

# Soccer in the mass media: Examining the role of metaperceptions of goal orientation on spectators' moral functioning

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## ABSTRACT

Watching soccer can be a source of leisure and enjoyment. However, the behaviour of some spectators is a concern that might be related to competitive sport and its handling by the mass media. This study analysed the relationship between the exposure to soccer in the media and the spectators' moral functioning. Participants were college students ( $N = 355$ ), who completed questionnaires assessing the time spent watching/listening/reading soccer programming, metaperception of goal orientations, and moral functioning. Structural Equation Modelling analysis indicated that the exposure to soccer programming was positively associated with metaperception of ego orientation, which in turn was associated with low levels of moral functioning. The direct effects of the exposure of soccer programming on moral functioning were significantly reduced in the presence of metaperception of ego orientation, indicating that such metaperception mediates the association between these two variables. These findings help us to explain the processes operating in soccer spectators. **Keywords:** Competitive sports; Soccer spectators; Sport events; Moral judgment.

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## INTRODUCTION

The first regulations for the sport soccer were established in 1863. Since then, and with the appearance of the mass media, it has become one of the most popular sports in the world (Barrero, 2007). Unfortunately, soccer broadcasting usually includes some of the worst manifestations of violence in modern sports. Aggression and violence in sports have been widely investigated, and experts distinguish between specific athletes' violence and violence associated with the sporting events, indicating that a closer relationship between sport and media entertainment results in a greater interaction between these two types of violence (UNESCO, 1987). Studying the impact of watching sports in the media on spectator's cognitive and emotional responses has become a very relevant topic (e.g., Carriedo, Cecchini, and González, 2018; Gau, James, and Kim, 2009; Potter and Keene, 2012; Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease, 2001). However, additional work is needed to examine the consequences of the exposure of soccer related programming in terms of introjection, or regarding the affective, cognitive and behavioural processes of spectators.

The violence associated with soccer events involves the spectators' behaviour, such as insulting, throwing things, threatening, fighting, or sports riots. It has been argued that this kind of behaviour could be related to the spectacle itself due to the attraction generated by the phenomenon of violence (Raney and Depalma, 2009) and its handling by the mass media (Barrero, 2007). In this regard, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) explains human behaviour in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction among behavioural, cognitive, and environmental factors. This approach postulates that human thought, behaviour and affect are influenced by observation and also by direct experience. Previous studies have shown that sport participants tend to imitate professional athletes' behaviour (CSD, 2011; Mugno and Feltz, 1985; Smith, 1978). Likewise, the way that sport presenters and journalist inform about sporting events affects the perceptions of spectators (e.g., Bryant, Brown, Comisky, and Zillman, 1982; Comisky, Bryan, and Zillman, 1977; Raney and Kinnally, 2009; Sullivan, 1991). Thus, if soccer viewers observe aggressions or foul play among players and, moreover, those acts are magnified by the mass media, it might be more probable that spectators legitimate or support similar patterns of behaviour. These cognitive processes are referred to as moral judgment, moral evaluation or moral deliberation and have been used when commenting on the assumed role of the moral domain in media consumption and message interpretation (Raney and Bryant, 2002). The Rest's (1984) model, that has been used to examine moral functioning in the sport context, proposes that four processes have to be examined to understand moral behaviour: a) interpretation of the situation, b) judgment about what should be done in a particular scenario, c) intention of performing an action, and d) performing the behaviour itself. Rest (1984) also said that although these four processes are presented in a logical sequence they all interact with each other and a deficiency in any of them may result in moral failure.

