

A Fan's Brain

June 26, 2012

The New Yorker:

The psychology of sports fandom is often so obvious and unsubtle in its raw tribalism that it can seem silly to apply academic rigor to the subject. “They Saw a Game: A Case Study” is considered a seminal paper in the sports-psychology subgenre.

First published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, in 1954, it brought the scientific method to bear on students’ reactions to a particularly violent football game between Princeton and Dartmouth.

Conclusion: “The data here indicate that there is no such ‘thing’ as a ‘game’ existing ‘out there’ in its own right which people merely ‘observe.’ ” In other words, Princetonians thought the Dartmouth boys played like thugs, and the folks in Hanover thought their rivals in New Jersey protested too much.

They watched the same game, but saw it differently, in accordance with their preëxisting loyalties. Geez, was that not already apparent?

Read the whole story: [*The New Yorker*](#)