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

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

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Running Head: PERCEPTION OF SPORT AGGRESSION

Aggressor – Victim Dissent in Perceived legitimacy of Aggression in Soccer:
The Moderating Role of Situational Background
This study investigates the aggressor–victim difference in perceived legitimacy of aggression in soccer as a function of score information (tied, favorable, unfavorable), sporting penalization (no risk, yellow card, red card), and type of aggression (instrumental, hostile). French male soccer players ($N = 133$) read written scenarios and rated the legitimacy of the described aggressive act depending on specific perspective (aggressor or victim) and situational information. Significant aggressor–victim difference in perception of instrumental aggression was found in situations where the score was tied or where there was no risk to be caught. In addition, aggressors were affected by such information, whereas victims were not. The discussion focused on explanations and implications of such divergences in aggressive sport situations.

Key word: Aggressive behavior, Perception, Perspective, Sport
Aggressor – Victim Dissent in Perceived legitimacy of Aggression in Soccer:

The Moderating Role of Situational Background

Over the three past decades, a substantial amount of research has focused on understanding aggression in sport. Thus, several sport scientists have devoted considerable effort to studying perceived legitimacy of aggression among athletes and factors influencing aggressive behaviors in sports (Conroy, Silva, Newcomer, Walker, & Johnson, 2001; Gardner & Janelle, 2002; Maxwell, Visok, & Moores, in press; Silva, 1983; Visok & Watson, 2005).

Most researchers have defined aggression in sport as overt acts violating the formal rules and intentionally causing harm (Stephens, 1998; Widmeyer, Dorsch, Bray, & McGuire, 2002).

However, aggression may also be conceptualized as a kind of social interaction involving at least two persons and characterized by a specific perspective interpretation of the act (Mummendey & Mummendey, 1983). This means there is always an aggressor and a victim, and that the perception of harm and rule-violating behaviors may differ according to the perspective of individuals (Widmeyer et al., 2002).

In that view, Mummendey and her coworkers pointed out that a decisive characteristic in the development of aggressive situations is an aggressor – victim dissent in the evaluation of the action (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten, Mummendey, & Wenzel, 1995). Such perspective-related differences in evaluation of aggressive acts have been demonstrated in several empirical studies in school (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten et al., 1995) and justice contexts (Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, 1998). Mummendey and Otten (1989) used a perspective taking experiment and revealed that pupils in a position of aggressor considered their own behavior as less intentional and inappropriate than pupils in a position of victims. In a similar vein, Mikula et al. (1998) found that victims reported negative and aggressive incidents as more unjust and less justified than aggressors did. In a team-sport context, results of recent research (Traclet, Rasile, Souchon, Cabagno, & Dosseville, 2008)
supported these findings and a similar aggressor-victim difference was observed: soccer players perceived a series of aggressive acts in soccer as more legitimate when they were placed in the aggressor’s than in the victim’s role.

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

Perceptions of legitimacy for aggressive sport behavior have frequently been studied in terms of sex differences, years of participation, competitive level, or types of sports (Conroy et al., 2001; Gardner & Janelle, 2002; Maxwell et al., in press; Silva, 1983; Tuker & Parks,
The role of situational considerations was less often taken into account, and to our knowledge, no study has dealt with the potential impact of situational information on perspective-related differences in the interpretation of sport aggression.

In an effort to explain the situational determinants of sport aggression, some research has suggested the influence of score information, that is, score differentials (e.g., 1-1, 2-0) or status (i.e., tied vs. (un)favorable). The frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989) stated that some aggression would emanate from frustration. In sports, frustration may be a result of an unsuccessful or unpleasant event, and situations presumed to be frustrating such as losing or unfavorable score situations would be associated with a higher endorsement of aggression (Widmeyer & McGuire, 1997). However, empirical evidence related to this topic is not convincing and often produces conflicting findings (Widmeyer et al., 2002).

