



Aggression and Its Justification among Senior High School Soccer Players in Ghana

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Abstract: The dual purposes of this study were to find out if any differences exist in the types of aggression endorsed by senior high school boys' and girls' soccer players, and if they differ in the justifications for their use. Two hundred and forty-four ($N = 244$) senior high school boys' and girls' soccer players responded to the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire and the Mintah-Huddleston Aggression Justification Inventory (MHAJI). Boys' soccer players differed from the girls on both MHAJI hostile and instrumental subscales, and on the Buss and Perry verbal aggression subscale. Overall, boys and girls senior high school soccer players in Ghana did not consider physical aggression, anger and hostility as appropriate.

Keywords: Aggression, Anger, Hostility, Justification

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are competitive and ambitious. Every person wants to show supremacy by challenging the other. These challenges stimulate, inspire and motivate all competitive athletes to sweat and strive to run faster, jump higher, throw further, and kick harder (Tomar, & Singh, 2012). To achieve these competitive edge in sport, athletes have adopted different approaches to mollify their opponents. One of these approaches that continually surfaces in competitive sport is aggression.

Aggression originates from the Latin roots *ag* (before) and *gred* (to walk or step). Hence to aggress is to step before or in front of someone, to initiate something, commonly an attack (Lorenz, 1966; Thapa, 2015). It is an intentional behaviour aimed at doing harm or causing pain to another person. Aggression is any verbal or physical act that can hurt an individual physically or psychologically (Baron, & Richardson, 1994). It is the infliction of an adverse stimulus, physical, verbal, or gestural, upon one person by another (Weinberg, & Gould, 2011). Aggression is accompanied by strong negative emotions. For a behaviour to be judged aggressive, it must be directed at another living being with the goal of causing some form of physical or psychological harm (Gill, 2000), and it must show a reasonable expectation that the attempt to inflict harm will be successful (Berkowitz, 1993; Gill, & Williams, 2008).

Aggression is classified as either instrumental or hostile (Grange, & Kerr, 2010; Husman, & Silva, 1984; Krishnaveni, 2014). Hostile aggression is behaviour performed with the sole intention of inflicting harm on a person (Silva, 1980). It stems from feelings of anger with the aim of inflicting pain or injury. The reward for hostile aggression is to see the victim suffer pain and injury (Weinberg, & Gould, 2011; Wood, 2001). An example of hostile aggression could be paying back an opponent who hurt you in a previous contest. Hostile aggression is unacceptable in sport.

Instrumental aggression has the intent to hurt another person. The reinforcement of instrumental aggression is to give an upper urge to a person's team and not necessarily to see the victim in pain (Tenebaum, et al., 1997). The goal of instrumental aggression is the added advantage given to your team (Weinberg, & Gould, 2011). Thus, the intent of instrumental aggression is to achieve a team goal in terms of fame, money or victory in performance (Jones, Bray, & Oliver, 2005). A dunk in your face in basketball is considered instrumental aggression. Instrumental aggression is acceptable in sport.

Four theories have been propounded to explain aggression. The first, Instinct theory, postulates that aggressive behaviour is an innate characteristic of all individuals (Lorenz, 1996). Human beings are born with aggressive instinct which continues to build up until it is released through an aggressive act (Gill, 2000). As a result, individuals who participate in competitive aggressive sports such as soccer have the most opportunities to release their innate feelings of aggression.

Frustration-Aggression theory maintains that aggression is caused by frustration. This theory posits that an individual's perception that she/he is being prevented from obtaining a goal will increase the probability of an aggressive response (Berkowitz, 1989; Bird, & Cripe, 1986; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939; Gill, 2000). And, the greater the closeness to the goal, the greater the frustration and the higher the tendency to behave aggressively (Husman, & Silva, 1984). Practically, it makes sense to consider the idea that frustration should lead to aggression as it fits into many observations in contact sport such as rugby, basketball and soccer. But, there are far more instances where a thwarted effort did not result in aggressive act (Abrahams, 2010; Nucci, & Young-Shim, 2005). This reduces the potency of the frustration aggression theory as frustration does not always lead to aggression. Instead, frustration heightens the predisposition to behave aggressive especially when it is not expected (Weinberg, & Gould, 2011). This makes the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis not fully supported (Gill, & Williams, 2008).