The Rest' (1984) model has also been analysed with the framework of the achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984; 1989), which has been successfully used to understand different aspects of sport participants (e.g., Roberts, 2001; Whitehead, Andree, and Lee, 2004). According to this theory, individuals interpret the subjective meaning of success in two different ways corresponding to two achievement goals; one oriented to the ego (i.e., when success depends on the superiority over the peers) and other oriented to the task (i.e., when success depends on the ability to master a specific task). Several researches have revealed that ego orientation is related to attitudes toward antisocial judgement (Sage, Kavussanu, and Duda, 2006) and behavior (Boardley and Kavussanu, 2010; Kavussanu, 2006), aggressive (Dunn and Dunn, 1999) and unsportmanlike play (Cecchini, González, and Montero, 2007; Duda, Olson, and Templin, 1991). On the other hand, task orientation is related to prosocial behaviour (Boardley and Kvussanu, 2010; Kavussanu, 2006) and some sportpersonship dimensions (Dunn and Dunn, 1999; Lemyre et al., 2002). Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) used a sample of American college basketball players to examine the role of achievement

goals in three of the four components of the Rest's model, specifically: moral judgment, intention and behaviour (which all together are known as moral functioning) and observed that higher ego orientation was associated with low levels of moral functioning. Subsequent researches conducted with athletes determined that extensive participation in medium contact sports (e.g., soccer) predicted low levels of moral functioning only when ego orientation mediated such relationship (Cecchini et al., 2008; Kavussanu and Ntoumanis, 2003). So far, these associations have not been studied among sport viewers and it is thought that the same processes could be operating in them. Therefore, this paradigm might be a new approach to examine cognitive and behavioural processes of soccer spectators.

The reactions exposed above might be the result of assimilating their goal orientations by a metaperceptual process. Cognitive-social psychologist distinguishes between self-perceptions and metaperceptions (e.g., Snyder and Stulas, 1999). While self-perceptions are opinions that individuals have on themselves, metaperceptions generally refer to the estimates that a person has on the perceptions of another person. Therefore, in the context of the current study, metaperceptions specifically refer to spectators' perceptions of their favourite players' perceptions of his or her goal orientation. Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) began the study of metaperceptions in the social psychology field. It is known that perceptions and metaperceptions are related (Kenny and DePaulo, 1993). However, the literature suggests that individuals usually do not base their metaperceptions on the reactions of their interaction partners (Kaplan, Santuzzi, and Ruscher, 2009). On the contrary, individuals usually look inwards, rather than outwards, and assume that their interaction partners see them as they see themselves (Malloy, Albright, Kenny, Agatstein, and Winquist, 1997). In most circumstances, self-perception is the base on which metaperception is constructed (Frey and Tropp, 2006). Nevertheless, in situations where the results depend on the judgments of the others the dependence on the strict self-perceptions might be mitigated (Kaplan et al., 2009). When the results depend on someone placed in a more powerful position, people tend to scrutinize more closely the reasons and behaviour of that person (Stevens and Fiske, 2000). Since soccer players and spectators do not interact at the same level, the same process might occur between them.

The present study attempted to integrate the knowledge about morality in sport and propose a process through which the exposure to soccer related programming may be associated with soccer spectators' moral functioning. Thus, the associations between the exposure to soccer programming in the mass media, moral functioning and metaperceptions of goal orientation of soccer spectators are examined. Based on this background, it is hypothesized that long exposures to soccer programming in the media is positively related to metaperception of ego orientation, which in turn is associated with low levels of moral functioning in the audience. As we do not know any study that have addressed these issues in sports spectators, and previous studies conducted with soccer players found no evidences of a relationship between sport participation and task orientation, it is hypothesized that there is no link between the exposure to soccer programming and the metaperception of task orientation.

## METHOD

### ***Participants and Procedures***

The study participants were a convenience sample of 355 Spanish college students, 181 male and 174 female (age range 18-40 years [ $M = 19.16$ ,  $SD = 5.25$ ]) who spent an average of 4.57 ( $SD = 5.80$ ) hours watching/listening/reading soccer programming per week. The term exposure to soccer programming was used to refer to hours of watching soccer matches on television ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ), hours of watching or listening entertaining soccer-related television and/or radio programming ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ), and hours of reading news about soccer in the press or internet ( $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ).

All participants' consent was obtained. They were informed that participation was voluntary and anonymous; they were encouraged to respond to the questions as honestly as possible; they were assured their responses would be confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All self-reported questionnaires took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to be completed. The study was previously approved by the research ethics committee of the University.

