

Thrill of the game: Fan motives and reactions to the suspension of the National Basketball Association due to COVID-19

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Introduction

There are a variety of reasons for why people become sport fans, including a desire to be affiliated with a group, to escape the problems of life, to learn new things, and to feel a sense of fun and excitement. These different reasons have been organized into five core motives: *escape*, *vicarious achievement*, *social interaction*, *aesthetics*, and *drama* (Wann & James, 2019).

Our goal of this study was to test if fan motives predicted how fans of the National Basketball Association (NBA) appraised, coped with, and generally reacted to a unique situation: the suspension of the 2019-2020 NBA season due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hypothesized that people who were NBA fans because it was an **escape** from their life problems would have a difficult time during the season suspension as they are no longer able to watch the NBA games as a form of escape. We also hypothesized that people who were motivated by the opportunity for **social interaction** would also have a difficult time given the limited alternative ways of connecting with others due to the social distancing and isolation protocols that were in place.

Methods

Participants: NBA fans (*N* = 399) were recruited online via Prolific Academic.

Procedure: Participants completed online surveys in which they answered questions regarding fan motives (Wann & James, 2019), stress appraisals (Peacock & Wong, 1990), coping behaviour (Carver, 1997), and their overall levels of perceived stress in life (Cohen et al., 1983).

Results

- All fan motives predicted **greater stress appraisals and coping responses**, although associations tended to be weaker with drama motives.
- General levels of **perceived stress** were positively associated with escape and social interaction motives

Conclusion

- When predicting appraisals and coping, what mattered most appeared to be the **quantity** of fan motivation, rather than the specific type of fan motives.
- Fans motivated to watch the NBA because of a desire to **escape** or for **social interaction** reported the highest levels of stress during the NBA season suspension, supporting what we initially hypothesized.
- This research contributes to our understanding of the impact that sport can play in people's lives.

All types of fan motives (with the possible exception of drama motives) were associated with greater **stress appraisals** and **coping behaviour** during the NBA season suspension



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Table 1
Correlations

	Fan Motives				
	ESCAPE	SOCIAL	VICACH	AES	DRAMA
Stress Appraisals					
Threat	.37**	.35**	.41**	.27**	.15**
Centrality	.33**	.32**	.38**	.28**	.05
Stressfulness	.38**	.31**	.41**	.27**	.14**
Coping					
Self-Distraction	.35**	.25**	.36**	.29**	.24**
Active Coping	.29**	.31**	.29**	.33**	.20**
Denial	.27**	.18**	.20**	.13**	-.02
Emotional Support	.24**	.31**	.21**	.14**	.04
Behavioral Disengagement	.18**	.18**	.15**	.03	-.13**
Venting	.33**	.26**	.35**	.15**	.11*
Positive Reframing	.27**	.29**	.30**	.19**	.21**
Humour	.20**	.29**	.22**	.15**	.27**
Acceptance	.07	.12*	.13**	.13**	.21**
Religion	.18**	.22**	.14**	.14**	-.13**
Perceived Stress	.24**	.17**	.06	-.06	-.04

Note. *p ≤.05, **p ≤.01 (two-tailed). SOCIAL = social interaction. VICACH = vicarious achievement. AES = aesthetics.