Specifically, aggression was sometimes associated to lose situations rather than to win situations (Widmeyer & Birsch, 1984; Widmeyer & McGuire, 1997), or the reverse (Cullen & Cullen, 1975; Worrell & Harris, 1986). In competitive team sports, VaezMousavi and Shojaie (2005) found that aggressive behaviors were significantly higher both in lose and win score situations when compared with tie score situations. In contrast, other observational studies indicated that the majority of aggressive acts in ice hockey transpired in tie score situations rather than large win and lose score situations (i.e., three goals and more in score differentials; Gee & Leith, 2007; Gee & Sullivan, 2006). Lastly, some research has failed to find a relationship between aggression and current state of scores (Jones, Bray, & Olivier, 2005; McGuire, Courneya, Widmeyer & Carron, 1992). These few studies and their contradictory results do not provide evidence of the association between aggression (and its endorsement) and score information. However, there are difficulties in interpreting past findings when the studies were based on the final results of the game or on the situation at the time aggression happens, and when they did not differentiate among different types of aggressions.
Social learning theory (Bandura, 1973; Silva & Conroy, 1995) states that athletes approve and adopt aggressive behaviors by observing others, by relating aggression with rewards, and/or based on their expectations of cost-benefit available in the immediate situation. According to this theory, score information at the time of the infraction may provide to the aggressor some precise details about benefits of his/her action, and therefore, its legitimacy (Silva & Conroy, 1995). For instance, behaving aggressively may be viewed by aggressors as more beneficial (e.g., taking a decisive advantage or avoiding an important disadvantage) and thus more legitimate when the score is tied between the teams than favorable (and success certain) or unfavorable (and failure certain). Conroy et al. (2001) precisely demonstrated that when team sports athletes assessed aggressive actions in a variety of situational circumstances, they more often approved of aggressive behaviors in situations where the score was tied or uncertain.

The social learning view in sport (Silva & Conroy, 1995) has also suggested that athletes may be socialized to accept misconduct in regard to their expectations about immediate situational costs of their actions. In team sports, penalization is the most frequent and costly consequence for players and teams using illegal or aggressive acts (e.g., ejection from the game and playing shorthanded; Widmeyer et al., 2002). Thus, such conduct may be viewed as less risky and as more acceptable when the game officials do not see the infraction or when the player does not get caught. Dodge and Robertson (2004) collected potential justifications for unethical and aggressive behaviors and indicated that “not getting caught” was the second most frequently reported justification by varsity athletes. Conroy et al. (2001) also revealed that team sport athletes described aggressive behaviors as more legitimate in situations where there was no risk to be caught than when the risk was high. In soccer, the risk or cost for deviant players can range from receiving a warning (i.e., yellow card) to being banished from the game (i.e., red card). Thus, athletes would more likely approve their aggression when
there is no risk of being caught by the officials rather than when the risk/cost is a yellow card and furthermore a red card. This reasoning in terms of benefits and cost values for aggressors to legitimize their conduct would be relevant for instrumental compared to hostile aggressive behaviors (Bandura, 1973; Silva & Conroy, 1995).

Indeed, if sport aggression includes all behaviors that violate the formal rules and intentionally harming another, the main goal and situational reinforcements related to such conducts may be different (Silva & Conroy, 1995). Instrumental aggression is performed as a means to a competitive end (e.g., to gain the ball), whereas hostile aggression is performed solely for the purpose of harming an opponent and may decrease the athletic performance rather than help it (Silva, 1978). This last type of aggression often falls outside of what is now considered admissible in sport (Conroy et al., 2001). On the contrary, the ultimate goal of instrumental aggression is to obtain a competitive benefit and this conduct seems to be part of a socialization process (Silva & Conroy, 1995). There is evidence that players in the aggressor role were more tolerant of their acts that appeared to be instrumental as opposed to hostile (Conroy et al., 2001; Traclet et al., 2008). For instance, Traclet et al. (2008) revealed that when players were placed in the aggressor perspective, they portrayed aggressive acts as more legitimate in situations where the instrumental value (rather than hostile value) of the act was high. In contrast, no significant difference was found in the victim perspective. Similarly, in a school context, Mummendey and Otten (1989) indicated that pupils in the position of aggressor considered the amount of seriousness of an act as well as the presence (or not) of provocation. Specifically, the participants judged unprovoked and serious aggression as less intentional but more inappropriate than others aggressive events. In contrast, perceiving the other’s behaviors in the position of victim led to a stable evaluation of aggression, regardless of the circumstances.
Based on the above discussion, we can hypothesize that aggressors would consider their instrumental aggressive behaviors as more legitimate in situations where (a) the score was tied rather than favorable or unfavorable, and (b) there was no risk of penalization rather than a risk/cost of yellow or red card. In addition, we can hypothesize that the situational and behavioral clues would be less important for victims to evaluate aggressive acts, even if it is difficult to state precisely in hypotheses about how situational information and types of aggression influence their perceptions.