### **Measures**

#### *Exposure to soccer programming*

The time spent watching/listening/reading sports programming specialized in soccer was measured with three items that collected the weekly minutes they usually dedicated to: 1) watching soccer matches with commentaries on television; 2) watching or listening entertaining soccer-related television and/or radio programming; 3) reading news about soccer in the press or internet. Since reading and listening can be much lower than watching, the total amount of exposure to soccer related programming was recoded from 1 to 5 points in reference to the duration of a soccer match (1 = 0 minutes; 2 = up to 90 minutes; 3 = from 91 to 180 minutes; 4 = from 181 to 360 minutes; 5 = more than 360 minutes).

#### *Metaperception of goal orientation*

To evaluate the estimates that spectators have about the perceptions of others (in this case the perception of their favourite players' self-perceptions of his or her goal orientation) was used the Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ; Roberts et al., 1998) adapted to the sports spectators' metaperceptions (Carriedo et al., 2018). The Meta-Perception of Success Questionnaire (M-POSQ) is a 10-item scale: 5 metaperception of task orientation (e. g., "...perform at the best level of skill") and 5 metaperception of ego orientation (e. g., "...are clearly superior to the others"). Participants responded to the stem "As a supporter, I feel that the players of my favourite team feel successful in their sport when they..." Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The M-POSQ has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency for task and ego metaperceptions with alphas' coefficients of .89 and .87 respectively and the confirmatory factor analysis produced indexes of goodness within the acceptable margins, \*CFI = .97; SRMR = .04; \*RMSEA = .05 (Carriedo et al., 2018).

#### *Moral functioning*

Moral functioning was assessed using an instrument developed by Gibbons et al. (1995), which was subsequently modified by Kassuvenu and Ntoumanis (2003), adapted and validated in Spanish language by Cecchini et al. (2008), and finally adapted to soccer spectators (Carriedo et al., 2018). Three dilemmas (e.g., "during a critical match a player of your favourite team has the opportunity to push an opposing player in order to intimidate him or her when the referees are not looking") were used in reference to unsportsmanlike attitudes that are likely to occur in viewers of soccer programming. For instance, soccer spectators may support, allow or encourage players to lie to a referee, to break a rule and to deliberately hurt an opponent. Thus, judgment, intention and behaviour were evaluated in every dilemma. *Judgment* was measured by asking spectators to judge whether the behaviour described was appropriate during a critical match. To assess *intention* to act, they had to indicate whether they would engage in supporting/encouraging such behaviour when watching a critical match. Finally, *behaviour* was measured by asking spectators to indicate how often they had supported or encouraged such behaviour as spectator in the last five matches. In all cases the responses varied from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). These questions have been used in past research in the sport context to assess indices of moral functioning (e.g., Cecchini et al., 2008; Kavussanu and Ntoumanis, 2003; Kavussanu and Roberts, 2001; Kavussanu and Spray, 2006). Finally, the moral functioning questionnaire in soccer spectators has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency for judgment  $\alpha = .84$ ,

intention  $\alpha = .83$ , and behaviour  $\alpha = .79$  and the confirmatory factor analysis produced indexes of goodness within the acceptable margins, \*CFI = 1; SRMR = .03; \*RMSEA = .01 (Carriedo et al., 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations and Cronbach's alphas were calculated using IBM SPSS 22 software. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was run to test the hypothesized model through AMOS 18.0 software. Following the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), firstly was tested the measurement of each separate model to examine subsequently the structural model, that is, the relationship between latent factors. Following this recommendation, the factorial structure of M-POSQ and moral functioning of soccer spectators' questionnaire were examined through maximum likelihood estimation, and subsequently, the hypothesized structural model was tested.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run to examine the factorial structure of M-POSQ. The evaluation of goodness-of-fit data was performed using multiple criteria (Byrne, 2008):  $\chi^2$  statistic, the chi square/degrees of freedom ratio  $\chi^2/d.f.$ , the *Comparative Fit Index* (CFI; Bentler, 1990), the *Tucker-Lewis Index* (TLI); *Root Mean Square Error Approximation* (RMSEA), and the *Root Mean Square Residual* (RMR). In general terms, a good model fit is inferred when the  $\chi^2/d.f.$  ratio is lower than 2 (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, and Muller, 2003), the CFI and TLI indices are greater than .95 (Hu and Bentler, 1995), and RMSEA (Browne and Cudeck, 1993) and RMR (Hu and Bentler, 1999) values are lower than .08.