Bandura (1973) social learning theory proposes that aggression is a learned social behaviour acquired via observation, imitation, modeling, demonstration and reinforcement. For example, young players perceive sports heroes as role models and imitate their behaviours (Arehart, 2002). At the same time, coaches, team mates, and parents' may also be taken to be role models and may depict support for aggressive playing styles. Hence, aggression in sports can occur due to young players imitating the behaviours of their role models. Therefore, players will imitate the virtues or the vices as they are executed by coaches, role models or parents (Gee, & Leith, 2007). And, in situations where aggression is portrayed by coaches or role models, then the propensity of aggression in sport is enhanced (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003). Social Learning theory has support in the aggression literature as sport participation teaches and/or reinforces either aggression or sportsmanship. This is because if players can learn aggressive responses to certain situations and cues, then they can just easily learn non-aggressive responses to the same situations.

The fourth theory propounded by Bredemeier and Shields (1984a, 1984b) purports that athletes' willingness to engage in aggression is related to their stage of moral reasoning. Since human aggression is unethical, a relationship should exist between the level of moral reasoning and overt acts of sports aggression. Therefore, for an individual to behave aggressively in sports, the player might have downplayed on his/her moral or ethical values learned in society (Bredemeier, & Shield, 1986a).

These theories (instinct, frustration-aggression, social learning, and moral reasoning) have helped shape research focus in different areas in sport aggression. For example, Bredemeier and Shields (1986) investigated male and female college and high school contact and non-contact athletes moral reasoning in both sport and life. Findings were that males had lower moral reasoning in both sport and life contexts. Among the collegiate participants, basketball athletes scored lower moral reasoning than the non-athletes. Mintah, Huddleston and Doody (1999) study on the extent with which male college contact and semi-contact athletes agree or disagree with the use of hostile and instrumental aggression found that semi-contact (basketball and soccer) athletes agreed more with the use of instrumental aggression than the contact (American football and wrestling) athletes. But, Maxwell (2004) research on anger rumination as an antecedent of sport aggression found that males regardless of sport had higher levels of aggression than females.

A similar study in which Keeler (2007) examined adult men and women pattern of sport aggression revealed high levels of aggression among males than females. And, a recent study by Mintah (2017) on university soccer players revealed that both female and male soccer players disagreed with the use of hostile and instrumental aggression. Even though, the female soccer players agreed more with the use of instrumental aggression in sport as appropriate than their male counterparts.

Available research has explored differences between contact and semi-contact sport athletes and concluded that overall males are more aggressive than females (Keeler, 2007; Maxwell, 2004; Mintah, 2017). In addition, high contact sport athletes have been found to be more aggressive than semi-contact or low contact athletes (Mintah, Huddleston, & Doody, 1999). Similarly, Bredemeier and

Shields (1985) study on soccer players revealed that most athletes clearly perceived there was a difference between how one acted in sport and in everyday life. Along the same lines, Dunn and Dunn (1999) concluded that elite hockey players become so much focused on the end result of their sport experience that their moral concerns about the means of achieving those ends often decline. Thus, athletes would downplay on their moral reasoning in sports to maximize their superiority over their opponents.

A cursive review of the literature indicated that most aggression studies were conducted using college and professional athletes. Not much research has been conducted using senior high school athletes. If senior high school athletes emulate the behaviours of college and professional athletes and consider them as role models, then it is incumbent on researchers to explore what these senior high school athletes consider acceptable and unacceptable aggression and the justifications they ascribe for the use of each type of aggression. Therefore, the dual purposes of this study were to find out if any differences exist in the types of aggression endorsed by senior high school boys' and girls' soccer players, and if they differ in the justifications for their use.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

A total of two hundred and forty-four ($N = 244$) senior high school soccer players participated in this study. There were 110 (45.1%) boys and 134 (54.9%) girls. Participants playing experience ranged from one to fifteen years ($M = 7.06$, $SD = 3.12$). The youngest player in the soccer team was 14 years old. The oldest was 21 years ($M = 17.08$, $SD = 1.55$).