Method

Participants

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

Instruments

In accordance with the prior research on aggression (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Traclet et al., 2008), a scenario and perspective taking procedure was conducted. In a previous study (Traclet et al., 2008), elbowing, kicking, tripping, and holding acts were mentioned by soccer players, coaches and chief referees as the most representative intentional rule-breaking behaviors in soccer. In the present study, eight written scenarios were made to illustrate the same list of behaviors. In each scenario, one soccer player intentionally attacks an opponent (including aggressive kicking, tripping, elbowing, or holding acts) when the latter player won back the ball in the middle field. Half of the scenarios depicted these aggressive acts with an instrumental ultimate goal (i.e., to gain the ball), whereas half depicted the same behaviors...
with a hostile ultimate goal (i.e., to harm the opponent). Because of the way behavior was measured, the term “behavior” refers to reported rather than actual behavior. The scenario with instrumental kicking is presented in the Appendix as an example.

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

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

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

External validity of the instrument

A separate sample of participants \((N = 40)\) was recruited to assess the external validity of the instrument and measure, that is, to evaluate whether the responses to the written situations were related to those in the real situations. Several authors have used similar written sport scenarios depicting aggressive behaviors with satisfactory external validity (Conroy et al., 2001; Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Maxwell et al., 2008). However, researchers have often focused on comparisons between responses to written situations and those to psychometric measures such as anger and aggressiveness questionnaires, neglecting responses to actual aggressive situations. In the present study, different departmental soccer games were videotaped and twenty aggressive situations were retained according to two randomly selected scenarios of the current study (i.e., kicking and elbowing situations). The actual aggressors \((n = 20)\) and victims \((n = 20)\) were individually approached following each game to watch their own video and to evaluate the perceived legitimacy of the perpetrated behavior (“real” condition). One week later, the same participants were contacted in their club to evaluate the perceived legitimacy of the same behavior presented in a written scenario (“hypothetical” condition), assuming that they were again the aggressor or the victim. The presentation of the
real and hypothetical conditions was counterbalanced to avoid potential order effects. Correlations were conducted to determine whether the players’ perceived legitimacy scores in these two conditions were related to each other. Regardless of the perspective, the correlations were at .62, suggesting a correspondence between evaluations of hypothetical and real aggressive situations.  

Procedure  

The investigation was conducted two hours before the entire summer soccer tournament began and was introduced as “research about competitive situations in soccer”. Participants were questioned in small groups of approximately ten players, regardless of their team membership, by one of the investigators or by two graduate students familiar with the aggression literature in a sport context. Participants were informed that questions needed to be completed individually and all answers would be kept confidential. They signed an informed consent form and were encouraged to provide honest responses to maximize internal validity. Following the signing of the consent forms, we used the scenario and perspective taking procedure to manipulate participants’ perspectives. Specifically, each group of participants was randomly assigned to a perspective (aggressor, \( n = 67 \); victim, \( n = 66 \)), and the eight scenarios were accompanied by the same written instructions to empathically take the role of a specific protagonist (either aggressor/player A or victim/player B) and to experience and evaluate the situation from this perspective (See Appendix). However, the designations of the terms “aggressor” and “victim” were not used; the aggressor was introduced as “player A” and the victim as “player B”. In other words, each participant read the eight written scenarios and completed the six questions for each scenario assuming that they were the same protagonist in all situations. The experimental session took approximately five minutes for each group of participants.  

Manipulation Check
Before the perceived legitimacy questions, we tested (a) the players’ knowledge of the soccer rules and definition of aggression (“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), and (b) whether participants could imagine themselves in a specific position (aggressor or victim) using a “Yes” or “No” response. All participants were able to adopt the imposed perspective and understood that each scenario depicted a clearly aggressive behavior ($M = 7.2$, $SD = 1.2$), even if there was a less negative judgment by aggressors.

**Data Analysis**

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

**Results**

In this sample, although all the average legitimacy scores were below the midpoint of the scale (4.5), aggressive behavior was perceived differently depending on each independent variable (see Table 1). For instance, aggressors seemed indicate more approval of aggressive...
behavior in soccer than did victims. The two 2 x 2 x 3 analyses of variances were computed and the results indicated a violation of Mauchly’s test of sphericity (from .67 to .90, ps < .002, ε = .75 to .90); Consequently, a Greenhouse-Geisser corrected F test and post-hoc tests using Tukey’s Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) were conducted. All main effects were significant with moderate to large effect sizes, but more importantly results revealed significant three-way interactions with moderate effect sizes (see Table 2), suggesting that the aggressor – victim perspective and situational information need to be considered together.