In this research, the three indices of moral functioning were measured through three dilemmas, so we considered the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) as the most suitable to examine its structure (Marsh and Grayson, 1995). The three indices of moral functioning were considered as traits (judgment, intention and behaviour) and the three dilemmas were considered as methods to assess different traits. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the relationship between traits, when the effects of method variance and random error are present. CFA MTMM analysis assesses the convergent validity, discriminant validity and method effects. Large loadings on trait factors provide support for convergent validity concerning to the stability of traits through different methods (see Marsh and Grayson, 1995). Very large correlations among trait factors suggest a lack of discriminant validity among traits. Lastly, large loadings on method factors indicate method effects, that is, variation in the responses which is specific to each dilemma.

According to Marsh and Grayson (1995), the main MTMM models have been tested and compared (Table 1). The first model posits correlated trait factors (3CT). The second posits three traits and three correlated method factors (3CT 3CM). The third model posits correlated trait factors and uncorrelated method factors (3CT 3UM). The fourth model also posits trait factors, but method effects are inferred from correlated uniqueness terms among measures variables assessed by the same method (3CTCU). Methods effects are inferred when the correlations between the uniqueness terms range from moderate to large and when the model fits considerably better than the trait-only model (Marsh, 1989). The most appropriate model is selected by an evaluation of the fit indices, and whether the model has converged to a proper solution, that is, whether parameter estimates are within the range of permissible values (Marsh and Grayson, 1995). If a model fails to converge, or if it converges to an improper solution, then it is not deemed credible.

In order to test the model, firstly, the hypothesized model including the remaining variables was tested. Then, the mediating role of metaperception of ego orientation in the relationship between the exposure to soccer programming and moral functioning was examined. To examine whether metaperception of ego orientation mediates the relationship between the exposure to soccer programming and moral functioning, we followed the four steps proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). The first step establishes whether the initial variable

predicts the mediator. The second step establishes whether the initial variable predicts the outcome variable. To examine this, we tested a model in which the exposure to soccer programming had a direct path leading to moral functioning. The paths from the exposure to soccer programming to metaperception of ego orientation and from the metaperception of ego orientation to moral functioning were constrained to zero. The last step examines whether in the presence of the mediator the direct path from the initial variable to the outcome variable is reduced to zero (complete mediation), or whether it is reduced in absolute size but is still different from zero (partial mediation).

## RESULTS

### Structural Equation Modelling

#### Examining the Factorial Structure of the M-POSQ

The fit indices showed that the hypothesized model had a poor fit,  $\chi^2(53) = 294.89$ ,  $p > .001$ ;  $\chi^2/d.f. = 5.56$ ; CFI = .90; TLI = .88; RMSEA = .10; RMR = .06. Inspection of the Lagrange modification indices and the standardized residual matrix suggested that one item from the metaperception of task orientation subscale and one item from the metaperception of ego orientation subscale had to be deleted to improve model fit. Deleting items to improve the factorial structure of an instrument is regarded as a legitimate process in measurement evaluation, as it retains the general structure of the originally hypothesized factor model but with only the best available indicators (Hofman, 1995). The modified model had an excellent fit:  $\chi^2(19) = 30.08$ ,  $p > .001$ ,  $\chi^2/d.f. = 1.58$ , CFI = .96; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06; RMR = .04. Alpha coefficients were .86 and .82 for the revised metaperception subscales of task and ego orientation, respectively.

#### Examining the Factorial Structure of the Moral Functioning Questionnaire

The results of this analysis are presented in table 1. The 3CT 3UM and the 3CTCU were the only models that had an excellent fit and also resulted in appropriate solutions. The 3CTCU model was selected by the SEM because the CT x CU models are considered the most rigorous of MTMM models (Marsh and Grayson, 1995). However, in practical terms, both models would have produced identical results.

