

CONNECT to the topic page 62

Talk show host: Good afternoon. Welcome to *Sports Beat*. Today we have with us Dr. Anika Douglas, a social psychologist who studies sports fans. Why don't you tell us a little about your research on sports fans.

Sports psychologist Dr. Anika Douglas: Sure, well, there's the saying in sports "it's only a game." Meaning, sports is just for fun, just a distraction. Don't take it so seriously.

Host: But that's not true for everybody, right?

Dr. Douglas: Exactly. My research tells me that for many sports fans "it isn't just a game." It's a big deal when their team loses. And it's a personal victory when their team wins.

Host: But isn't there an upside to this? An advantage to being an avid sports fan? Doesn't your research show that being a sports fan can also be good for our emotional health?

Dr. Douglas: Yes, it does. It can be. Our research shows that sports fans who identify with a team have higher self-esteem and feel less lonely.

Host: Well, tell us: How do you do your research? Do you interview fans?

Dr. Douglas: Well, I use the "Sports Spectator Identification Scale."

Host: The Sports Spectator Identification Scale?

Dr. Douglas: Yes, it's a set of questions developed by Daniel Wann, who studies the psychology of sports fandom. The answers to the questions show how much someone identifies as a sports fan, how emotionally involved that person is as a fan.

Host: What kind of questions?

Dr. Douglas: Oh questions like "Do you know your team's schedule?" and "How important to you is it if your team wins?" and "How often do you wear your team colors?"

Host: Is there a question: "Do you buy the team jerseys of your favorite players?"

Dr. Douglas: Yes, that question is on there.

Host: Well, I guess I'm a big fan then! Well we're out of time. That's it for *Sports Beat* for today.

FOCUS your attention page 65

Speaker: OK. So today, I'm going to cover three basic types of sports fans as I see it. The first type of fan I'll call the fair-weather fan. This first type only identifies as a fan if the team is successful. A quick example: The fair-weather fan buys a team T-shirt only after a

big championship win. Now let's turn to the second type of fan, who I'll call a loyal fan. For example, the second type of fan follows the team's ups and downs all season, but definitely has other interests besides the team. And then, let's move on to the third type of fan that I'll call the super fan. This third type of fan is totally committed to the team. Examples: Follows on Twitter, has season tickets, watches replays of the games, even gives team T-shirts and hats to family and friends, hoping to get them to become super fans as well. Now let's look at each type in more detail ...

WATCH the lecture page 66

Professor Colin Edwards: E01 I don't know about you, but I spent the entire weekend watching World Cup matches. In fact, my whole family did—we're big sports fans. And while some people think of sports as just a fun interest, social psychologists have a wider view. Many modern social psychologists say that watching sports—and identifying with a particular player or team—fulfills an important human need. This is the need to belong to a group and feel a sense of self-esteem. In other words, people may have a deeper social motivation for following sports. It's not just about watching a game. Today, we'll take a quick look at five *broad* reasons why people follow sports. And then we'll come back to this idea of belonging and self-esteem. OK? **E02** First off, people are motivated to watch sports because sports are really *entertaining*. Sports is performance art. We can observe superb athletes displaying their talent and dedication. For example, even if you don't particularly like sports, you can appreciate the gymnastic performance of an Olympic athlete, or an NBA player dunking a basketball, or a Wimbledon champion serving an ace, or a soccer player scissor-kicking a goal. The beauty of sports performances can be enchanting. **E03** The second motivation for following sports is our love of *competition*. Human beings are *competitive*—we love competition: a race, a contest. When we watch athletes playing competitive sports, we get a kind of indirect satisfaction. We feel as if we are also *in* the competition. Our blood pressure and hormone levels increase along with the athletes'. **E04** The third motivation for following sports is our interest in *drama*. All human beings, in all cultures, love stories. Sports is a great source of storytelling, because sports involve personal histories and struggles, relationships and rivalries. We want to see how these individuals succeed and how they respond to challenges. We also want to know about their lives "outside the lines"—their real lives, when they're not performing. **E05** Now there is a fourth motivation for

watching sports. This is our desire to understand *strategy*. Games are interesting only if they involve some kind of problem solving and decision making. When we watch a sports event—like a soccer match at the World Cup or even a chess match—we want to analyze the strategy of the players. We want to learn: What tactics do the players use? How do they try to get an advantage over their opponents?

