4	Often Ok [legitimate]	5	6	Always OK [legitimate]	7	8
20 1. If there was no risk to be caught 21 by the referee ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
22 2. If the score was clearly in favor of 23 player A in the situation and 24 success was quite assured (2-0; 3-0)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
25 3. If there was a risk to be penalized 26 by a yellow card?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
27 4. If the score between the teams 28 was tied in the situation (0-0; 2-2)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
29 5. If there was a risk to be penalized 30 by a red card?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
31 6. If the score was clearly in disfavor of 32 player A in the situation and 33 failure was quite assured (0-2; 0-3).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				



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For Peer Review

1 Footnotes

2 <sup>1</sup>We should be duly cautious in generalizations of the correlations. Most of the actual  
3 (videotaped) aggressions in the present study occurred in tie score situations, and correlations  
4 between perceived legitimacy of hypothetical and actual aggressive behaviors were assessed  
5 only in such situations. Research is needed to examine correlations between evaluations of  
6 hypothetical and real aggression in others situations.

For Peer Review

1 Table 1

2 *Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Perceived Legitimacy of Aggression in Soccer*

	Analysis 1		Analysis 2		<i>n</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>Overall Perceived Legitimacy across all levels</i>	2.44	1.72	2.14	1.60	133
Perspective					
Aggressor	3.18	2.19	2.60	1.91	67
Victim	2.15	1.10	1.74	1.19	66
Aggressive Condition					
Instrumental	2.69	1.98	2.57	1.91	133
Hostile	2.06	1.32	1.77	1.04	133
Score Information					
Tied	3.10	1.92	-	-	133
Favorable	1.80	1.30	-	-	133
Unfavorable	2.23	1.53	-	-	133
Sporting Penalization					
No risk	-	-	2.23	1.83	133
Yellow card	-	-	2.26	1.60	133
Red card	-	-	1.86	1.24	133

3 *Note.* Judgments were made on 8 point-scale (anchors, 1: Never OK/legitimate and 8: always

4 OK/legitimate). Dashes indicate the situational variable was not examined in the analysis.

1 Table 2

2 *Significant Effects in the Analyses of Variance on Perceived Legitimacy Scores*

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
ANOVA 1 (with score information)			
Perspective (P)	1 (170.7)	34.4**	.20
Aggressive condition (AC)	1 (104.4)	42.9**	.24
Score information (SC)	1.9 (198.9)	88.1**	.40
P x AC	1 (69.69)	28.61**	.17
P x SC	1.95 (106.58)	47.21**	.26
AC x SC	1.50 (116.13)	55.94**	.29
P x AC x SC	1.50 (57.34)	27.62**	.17
ANOVA 2 (with sanction information)			
Perspective (P)	1 (149.9)	23.29**	.16
Aggressive condition (AC)	1 (126.9)	46.64**	.26
Sporting penalization (SP)	1.89 (78.9)	33.69**	.20
P x AC	1 (12.18)	4.47*	.03
P x SP	1.83 (158.6)	67.7**	.34
AC x SP	1.93 (11.46)	6.36**	.04
P x AC x SP	1.93 (45.34)	25.15**	.16

3 *Note.* Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean squares. P = Perspective, AC =