Table 1. Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Moral Functioning and the Hypothesized Models

Model	Solution	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMR	RMSEA
Moral Functioning							
3CT	Improper	863.40**	24	.64	.47	.17	.31
3CT 3CM	Improper	15.70	12	1.00	1.00	.03	.03
3CT 3UM	Proper	15.21	15	1.00	1.00	.02	.01
3CTCU	Proper	15.21	15	1.00	1.00	.02	.01
Hierarchical 3CTCU	Proper	15.21	15	1.00	1.00	.02	.01
Hypothesized model	Proper	131.73	90	.99	.98	.06	.04

The trait factor loading and the uniqueness variance of the 3CTCU model were almost the same to those in Figure 1. The trait factor loadings associated with the other dilemmas were large (mean of trait loadings = .70). The overall pattern of trait factor loadings indicated a moderate convergent validity. Practically all correlations between the uniqueness terms of observed variables assessed by the same method were above .50 (mean  $r = .56$ ), except lying to a referee, indicating the presence of relatively large method effects. The correlation among the trait factors were .95 between judgment and intention, .85 between judgment and behaviour, and .80 between intention and behaviour, indicating low discriminant validity. However, should be noticed that factor correlations are higher than Pearson's correlations because they do not contain

measurement error. Furthermore, the CT x CU model tends to be a conservative test of discriminant validity (Marsh and Bailey, 1991).

### *Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlation*

Means and standard deviations for all variables are enumerated in Table 2. The table also contains correlations among variables. The hours of exposure to soccer programming were correlated with all variables except with metaperception of task orientation, which was not related to any except to metaperception of ego orientation. Metaperception of ego orientation was correlated with all variables.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of all Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Correlations		
			1	2	3
1. Exposure to soccer programming	4.57	5.80			
2. Ego Metaperception	4.10	0.86	.36**		
3. Task Metaperception	4.50	0.67	.03	.37**	
4. Judgment	2.03	0.92	.22**	.28**	-.01
5. Intention	2.05	0.92	.20**	.27**	-.04
6. Behavior	1.79	0.88	.17**	.23**	.03

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

### *Testing the Hypothesized Model*

In this study we hypothesized that a long exposure of watching/listening/reading soccer programming in the media would correspond to metaperception of ego orientation, which in turn would be associated with low levels of moral functioning. Metaperception of task orientation was not related to any variable, for that reason was excluded from the model. The exposure to soccer programming was included in the model by a factor that includes the three items aforementioned ( $\alpha = .83$ ). The indices showed a good fit between the model and the data (see Table 1), and all parameter estimates were significant (see Figure 1). The exposure to soccer programming was positively associated with metaperception of ego orientation ( $\beta = .48$ ), which in turn was positively associated with moral functioning ( $\beta = .34$ ). Based on how moral functioning was assessed (high scores meant low levels of moral functioning), the positive relationship between metaperception of ego orientation and moral functioning implies that high metaperception of ego orientation is associated with low levels of moral functioning.

To examine whether metaperception of ego orientation mediates the relationship between the exposure to soccer programming and moral functioning, we followed the four steps proposed previously. In the first step the exposure to soccer programming significantly correlated to metaperception of ego orientation, as can be seen in Figure 1. The second step established whether the initial variable predicted moral functioning, the direct step was  $\beta = .25$  and significant. The third step test indicated that the metaperception of ego orientation was a significant predictor of moral functioning after controlling for the exposure to soccer programming (see Figure 1). To prove the last step, we added a direct path from the exposure to soccer programming to moral functioning; this path was  $\beta = .11$ , nonsignificant, and smaller than the original path of  $\beta = .25$ . The Wald modification index suggested that the removal of this path would not significantly deteriorate the fit of the model. Thus, it was concluded that the metaperception of ego orientation partly mediated the relationship between the exposure to soccer programming and moral functioning.