2.2. Dependent Measures

2.2.1. Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire

Buss and Perry (1992) Aggression Questionnaire was used to assess soccer aggression in this study. This 29-item questionnaire measures physical aggression (1-9), verbal aggression (10-14), anger (15-21) and hostility (22-29). Participants indicated their responses on a 5-point rating scale of extremely uncharacteristic of me (1) to extremely characteristic of me (5). Test-retest reliability on the four factors yielded values of .80 for physical aggression, .76 for verbal aggression, .72 for anger, and .72 for the hostility factor (Buss, & Perry, 1992). In this present study, a total alpha of .80 was established.

2.2.2. Mintah-Huddleston Aggression Justification Inventory (MHAJI)

Mintah-Huddleston Aggression Justification Inventory (MHAJI) was used to assess players' justifications for aggressive behaviour in sport. The MHAJI is a 24-item inventory that measures hostile and instrumental justifications for sport aggression on a 4-point Likert-type scale. Subscale scores range from a low of 12 (strong agreement) to a high of 48 (strong disagreement). The midpoint (neutral) response to each subscale is 30. High scores on both subscales reflect disagreement with hostile and instrumental justifications for aggressive sport behaviour (Mintah, Huddleston, & Doody, 1999). For this study, the MHAJI instrumental and hostile subscales yielded a total alpha value of .74.

2.3. Procedure of Data Collection

An institutional Human Subjects Review Board approved the research protocol, and permission to contact the senior high school soccer players was obtained from the coaches. A cover letter, the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire and the MHAJI were given to each coach for distribution among their players. The cover letter briefly explained the purpose of the study and assured complete confidentiality of the players' responses. No identifying information was requested of the players, and participation was strictly voluntary. Each participant was given seven days to complete the questionnaire and return it to his/her coach.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Preliminary Analysis

Pearson bivariate correlation was calculated to determine the relatedness of the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire and the MHAJI subscales. On average, the four factors of the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire correlated low with the MHAJI hostile and instrumental subscales. All correlations were significant (see Table 1).

Table1. Paired Correlations Between the Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire and MHAJI

Sub scales						
AGGERSSION QUESTIONNAIRE MAHAJI						
Subscale	Physical	Verbal	Anger	Hostility	Hostile	Instrumental
Aggression Questionnaire						
Physical	1.00	.49**	.60**	.47**	.32**	.24**
Verbal		1.00	.59**	.43**	.14*	.21**
Anger			.48**		.25**	.25**
Hostile				1.00	.19**	.14*
Instrumental						
MHAJI						
Hostile				1.00		.59**
Instrumental			1.00			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

3.2. Main Analysis

The dual purposes of this study were to find out if any differences exist in the types of aggression endorsed by senior high school boys' and girls' soccer players, and if they differ in the justifications for their use. Due to the inter correlations among the aggression questionnaire and the MHAJI subscales (see table 1) as well as the need to analyse all the dependent variables and their interactions together, General Linear Model (GLM) Multivariate was calculated to investigate differences between boys and girls on the Aggression Questionnaire and MHAJI subscales. Years played soccer was held constant.

Results of the GLM Multivariate showed a significant main effect by gender, Wilks's Lambda = .91, $F(6, 236) = 3.95$, $p < .05$. Boys' soccer players differed from the girls on both MHAJI hostile ($M = 23.22$, $SD = 5.52$, and $M = 20.69$, $SD = 5.96$, respectively; total mean = 21.83, $SD = 5.89$) and instrumental ($M = 24.78$, $SD = 5.39$, and $M = 22.55$, $SD = 5.56$, respectively; total mean = 23.56, $SD = 5.63$) subscales. In addition, the boys differed from the girls on verbal aggression ($M = 14.83$, $SD = 4.08$, and 12.82 , $SD = 4.09$, respectively; total mean = 13.72, $SD = 4.20$). No statistical significant difference was found between boys and girls soccer players on physical aggression, hostility and anger subscales of the aggression questionnaire (see table 2).