E06 And the fifth thing that motivates people to become sports fans is the attraction of being part of a *community*. People become sports fans because that experience bonds them with others. Being a fan allows individuals to feel like they're part of a group. They can experience a sense of belonging and acceptance. We definitely witness this at a national level, don't we? For example, at the Olympics, being a sports fan is a way for people to feel united as a nation. Fans feel a sense of triumph and glory simply when their national team competes. They love wearing the same colors, chanting and cheering with their group. It feels good! And fans can feel that they are involved whether they are at the stadium or just watching at home.

E07 What's going on here? We can explain this with Social Identity Theory, which was originated some 40 years ago by two British psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John Turner. Social Identity Theory states that people behave in ways that increase their self-esteem. Self-esteem is a term in psychology that relates to mental health. We need self-esteem to be healthy. This includes self-respect, pride, and self-confidence. And being a sports fan is one way that people can boost their self-esteem. By *associating* or *affiliating* with a team—by wearing team colors or by going to games and tracking wins and losses—fans feel that they are an integral part of something. They feel they are an important part of the team, part of a community. The team and the team community actually becomes an important part of the fan's self-identity. So when the team wins, it feels like a personal success. And, yes, when the team loses, it feels like a personal failure. But even when our team loses, we can still feel self-esteem, because we remain loyal dedicated members of our group. And like all fans everywhere, we keep hoping for future success.

E08 Are you with me so far? Well, here's an interesting aspect of fan affiliation. It has to do with how social media reinforces Social Identity Theory. Fans tend to use social media—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and so on—as a way of broadcasting and reinforcing their sense of belonging to a group. With social media, fans stay connected and share their commitment to the team. And it works both ways. Teams and players also post regularly on social media. This ongoing exchange keeps fans involved in the team community.

E09 So to summarize, we've looked at five types of motivation for people to become sports fans: entertainment, competition, drama, strategy, and community. We all have a human drive to be part of a group and to feel good about ourselves. And being

a sports fan is one way to do that. In the next class, we'll look at other kinds of social groups and how Social Identity Theory operates in them. OK, team, that's all for today.

HEAR the language page 68

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- 2 And while some people think of sports as just a fun interest, social psychologists have a wider view.
- 3 Many modern social psychologists say that watching sports—and identifying with a particular player or team—fulfills an important human need.
- 4 This is the need to belong to a group and feel a sense of self-esteem.
- 5 Games are interesting only if they involve some kind of problem solving and decision making.
- 6 How do they try to get an advantage over their opponents?
- 7 For example, at the Olympics, being a sports fan is a way for people to feel united as a nation.
- 8 By associating or affiliating with a team—by wearing team colors or by going to games and tracking wins and losses—fans feel that they are an integral part of something.
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- 10 We all have a human drive to be part of a group and to feel good about ourselves.

TALK about the topic page 69

Ben: Hey everyone. How about we start by reviewing the reasons people follow sports? What are the main reasons people watch sports?

Shelley: Yeah, right. One reason, of course, is for entertainment. But, don't include me.

Ben: No? Not a big sports fan?

Shelley: Not really, no.

Kenzie: I think people follow sports for the competition. I love watching a tough match between two good teams or two strong players. Fight to the finish!

Hugh: Yeah, me too. I admit I go for the drama. Not about players' personal lives—I don't care about that stuff. But I *am* interested in their personalities—how they face challenges.

Ben: Cool. What else? Oh. There's also the fun of analyzing the strategy.

Kenzie: Yes, right. To me, following a game is like solving a big puzzle. What's the next move? You know?

Hugh: Yeah, yeah. And the lecturer talked a lot about community. Did you all notice that?

Shelley: Yeah, but what does that mean, “community”? I really didn’t get that part.

Ben: Well, I think it means that sport fans feel a kind of bond with each other. They sort of form a community. But you’re not a sports fan, so maybe you haven’t felt that.

Shelley: No, maybe not. But, I do feel some pride, like national pride, during the Olympics. So, I understand Social Identity Theory.

Kenzie: Yeah, so you *are* a sports fan!

Shelley: Well, a little. I wouldn’t say watching sports increases my self-esteem.

Hugh: Sure. I think Social Identity Theory means that we find group identity in different ways. It’s not just about being a sport fans.