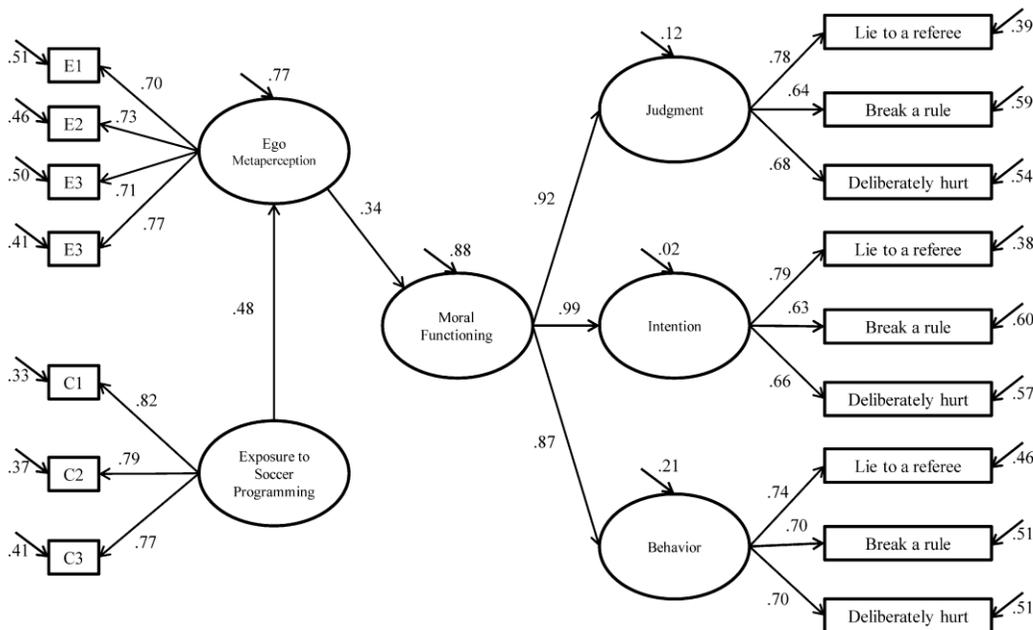


Figure 1. The tested model with standardized estimates. *Note.* According to the background of this manuscript, the metaperception of task orientation was removed. The hypothesized structural model analyzed the relationships between the exposure to soccer programming in the media, metaperception of ego orientation and moral functioning of spectators.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether exposure to soccer programming are associated with the moral functioning of soccer spectators, and if these relationships are mediated by some metaperception of goal orientation. We have observed that the exposure to soccer programming (measured in hours spent watching soccer matches on television, watching or listening soccer programs on television and/or radio, and reading news about soccer in the press or internet) is positively associated with low levels of moral functioning. We have also found that this outcome is partly mediated by the spectators' metaperception of ego orientation. Thus, supporters with extensive exposure to soccer programming may be more likely to present high metaperception of ego orientation, which in turn would be associated with low levels of moral functioning. These results are consistent with those maintaining that cognitive distortions mediate the relationship between the consequences of aggressive shows and the frequency with which people are exposed to those entertainment media (Richmond and Wilson, 2008). Therefore, the perceiver cognitions have become increasingly more important in explaining these issues (Orue and Calvete, 2012).

These findings are important because they point to new relevant factors in the relationship between spectators and ethics in sports and suggest that it is not the competitive sport itself but the adopted metaperception of goal perspective which could explain that the extensive exposure to soccer programming in the mass media is related to low levels of moral functioning. Accordingly, the fans might become identified with the successes of their favourite team and, depending on how it is built; this identification would take two

possible orthogonal or independent directions: metaperception of task and ego orientation. In the first case, the perception of success would be related to the effort, the progression, the self-improvement, and the self-referenced targets of achievement. In the second case all would depend on the final result of the competition (winning or losing) independently of the way it is attained (playing well or deficiently). Metaperception of task orientation seems quite constant, while the metaperception of ego orientation increases with the exposure to soccer related programming. Similar results had been previously observed in the case of the soccer players. An increase in the level of sport involvement intensifies the ego orientation (Cecchini et al., 2007; Kavussanu and Ntoumanis, 2003). This has been explained assuming that in this kind of sports athletes unavoidably interact with the opponent and this interaction is the vehicle through which they attempt to establish superiority (Kavussanu and Ntoumanis, 2003). Success depends on dominating the rivals; establishing and maintaining the superiority over them. This act of comparing is continuous throughout the entire play. Athletes are constantly aware of how they are doing and therefore, they act consequently.