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

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

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

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

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

Although aggressors showed a high variability in their judgments and considered the aggressive and situational conditions, victims perceived aggressive behaviors equally illegitimate across all the situational information. This finding appears to support the literature on perspective-related differences about aggression (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Traclet et al., 2008), suggesting that victims may use different considerations to assess aggression. In the sport context, there may be a fundamental difference between situational (local) and general (global) athletes’ perceptions of aggression (Conroy et al., 2001). The former are specific to whether it is acceptable to act aggressively when placed in a given situation, whereas the latter are reflective of a more general acceptability of such behaviors in the sport domain. In the present study, the invariance of the victims’ judgments could be related to
these global norms, for which all aggression makes victims suffer (regardless of the situation) and is against the ideological conventions of fair-play in sport.

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

It has been already mentioned that such differences in perceptions of aggression would have important scientific and/or applied interests in real situations. In a school context, Mummendey and her associates have suggested that perspective-related divergences may predict the course of the interaction and may explain some aggressive conflicts (Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten et al., 1995). For instance, an aggressive episode may be brief if the aggressor and victim agree on the illegitimate aspect of the act. In contrast, differences in perceptions of these two protagonists may lead to anger and retaliation from the victim, and may produce an escalation of violence. In a sport context, instrumental aggression is often associated with the continual rise of hostile and angered aggression (Gardner & Janelle, 2002). This might be explained by a pronounced aggressor-victim difference in the perceived legitimacy of instrumental aggression, which may generate hostile feelings or reactions from the victim player. Moreover, it sounds reasonable that a divergence in perceptions between
the aggressor and an observer (e.g., the referee) may prompt the referee to severely penalize and the deviant player to contest and even attack the official. Further research and practice interventions and educational programs should investigate possibilities to reduce these judgmental differences about aggressive sport situations. For instance, role-playing and perspective-taking techniques (Batson, 1991; Day, Gerace, Wilson, & Howells, 2008) would challenge aggressors’ way of perceiving situations as rationalizations and lead them to consider the other’s point of view.

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


Appendix

Instrumental kicking act scenario: General instructions

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

Scenario #1

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

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

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<td>3</td>
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<td>2. If the score was clearly in favor of player A in the situation and success was quite assured (2-0; 3-0)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3. If there was a risk to be penalized by a yellow card?</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4. If the score between the teams was tied in the situation (0-0; 2-2)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. If there was a risk to be penalized by a red card?</td>
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<td>6. If the score was clearly in disfavor of player A in the situation and failure was quite assured (0-2; 0-3).</td>
<td>1</td>
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Footnotes

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

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

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

Note. Judgments were made on 8 point-scale (anchors, 1: Never OK/legitimate and 8: always OK/legitimate). Dashes indicate the situational variable was not examined in the analysis.
Table 2

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANOVA 1 (with score information)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective (P)</td>
<td>1 (170.7)</td>
<td>34.4**</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive condition (AC)</td>
<td>1 (104.4)</td>
<td>42.9**</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score information (SC)</td>
<td>1.9 (198.9)</td>
<td>88.1**</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x AC</td>
<td>1 (69.69)</td>
<td>28.61**</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x SC</td>
<td>1.95 (106.58)</td>
<td>47.21**</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC x SC</td>
<td>1.50 (116.13)</td>
<td>55.94**</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x AC x SC</td>
<td>1.50 (57.34)</td>
<td>27.62**</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANOVA 2 (with sanction information)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective (P)</td>
<td>1 (149.9)</td>
<td>23.29**</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive condition (AC)</td>
<td>1 (126.9)</td>
<td>46.64**</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting penalization (SP)</td>
<td>1.89 (78.9)</td>
<td>33.69**</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x AC</td>
<td>1 (12.18)</td>
<td>4.47*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x SP</td>
<td>1.83 (158.6)</td>
<td>67.7**</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC x SP</td>
<td>1.93 (11.46)</td>
<td>6.36**</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P x AC x SP</td>
<td>1.93 (45.34)</td>
<td>25.15**</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean squares. P = Perspective, AC = Aggressive Condition, SC = Score information, SP = Sporting Penalization information.

*p < .05, **p < .01.
Figures Caption

Figure 1. Aggressor’s and victim’s perceptions of instrumental aggression as a function of the game score

Figure 2. Aggressor’s and victim’s perceptions of instrumental aggression as a function of the sporting penalization
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, $p_s < .001$;

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

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