Table2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Aggression Questionnaire and MHAJI by Gender

Aggression Questionnaire			MHAJI			
		Physical Hostile	Verbal	Anger	Hostility	Instrumental
Boys	<i>M</i>	17.1411.25	19.03	14.83**	24.78*	23.22*
	<i>SD</i>	5.692.96	4.68	4.08	5.39	5.52
Girls	<i>M</i>	16.8610.45	17.82	12.82**	22.55*	20.69*
	<i>SD</i>	5.553.20	5.12	4.09	5.65	5.96

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; N = 244 (boys = 110, girls = 134)

4. DISCUSSION

Overall, boys and girls senior high school soccer players in this study did not differ in their use of physical aggression, anger and hostility. A possible reason could be that the sport of soccer eschews acts of violence especially when the act has the intent to hurt; in this case anger, hostility and physical aggression. FIFA Laws governing soccer protects opponents and prevents players from the use of unnecessary force to overcome their opponent; such offence is punishable by expulsion or sent off (Law 12: FIFA, 2011). Since these players are senior high school students, they might have been well educated on the Laws of the game to avoid the use of violent act aside the desire to win. Besides, these high school students play soccer for fun and to showcase their talents to scouts during such tournaments. Any unwarranted behaviour resulting in sent off could affect their ability to continue to compete and to market themselves. Hence, the senior high school soccer player's abhorrence to the use of anger, hostility and physical aggression. This finding is congruent to Mintah (2017) study in which college male and female soccer players disagreed with the use of both hostile and instrumental aggression in soccer.

In this study, boys differed from girls on the Buss-Perry verbal aggression subscale. Comparing the data with the scale revealed that overall soccer boys ($M = 14.83$) occasionally use verbal aggression

but the girls ($M = 12.82$) rarely use it. This was expected because, the average Ghanaian child is raised to be seen and not to be heard. The cultural practices and socialization processes frown on verbal insults. Parents, teachers and society in general look down and reprimand persons who exhibit verbal aggression. These young boys and girls might have been raised with these values or at best learned them from their schools. Besides, these participants were representing their schools and regions in a national senior high school sports festival organized under the auspices of the Ghana Education Service. And, as such were being observed by their coaches, teachers, and heads of institutions. Any unnecessary misbehavior would be rebuked. Altogether, it was not surprising when the finding revealed that both the boys and girls senior high school soccer players hardly used verbal aggression.

Finally, boys differed from girls on the MHAJI hostile and instrumental subscales. However, an examination of the means indicated that overall both boys and girls senior high school soccer players disagreed with the use of hostile and instrumental justifications. Again, these senior high school soccer players consider soccer as a secondary outlet to showcase their talents and not a means to overpower their colleagues. And, because they did not subscribe to any type of aggression, they do not see the need to justify their use. This finding is similar to that of Bredemeier and Shields (1985, 1986), Mintah, Huddleston and Doody (1999) and Mintah (2017) studies which concluded that contact sports including soccer may alter moral reasoning to the extent that participants do not feel the need to justify or defend aggressive behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

On the whole, participants in this study do not consider any form of contact that occurs in the sport of soccer as hostile or instrumental aggression. They see every contact that occur in soccer as normal part of the game with no intent to harm or hurt, and therefore do not see the need to justify it as hostile or instrumental. In effect, they do not perceive it necessary to have different morality in sport and in life. The implication is that soccer as a high school sport is a fertile ground for building character as it does not perpetuate acts of aggression.

Therefore, more high school students in Ghana should be encouraged to participate in it. In addition, senior high schools in the country should continue to enforce the moral and ethical values that have transformed these young adults to perceive any form of aggression as unacceptable in soccer.

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