Something similar occurs in the case of the spectators. Fans and supporters of a soccer team not only feel identified with their successes and failures, but also with the way of interpreting them. So, the longer exposure to soccer programming, the higher is the spectator's metaperception of ego orientation. In fact, the identification process goes in both directions and the orientation of the athletes is also influenced by the reactions of the fans who in many cases emphasize the meaning of normative success in the competition. However, in situations where the results depend on the judgments of the others, metaperceptions exert a powerful influence (Kaplan et al., 2009).

According to previous research, in which high ego-oriented athletes reported lower levels of moral functioning (Kavussanu and Roberts, 2001), fans with a metaperception of ego orientation also demonstrated lower levels of moral functioning. These findings suggest that how the fans think their players achieve success have important implications in the moral functioning of soccer spectators. Furthermore, as they can interact with the opponents, players or other supporters, they frequently try to establish its superiority with aggressive behaviour. The way spectators construct their frame of reference to interpret sporting success is mediated by the sociocultural context, in which the mass media play an important role. The mass media are not limited to soccer matches broadcasting; they also comment on them, select the actions and replays, the importance of the events, etc. distinctly influencing the spectators' feelings. Very often sports programs in mass media (television, radio, the press and internet) reproduce the confrontation model characteristic of high contact sports, in which athletes try to establish and maintain superiority over the opponent. The comments in any mass media are most frequently analysed in very high degree, exaggerated and ardently overemphasized, thereby not contributing to calm down the passions and aggressions, and even less to promote fair play (De Antón and Del Riqueleme y Tejera 1990). Although a personal predisposition exists which determines the probability of adopting a particular goal orientation, different studies suggest the hypothesis that goal orientation can be reinforced by interventions or environmental influences (Cecchini et al., 2007; Cervelló, Hutzler, Reina, Sanz, and Moreno 2005), and the mass media might contribute to such reinforcement. On the one hand, soccer programs that continually emphasize a context of involvement in ego orientation could build up expectations about victory in the competition at all costs. As a result, spectators of such soccer programs would perceive that success is the result of winning regardless of the means. On the other hand, fans who view soccer programs that praised the effort and the improvement of players (task orientation) could evaluate the course of the match without focusing on the result. Thus, it may be conceivable that the mass media would contribute to the reduction of immoral functioning in spectators by highlighting good performance, personal improvement, fair play, respect for the adversary, match rule submission among players and in consequence, to denounce and not justify physical or verbal aggression in the pitch or in the

stands. Also, to show not “understanding” with the dirty trick of some players, not encourage fighting between coaches or managers of rival clubs, and not transfer the pitch aggressiveness to the television studios, etc.

This study extends to the sport spectators domain the previous works that have identified relationships between sport involvement and various aspects of morality. However, although this work increases the understanding of soccer spectators’ morality, the results should be taken carefully due to underlying causes remains unclear. Thus, the potential limitations should inspire further research. The first one is that this is a cross-sectional and thereby is only insufficient to infer relationships. Therefore, it is not sufficiently clear whether is the sport *per se*, which ultimately determines low levels of moral functioning through the metaperception of ego orientation. The motivational climate created in some soccer related television/radio/press programming might exert a powerful influence on the metaperception of goal orientation and, therefore, further research should examine the impact of motivational climate on these variables. Moreover, such associations should be examined by controlling both the exposure to other sports programming and the sport participation. It is not sufficiently clear either whether the exposure to soccer related programming enhances the metaperception of ego orientation in fans, or if highly ego-oriented individuals were actually attracted to this type of show. Longitudinal research could provide strong evidence for the direction of causality. Finally, our findings are limited to college students; we do not know whether the same processes hold for young fans, high school students, parents of young players, or fanatic fans. Also, we do not know how the metaperception of goal orientations may influence other variables such as fair play or aggressive attitudes. Hence, further research is needed to determine the full implications of the present findings.

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