4 Aggressive Condition, SC = Score information, SP = Sporting Penalization information.

5 \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

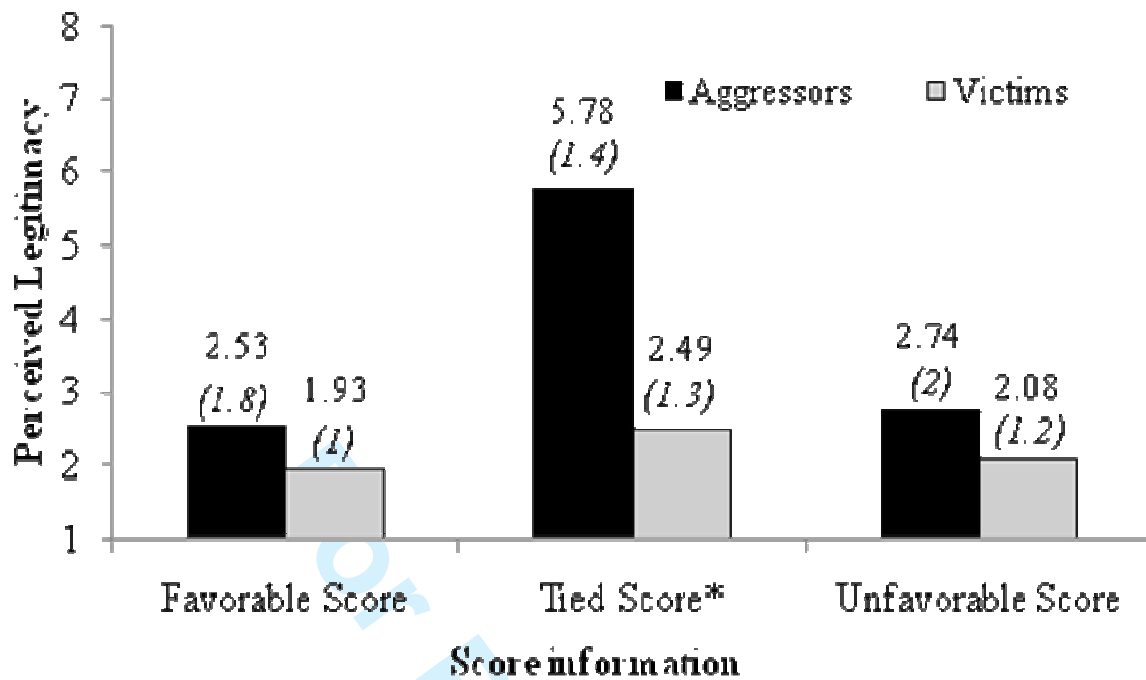
1 Figures Caption

2 *Figure 1.* Aggressor's and victim's perceptions of instrumental aggression as a function of the  
3 game score

4 *Figure 2.* Aggressor's and victim's perceptions of instrumental aggression as a function of the  
5 sporting penalization

For Peer Review

Figure 1 - TOP



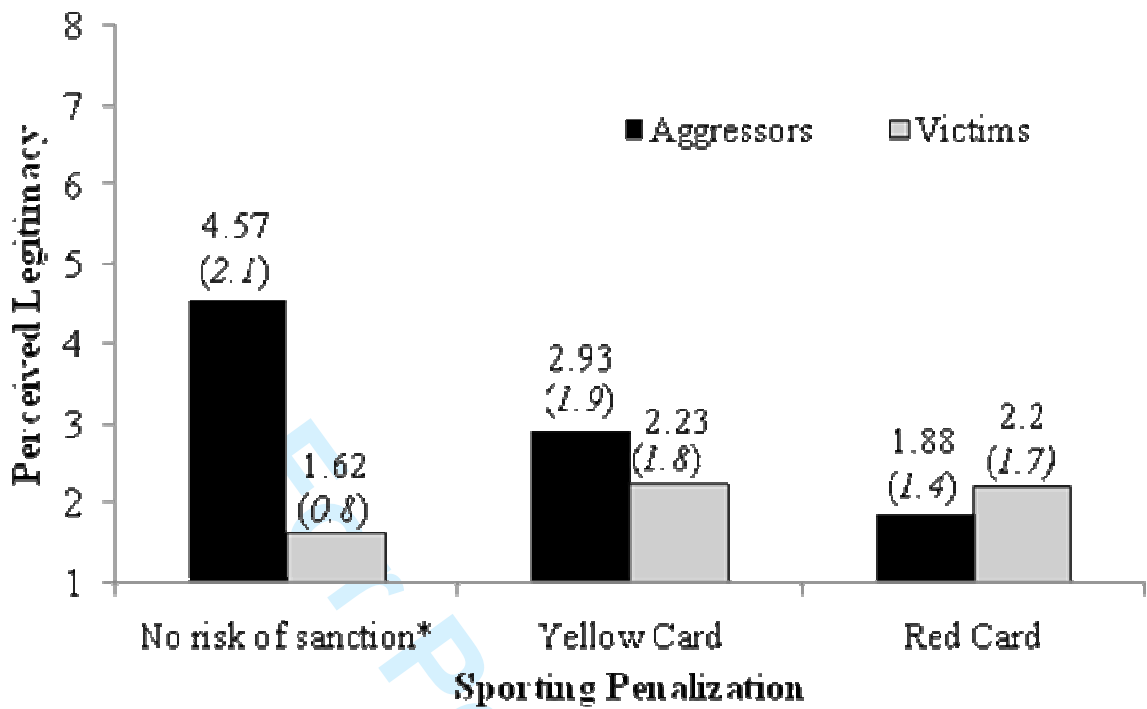
*Note.* Judgments were made on an 8 point-scale (anchors, 1: Never OK/legitimate and 8: Totally OK/Legitimate);

Values enclosed in parentheses represent Standard Deviations;

In the aggressor perspective, the “Tied score” condition differs from the others,  $p < .001$ ;

\* Significant aggressor-victim difference,  $p < .001$ .

Figure 2 - TOP



Note. Judgments were made on an 8 point-scale (anchor 1: Never OK/legitimate and 8: Totally OK/Legitimate);

Values enclosed in parentheses represent Standard Deviations;

In the aggressor perspective, the “no risk” condition differs from the others,  $p < .001$ ;

\* Significant aggressor-victim difference,  $p < .001$



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